

Eating Well for OPTIMAL Brain Function

by Donna Gleeson, MOEd, RD, LD

Your mother probably told you that fish was brain food, but maybe she didn't know why. You may have heard that blueberries were good for your brain. And now, it turns out, drinking tea could help improve your memory. There is actually much research currently in progress on the impact of diet on brain function and the early results are very promising. There are many wonderful foods that can improve memory as well as reduce the inflammation that can lead to neurological diseases such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's.

Getting the recommended 5-9 servings a day of fruits and vegetables is a great way to start. Cruciferous vegetables such as cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, bok choy, arugula, watercress, and kale stand out in numerous studies as a means of preventing cancer, heart disease, and stroke. All leafy greens provide folic acid, needed to insulate nerve fibers so chemical messengers are able to transmit information throughout the brain and body. These same greens are also a great source of antioxidants that protect the brain from inflammation.

Other antioxidants are abundant in fruits like blueberries, raspberries, apples, grapes, prunes, raisins, and tomatoes. Both black and green teas contain antioxidants, as does dark chocolate. And egg yolks are one of our few dietary sources of choline, needed to support memory. How easy and pleasurable can it be to add these health-boosting foods to your diet?

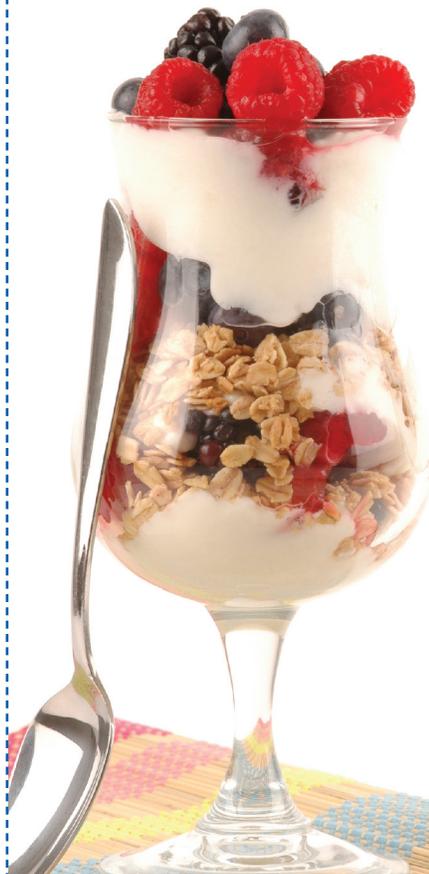
Eating fish provides your brain with much needed omega-3 fats. A recent article in USA TODAY highlighted fish as a means of preventing Alzheimer's disease. Salmon, sardines, cod, and tuna are good sources as are eggs from chickens that have been fed algae or flax meal. You can usually find these eggs in the health food part of your grocery store along with flax seeds, walnuts, and pumpkin seeds, other food sources of omega-3 fats.

Finally, avoiding or greatly limiting the foods that damage your brain, such as those prepared with trans or hydrogenated fats, can provide even more support for healthy brain function.

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POWER Parfait



6-8 ounces plain or vanilla yogurt
2 Tbsp. walnut pieces or flax meal
1/2 to 1 cup fresh or frozen raspberries,
blueberries, or blackberries

- Choose a glass dish to appreciate the colors.
- Alternate layers of yogurt, nuts, and fruit.
- Any fruits or nuts would work in this combination, perhaps depending on the season (for example, sliced almonds are tasty with peaches or plums). These were chosen for the omega-3 content as well as high levels of antioxidants.