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INTRODUCTION

BRILLIANT BRAIN BOOSTERS: 15 SUPERFOODS TO NATURALLY IMPROVE YOUR FOCUS AND THINKING

The growth of an organism is, on the most fundamental level, the reproduction of its cells. In order to multiply, they need a variety of nutrients to provide energy in the form of adenosine triphosphate, or ATP for short. The most obvious source of nourishment comes from food, which is how the proverb, “You are what you eat,” came about.

It has been known since time immemorial that our bodily functions can be optimized or hampered by certain ingredients. The same is true for our brain functions. Though our brain accounts for only 2% of our body weight, it utilizes an average of 20% of our energy expenditures. [1]

It’s not rocket science to deduce what’s good for this important organ. While dieticians, nutritionists, and physicians all differ on the best diet one can keep—it varies by individual and their specific needs/limitations—they agree that replacing processed foods with natural and wholesome ones is an important step that you can’t do without. So, what are these essential nutrients we need?

The first is carbohydrates.

Living organisms, including humans, use energy in the form of ATP. The most ubiquitous source of this molecule for us is glucose, and our brain uses large amounts of it. [2] In fact, it has been shown that insufficient blood sugar levels have a drastic effect on cognitive processing. [3] Carbohydrates are great sources of glucose, which is why many dieticians recommend high intake of whole grains, fruits, and vegetables as clean sources of natural sugars.
Next are proteins. Our brain signals take the form of hormones called neurotransmitters, which are built from amino acids. They are the building blocks of proteins and are commonly found in foods like lean meats, poultry, fish, eggs, dairy, and beans. [4]

And how can we forget antioxidants? They are molecules that inhibit oxidation – a process that produces free radicals, which can lead to cellular damage and cancers – and can be found in our bodies naturally or in foods rich in Vitamins A, C, E, as well as in carotenoids.

Last but not least, essential fatty acids, such as omega-3, are proven to improve brain functions and are important building blocks of the cerebral cortex. [6][7] Salmon, avocado, and olive oil are great sources of this particular fat.

Your brain needs all these precious nutrients to function properly. If you lack any one of them, your bodily functions and mood will be negatively affected. Therefore, let’s take a look at 15 natural brain boosters as well as some delicious recipes to improve your neurological function.
AVOCADO

The subject of a food craze sweeping the nation and the base for a party favorite dip, avocados sometimes receive criticism for being high in fat. This is actually the fruit’s best feature; after all, our brains are 60% fat. [8] Since essential fatty acids are a must in our diet, this fruit shines by giving us a delicious, creamy treat packed with omega-3, omega-6, antioxidants, dietary fiber, and a litany of vitamins and minerals, all while being very low in total sugar, at around 0.4g per fruit. These benefits go beyond the brain to promote cardiovascular health, weight loss, healthy aging, and even improving the bioavailability of certain fat-soluble vitamins and minerals that might otherwise be flushed out of your body. [9]

BEETS

Beets provide an important yet often overlooked compound: nitrates. They can help increase blood flow, which is important as they ensure a steady flow of nutrients and oxygen to your brain. A study conducted in 2010 showed that drinking beet juice improved neural plasticity and helped delay dementia in older patients. [10] This purple vegetable is also a good source of natural sugars and antioxidants that give you a good dose of energy and anti-inflammatory benefits. Plus, it can be paired with delicious recipes that range from energy shakes to meal entrees.

BLUEBERRIES

Known as a 'superfood', the benefits of blueberries on brain health have long been known. This humble berry is very nutrient-dense, with just one cup bearing a healthy load of Vitamin C, Vitamin K, dietary fiber, and manganese, which all play a vital role in nerve and brain function among other countless benefits. [11, 12] They also often receive high praises for being rich in antioxidants, which help promote healthy brain activity and memory by reducing stress on aging neurons. [13] They are delicious by themselves as a healthy snack or in cereals, baked goods, or salads.
**BROCCOLI**

Broccoli, like most cruciferous vegetables, gets a bad rap. Growing up, most of us at one time or another, were forced to eat it as kids. Some of us still have bad memories of choking down overcooked, rubbery florets and being told it would make us strong. Fortunately, not only does it have vast health benefits to us, it can be delicious if prepared correctly. One serving of broccoli, according to the USDA, contains 107% of the daily recommended intake (DRI) of Vitamin C and 97% of the DRI of Vitamin K. [14] The first is a good source of antioxidants, while the second works wonders for memory and is known to help with blood clot formation, thereby reducing the risk of hemorrhage or internal bleeding. [15]

**CELERY**

Often touted for being a low-calorie snack that is beneficial for aiding weight loss due to its naturally high levels of dietary fiber, it also contains a bucket-load of vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants [16]. It has recently been the subject of studies on brain health, where interesting findings have been unearthed. The vegetable, while rich in Vitamin K, also carries a compound known as luteolin. Recent studies on mice at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign have shown that diets rich in luteolin can reduce age-related inflammation and stress signals to the brain. [17, 18] This helps delay the onset dementia and promotes a healthy brain.

