



THE BEST



FOODS TO



KEEP YOUR



BRAIN



YOUNG



AND



HEALTHY

If you could protect your brain against degeneration and even boost the production of neurotransmitters just by making a few changes to your diet... **would you do it?**

There's good news for you if you said yes. Research is showing that you can increase your chances of maintaining a healthy brain well into your old age if you add certain **"smart" foods** to your daily eating regimen.

Check out these **top foods** that health experts are recommending to keep your brain young and healthy.



Walnuts



They even look like little brains, so maybe that's Mother Nature's way of telling us what walnuts are good for.

Indeed, a 2009 study in the *Journal of Nutrition* found that diets in which nuts made up as little as 2 percent reversed signs of aging in the brains of old rats, including the ability of the brain to function and process information.

And a study presented in 2010 at the International Conference on Alzheimer's Disease reported that mice with Alzheimer's demonstrated improved learning, memory and motor coordination after being fed walnuts.

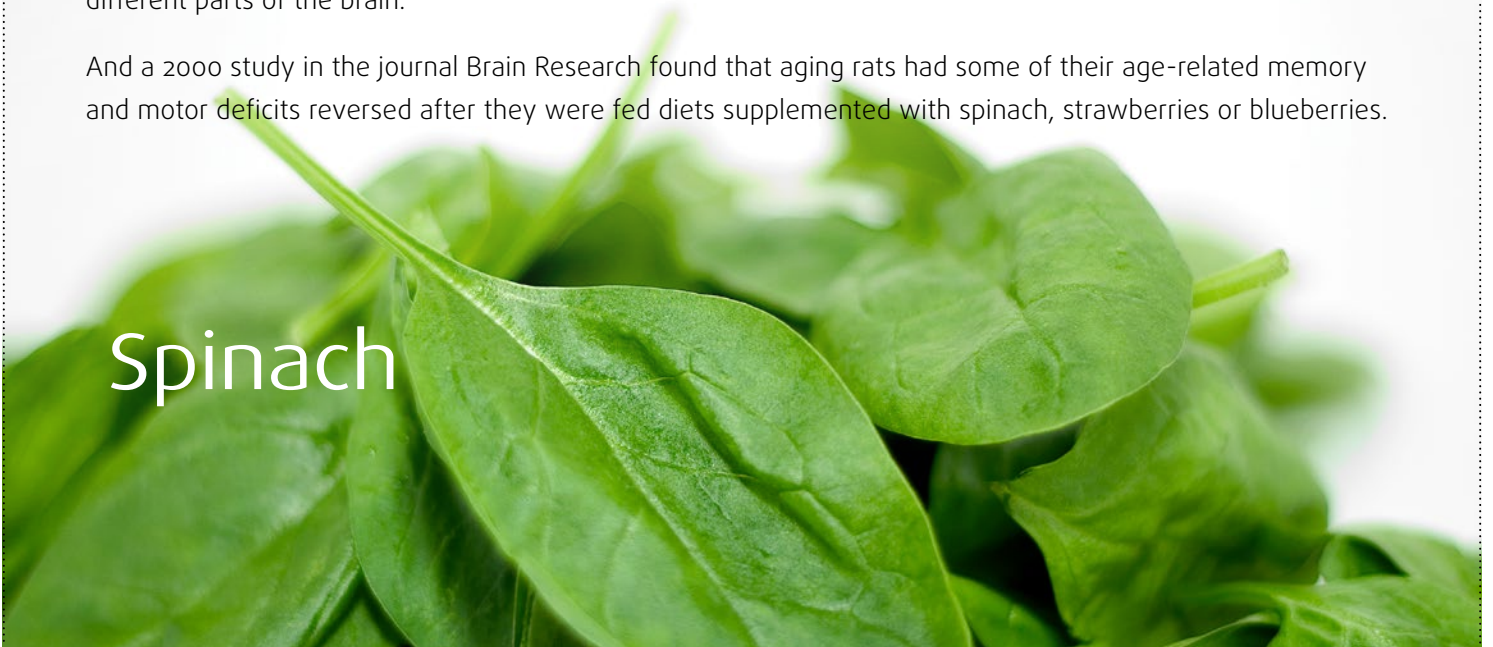
Walnuts contain high amounts of antioxidants, which some researchers say may combat the damage to brain cells' DNA caused by free radicals in our bodies.