**GREEN, LEAFY VEGETABLES**

Green, leafy vegetables encompass several different kinds of produce. The most common ones include spinach, kale, collard, and mustard greens. Like broccoli, they are all great sources of Vitamin K, as well as antioxidants like lutein, folate, and beta-carotene. [18] Whether on their own or all together, they are a wonderful upgrade from lettuce in salads. For finicky eaters, their taste can be well-hidden in a fruit shake.

**WALNUTS**

English Walnuts, which are taxonomically classified as fruits, make for a great snack on their own, candied, put in salads, or part of desserts. Their mild flavor and texture should not deceive, however, as it is another small but powerful superfood, bearing a load of nutrients, antioxidants and fatty acids to help reverse age-related memory decline. [20, 21] A 2014 study showed a marked improvement in brain and memory function in mice with Alzheimer’s disease after being fed a diet of walnuts. [22]
Meats & Animal Products

Bone Broth

While meats are packed with nutrients, we often miss out on many benefits that are present in bones when we discard them. Bone broth is an ancient dish that is often prepared and consumed by the earliest humans by boiling and simmering bones in water, often with an acid to help break down the composition.

High in collagen, it aids tissue regeneration all over the body and protects the brain from dementia-causing proteins. [23] Collagen contains an amino acid known as glycine, which has been found to improve microcirculation in the brain and helps to reduce anxiety. [24] Chondroitin, a compound shown to aid in central nervous system regeneration and neural plasticity, is also present in this milky dish. [25] It is easy to make, and it tastes delicious on its own or as a base for all kinds of dishes.

Egg Yolks

The yolk is the component in the egg that provides the embryo with a supply of key nutrients necessary for healthy development. It should come as no surprise, then, that it provides similar health benefits to humans.

Not only are they great sources of proteins, amino acids, and fatty acids, it also contains a massive quantity of choline. [26] A vitamin that is vastly beneficial to fetal brain development, choline contributes to the growth of cerebral inhibition, otherwise known as the ability to tune out repetitive noises. It is recommended that pregnant women consume lots of it to ensure healthy brain function in their unborn child. [27]

Salmon

A staple food of many peoples around the world, salmon has been fished for millennia. In Ireland, an old legend talks of the “Salmon of Knowledge,” which would bestow the world's wisdom to the first person to eat it. While eating this fish will not grant you immediate intelligence, the food is, fortunately, a well-known superfood that can improve brain health. This is because it is rich in omega-3 fatty acids [28], which have been shown to help in treating some mental illnesses and aid in healthy aging in the brain. [29]
COCONUT OIL

Coconut oil has found itself in the limelight as of late, being used for countless applications ranging from cooking to massage. While many of these claims are under heavy scrutiny by scientists, it has been found to be a good source of ketone bodies. These water-soluble molecules are a great alternative and efficient source of energy for the brain when glucose is not in ready supply. Studies have shown that the administration of Medium-Chain Triglycerides (MCTs), such as those found in coconut oil, may be effective in treating adults with mild to moderate Alzheimer’s disease. [30]

EXTRA VIRGIN OLIVE OIL

Olive oil has been produced by Mediterraneanean countries since ancient times. The highest grade, Extra Virgin Olive Oil (EVOO) (which must contain no more than 0.8% free acidity) is considered a “superfood” due to its high polyphenol content, which is a potent antioxidant shown to reduce oxidative stress in brain tissues. In a 2012 study, rats fed EVOO showed enhanced memory in maze trials. [31] Replacing butter or lard with EVOO is an easy way to make dishes healthier, while giving your brain a boost.
DARK CHOCOLATE

Perfect as an alternative to a sugary dessert, dark chocolate is a healthy snack that works wonders for brain health. That is because its main ingredient, cocoa, is naturally high in flavonols – a class of antioxidants that contain powerful anti-inflammatory properties.

It is important to limit your sugar intake, especially after brain injuries, so knowing what kinds of chocolate to eat is important. Those that contain at least 85% cocoa is what you want and they can be easily found at any grocery store. [32]

ROSEMARY

This herb, which goes great in meat recipes, is packed with flavor and contains an important ingredient called carnosic acid (CA) that can reduce neurodegeneration. It works as a preservative and an antioxidant that can fight off the effects of aging and risks of stroke by attaching itself to free radicals. It is currently being researched for applications in medication for aging and neurologically-hampered patients [33]. Since rosemary is easy to cultivate, you can rest assured that you'll always have this super herb in ample supply.