Your mom always told you to eat your spinach, and there's science to back up her advice. The green leafy vegetable is loaded with vitamins C and E, which, studies have shown, help to improve cognitive abilities.

A 2000 study in the *Journals of Gerontology* showed that rats whose diet was supplemented with vitamin E experienced a 500 to 900 percent increase in brain and nerve tissue over an eight-month period, as well as an increase in the release of dopamine in the brain, the "pleasure" chemical that controls flow of information to different parts of the brain.

And a 2000 study in the journal *Brain Research* found that aging rats had some of their age-related memory and motor deficits reversed after they were fed diets supplemented with spinach, strawberries or blueberries.

Spinach





Pumpkin Seeds

Just a handful of pumpkin seeds a day is all you need to get your recommended daily amount of zinc, vital for enhancing memory and thinking skills.

Curry

Curry contains turmeric, a spice that in turn contains the anti-inflammatory antioxidant curcumin. Curcumin is capable of crossing the blood-brain barrier, which is one reason why it holds promise as a neuroprotective agent in a wide range of neurological disorders.

Research has shown that curcumin may help inhibit the accumulation of destructive beta amyloids in the brain of Alzheimer's patients, as well as break up existing plaques. Curcumin has even been shown to boost memory and stimulate the production of new brain cells, a process known as neurogenesis.

A word to the wise... some curry powders may contain very little curcumin compared to straight turmeric powder, so choose the latter for the best health benefits.



Broccoli

A great source of vitamin K, which is known to enhance cognitive function and improve brainpower.



Blackcurrants

Vitamin C has long been thought to have the power to increase mental agility. One of the best sources of this vital vitamin is blackcurrants.

These popular beverages do more than keep you awake in the mornings. Studies have shown they may prevent Alzheimer's disease and improve cognitive function.

A 2010 study in the Journal of Alzheimer's Disease found that when researchers gave caffeinated coffee to mice genetically engineered to develop Alzheimer's disease, the disease either slowed in progression or never developed. Based on the finding, coffee eventually could serve as a therapeutic treatment for people with Alzheimer's disease, the researchers said.

Tea showed protective effects on the brain, too. Tea drinkers did better on tests on memory and information processing than non-tea drinkers did, according to a 2010 study of 716 Chinese adults 55 and older in the Journal of Nutrition, Health and Aging.

Coffee and Tea



Sage

Sage has long had a reputation for improving memory and although most studies focus on sage as an essential oil, it could be worth adding fresh sage to your diet too.





Red Wine

Studies have shown that people who consume moderate amounts of red wine and other types of alcohol may be at reduced risk for Alzheimer's disease, but it may be that there is something else that tipplers do or don't do that affects their risk of developing Alzheimer's disease.

People who drink alcohol or eat healthy may be healthier in other aspects of their life, so it is difficult to disentangle whether it's the healthy diet that protects them versus other healthy behaviors.

Fish

Studies have shown that eating fish rich in omega-3 fatty acids could help slow typical cognitive decline that comes with age.

A 2005 study in the journal *Archives of Neurology* found that people 65 and older who ate two meals of fish a week for six years had a 13 percent decrease in cognitive decline, compared with people who didn't eat any fish regularly. And people who ate one meal of fish a week had a 10 percent decrease in cognitive decline.

Fish high in vitamin B12 may also help protect against Alzheimer's, according to a study published in 2010 in the journal *Neurology*.





Berries

Adding some vitamin-rich berries to your diet may not be a bad idea if you want to improve your memory, according to several studies.

One study, published in 2010 in the *Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry*, found that after 12 weeks of daily supplements of wild blueberry juice, nine older adults who had started to experience slight memory problems showed better learning and recall abilities than a similar group of adults who didn't take the supplements. The blueberry group also showed reduced symptoms of depression.

And in a 2009 report in the *Journal of Nutrition*, researchers said they examined a group of studies that showed fruits such as blueberries and strawberries, which are high in antioxidants, can decrease a type of stress in cells associated with aging and increase the signaling capabilities in brains.

In one of the studies, researchers placed 6-month-old rats on a diet supplemented with blueberry and strawberry extracts (totaling 2 percent of their diet) for nine months. These rats had better spatial and memory skills than rats not given the supplements.

Lentils

Adding lentils to salads and soups should be a no brainer. This legume is brimming with folate, a B vitamin shown to help boost brain power. Folate also plays a role in decreasing levels of amino acids that can impair brain functioning.



Nuts and seeds

Nuts and seeds are good sources of vitamin E. Higher levels of vitamin E correspond with less cognitive decline as you get older.

Add an ounce a day of walnuts, hazelnuts, Brazil nuts, filberts, almonds, cashews, peanuts, sunflower seeds, sesame seeds, flax seed, and unhydrogenated nut butters such as peanut butter, almond butter, and tahini. Raw or roasted doesn't matter, although if you're on a sodium-restricted diet, buy unsalted nuts.



Crab

You don't see crab on many power food lists, do you? But you should. One serving of crab has 1840 mg (more than your entire daily requirement) of phenylalanine, an amino acid needed to make the important neurotransmitter dopamine, as well as brain-stimulating adrenaline and noradrenaline and thyroid hormone.

Many types of fish and seafood are rich in phenylalanine, but we're singling crab out because it's easy to find and it's less likely to be high in mercury, an issue with tuna and other popular fish. Research also suggests phenylalanine may be helpful in combating Parkinson's disease. Added value: Crab is also one of the best dietary sources of vitamin B12 (see below) with one serving providing 192 percent of your daily requirement.



Carrots

This vegetable has been well known for its vision benefits and it turns out, it's good for the brain, too.

Carrots have high levels of a compound called luteolin , which could reduce age-related memory deficits and inflammation in the brain, according to a study published in 2010 in the journal Nutrition. In the study, mice whose daily diet was supplemented with 20 milligrams of luteolin had reduced inflammation in their brains. The researchers said the compound also restored the mice's memory to the level of younger mice's.

Olive oil, peppers and celery are also high in luteolin.

Although high in fat, peanut butter tends to be a source of healthy fats. And it's also packed with vitamin E.

Peanut butter may help keep the heart and brain healthy and functioning properly. Another good choice is almonds butter.

"There has been some very good research that diets that are high in healthy fats, low in saturated fat and trans fats, and rich in whole grains, green leafy vegetables, and nuts are good for the brain and the heart," says Maria C. Carrillo, PhD, senior director of medical and scientific relations at the Chicago-based Alzheimer's Association.

Peanut Butter



Avocados



Avocados are almost as good as blueberries in promoting brain health. True, the avocado is a fatty fruit, but it's a monounsaturated fat, which contributes to healthy blood flow. And healthy blood flow means a healthy brain.

Avocados also lower blood pressure. And as hypertension is a risk factor for the decline in cognitive abilities, a lower blood pressure should promote brain health.

Avocados are high in calories, however; so try adding just 1/4 to 1/2 of an avocado to one daily meal as a side dish.

Peppermint

Gum or teas, the smell has been associated with an increase in alertness and memory functioning by acting as a stimulant, researchers believe.



Broccoli and Cauliflower

For some time, researchers have been investigating the role of choline in brain development, looking at whether choline has the potential to spur the growth of new brain cells and neural connections.

Studies have shown that prenatal choline supplementation appears to boost later intelligence while choline deficiency has been linked with neural tube defects. In adults, choline keeps neurotransmitters healthy, keeping you sharp and your memory strong.

Remember wheat germ? One cup has 202 mg of choline; beef liver is the best dietary source of choline with 473 mg in a five-ounce serving. Much easier to incorporate broccoli and cauliflower, with 182 and 177 mg, respectively. Added value: Broccoli is also high in vitamin K, studied for its effect in boosting cognition.



SOURCES: Dr. Steven Pratt, MD, Dr. Ann Kulze, MD, Joe Lewin, Nutritional Therapist, Melanie Haiken, Nutritional Contributor, Dr. Joseph Mercola, MD, Amanda Chan, Nutritional Contributor, Mathew Kadey, RD, Maria C. Carrillo, PhD, WebMD.com, Alzheimer Association of Chicago



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Blackcurrants Curry
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Berries **Avocados**
Broccoli Spinach
Fish Pumpkin Seeds
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