TURMERIC

Commonly used in Indian Traditional Medicine, as well as curries, turmeric is a spice that is related to ginger. The main constituent of this golden yellow root is curcumin, and it has been used as an anti-inflammatory medicine for a long time in Ayurvedic medicine. Recently catching the attention of Western researchers, the latest studies show that this compound can help inhibit the synthesis of proteins linked with the onset of Alzheimer’s disease as well as improving overall brain function. [34]

In the next pages you’ll find 5 simple, tasty, and nutritious recipes that will give you a kickstart to providing your brain the boost it needs!
LEMON ROSEMARY SALMON

Serves 2

Ingredients:

2 Alaskan salmon fillets, deboned
1 lemon, thinly sliced
4 sprigs of fresh rosemary
Himalayan pink salt or coarse white salt to taste
Freshly ground black pepper to taste
2 tablespoons of extra-virgin olive oil (EVOO)

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees Fahrenheit (200 degrees Celsius).
2. Coat pan with 1 tablespoon of olive oil.
3. Arrange a layer of half the lemon slices topped with 2 sprigs of rosemary, then place the salmon fillets on top. Season the salmon with salt and pepper, then layer again with the remaining lemon and rosemary. Drizzle with 1 tablespoon of olive oil.
4. Place in preheated oven and bake for 20 minutes.
Serves 1

Ingredients:

2 cups of coconut milk (or almond milk)
1 teaspoon of turmeric
½ teaspoon of cinnamon
Pinch of black pepper
Pinch of cayenne pepper

Instructions:

1. Blend all ingredients until they reach a smooth, even consistency
2. Heat in a medium saucepan for 3-4 minutes; do not boil
3. Drink warm
**Ingredients:**

- 4 lbs of beef bones
- 12 cups of water
- 2 tablespoons of apple cider vinegar (ACV)
- 2 large carrots, sliced
- 1 leek, sliced
- 4 sprigs of fresh rosemary
- 1 teaspoon of black pepper
- 3 bay leaves

**Instructions:**

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees Fahrenheit.
2. Bake the beef bones on a nonstick sheet for 40 minutes, turning halfway.
3. Place the bones in water in a large pot. Add ACV and let sit for 30-45 minutes.
4. Add the chopped vegetables and bring to a rolling boil for 2-3 hours. Remove any foam that comes to the top.
5. Let simmer for 48 hours.
6. Allow it to cool, strain, and place in an airtight container. Refrigerate overnight.
7. Scrape off the fat on top and store in a separate container.
8. Store the bone broth in jars and freeze. Heat up broth over low heat before serving.
KALE AND BLUEBERRY SALAD

Ingredients:

1 bunch of kale
3-4 carrots, julienned
½ cucumber, diced
1/4 cup apple cider vinegar (ACV)
2 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil (EVOO)
1/2 teaspoon salt and 1/8 teaspoon black pepper, or to taste
1 – 1 1/2 cups fresh blueberries

Instructions:

1. Rinse the kale and remove the stems.
2. Chop to bite-sized pieces
3. In a small bowl, stir together apple cider vinegar, olive oil, salt, and pepper.
Serves 2

Ingredients:

2 whole eggs
1 avocado, chopped
1 Roma tomato, diced
1 serrano pepper, diced
½ lime
Salt and pepper to taste
2 corn tortillas
1 tablespoon of extra virgin olive oil

Instructions:

1. Prepare the guacamole by combining the avocado, tomato, pepper, and a pinch of salt and pepper. Squeeze in the lime juice and mash with a fork until smooth.
2. Coat a skillet with olive oil and place two corn tortillas over medium heat for 5 minutes.
3. Remove corn tortillas and spread the guacamole over it.
4. Cook two eggs over medium heat, flipping once until over-medium.
5. Place the eggs over the tortillas and season with salt and pepper to taste.
Conclusion

With research uncovering more neurological health benefits of foods and a popular return to clean eating, it is now easier than ever to consciously consume what your brain needs.

Believe it or not, less is more! A lot of what causes brain decay is found in additives present in many processed foods. Therefore, it is recommended that such ingredients and excess sugar be avoided. By consuming whole foods made from natural produce, we are eating food the way it was meant to be – free from harmful man-made chemicals.

Eating junk foods create stress on our bodies. Since your mental health is affected by your overall well-being, eating well is the first step to obtaining a healthy brain. It’s true that a clear mind begins in the gut, as an abundance of research points to the link between gut and brain health.

The above-listed foods are rich in antioxidants and research has found this to be extremely important, as studies show that they are effective in preventing oxidative stress. This translates to lower cognitive decline as you age.

Therefore, start eating clean and healthy if you want to protect your brain’s health and stay mentally sharp even as you age. You can eliminate processed foods from your daily diet and include brain-boosting ingredients in your everyday meals. Many of them are delicious on their own or can be easily applied to a recipe and made into something spectacular. With a little bit of creativity, you can ensure you enjoy your meals without compromising on mental acuity!

Samuel Greeneville
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