

EFFECTIVE BRAIN-FOODS

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IMPORTANT

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Introduction

The following foods are believed to be good for balancing, nourishing, maintaining, and stimulating the brain:

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VIT B - LIVER TO IMPROVE BRAIN FUNCTIONING AND INTELLIGENCE

The brain accounts for around 20% of the body's oxygen needs, and iron is needed to get oxygen to the brain by means of the blood's haemoglobin. Liver is one of your diet's assets guaranteed to contain this valuable metal. Equally, liver is one of the most important sources of Vitamin B. Since the mid-1980s, it has been shown that these vitamins, mainly B9, B12, B1 and B6, improve cognitive function and the results of intelligence tests. If you don't like liver, consider ham, beef or nutritional yeast as a supplement.

Sources: cattle, pigs, sheep, veal, chicken, etc

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VIT C - BERRIES TO MAINTAIN AND STIMULATE BRAIN CELLS

All edible berries are excellent sources of Vitamin C (for example, blackcurrants have twice as much Vit C concentration as kiwi fruit, and have three times as Vit C much as oranges). They have antioxidant micronutrients that make up their colour (anthocyanes, polyphenols, flavonoids, etc).

Together, they not only fight against free radicals which can affect nerve cells, notably brain cells, but also improve circulation and strengthen blood capillaries, which enable the best oxygenation of the brain. If you don't like red berries, then go for kiwi fruit or garlic.

Sources: blackcurrants, strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, blackberries, citrus fruits, etc

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VIT E - AVOCADO TO REJUVENATE THE BRAIN

The avocado is exceptionally rich in Vitamin E. This vitamin constitutes one of the most powerful antioxidants and protects the fatty tissues of the brain from ageing.

Alternative sources: nuts, particularly hazelnuts, etc.).

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FOLATES - SPINACH TO PROMOTE MEMORY

All leafy vegetables are rich in Vit B9 (or folates), which plays an active role in the development of nervous tissue and in the renewal of blood cells. One of the signs of Vitamin B9 deficiency is reduced awareness and memory deterioration. This phenomenon, observed in people of advanced age with folate deficiency, can probably be explained by the fact that Vitamin B9 is needed for the maintenance of dendrites (arborisation of neurons, where B9 levels are high).

If you don't like spinach, go for watercress, lamb's lettuce, iceberg lettuce, broccoli or different types of herbs. Of these, rosemary is worth noting as it has certain flavonoids (notably apigenin) in its aroma, which possess stimulating properties affecting concentration and memory through encouraging cerebral blood flow.

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MAGNESIUM - BANANAS TO BALANCE THE BRAIN

Bananas are rich in magnesium, which is essential in the transmission of nervous impulses, and they are also a good source of Vitamin B6. This vitamin is used in the assimilation of magnesium in cells, the metabolism of amino acids, and the functioning of the nervous system through enabling the production of the neurotransmitters, Serotonin and GABA (Gamma-Amino Butyric Acid). These two molecules are associated with calm and measured behaviour.

Other sources: prunes, dried fruit, etc.

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OMEGA 3 - OILY FISH FOR BRAIN MAINTENANCE

More than 50% of brain mass is made up of lipids, and over 70% of these are fatty acids that belong to the Omega 3 group. These fats are important to the production and maintenance of brain cells, and for preserving the fluidity of cell membrane.

They also play a part in neuron activity. Weakening brain function and memory trouble can often be traced back to a deficiency in Omega 3.

Oily fish are one of the best sources of Omega 3, but if fish isn't to your taste, consider nut oils and rapeseed oil as equally rich alternatives.

Sources: mackerel, sardines, pilchards, salmon, etc.

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EGGS FOR BRAIN MAINTENANCE

Eggs contain lecithin and phospholipids, integral to the construction of brain cell membrane. In terms of feeding intellect, their value lies mainly in the quality of their proteins. Eggs are also rich in amino acids which are essential in the production of the principal neurotransmitters.

This is also the case with acetylcholine, a synthesis made from methionine and serine used in the process of memorisation, where noradrenalin (which stimulates learning) and its production rely on the presence of tyrosine and phenylalanine, which are found in the proteins in eggs.

Alternative source: white fish.

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COCOA TO STIMULATE THE BRAIN

In Aztec times, cocoa was already considered a medicine. Later, Casanova, the legendary seducer of women, used chocolate as an aphrodisiac with the kind of effects we know well! Since then, the chemical analysis of cocoa paste has revealed many surprises; besides the important calorific benefits, the presence of molecules similar to caffeine (theobromine, theophylline) and amphetamines (phenylethylamine, tyramine) give chocolate its true power as a tonic and psycho-stimulant. At the same time, chocolate's high magnesium content (330 milligrams per 100 grams), and the molecules it contains which are similar to serotonin (the 'relaxation' hormone), account for its 'anti-stress' and anti-depressant effects.

But that's not all! Scientists have demonstrated the positive role flavonoids present in cocoa play in encouraging better dilation of blood vessels. These antioxidant compounds help fight free radicals and guard the brain's activity. Beware of over-indulging, however. If you don't like chocolate, drink tea (which also contains antioxidants) and weak coffee (for its caffeine and its psycho-stimulating effect), but being mindful of excess and without indulging too much at the risk of cancelling out or even reversing the effects.

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GLUCOSE - PULSES TO ENERGISE THE BRAIN

The brain is glucose-dependent, which means that it uses only glucose to function. Consequently, it consumes more than 5 grams an hour, but does not store it. Thus it has to be regularly supplied through the diet and the circulatory system. It has been noted that the most difficult task within intellectual performance, the capacity to memorise, is dependent upon the level of glucose in the blood.

However, avoid indulging in sugary foods - though these are easy to snack on, they can lead to strong blood sugar fluctuations that your system can react violently and reduce blood sugar to below its normal level. The brain cannot tolerate this and the drop in blood sugar leads to fatigue and a shorter attention span.

The sugars that are said to be 'complex' and which have a low Glycaemic Index (GI) are therefore important. Pulses are rich in these 'complex' sugars, and their GI is one of the lowest. This really works to allow the regulation of glucose in the blood and its supply to the brain without creating a reaction of hyperglycaemia. If pulses aren't to your taste either, consider wholegrain foods, especially cooked 'al dente'.

Sources: lentils, chick-peas, etc.

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SHELLFISH TO IMPROVE BRAIN FUNCTION

Though rich in Vitamin B12 and in protein (notably lysine, a precursor to dopamine, a powerful neurotransmitter), it is mostly the oligo-elements in seafood and crustaceans (oysters, clams, shrimp etc.) that are good for brain function. Oligo-elements are crucial in order to fight and prevent stress and its inconveniences. Some of these can be described as 'therapeutic weapons' as they have a hand in fighting anxiety, mental fatigue and nervous disposition.

Manganese, copper, lithium, zinc and iodine have this effect too and can also be found in seafood. If you don't like shellfish, consider eating wholemeal bread, algae (which has iodised salt as in table salt) or wheat germ.

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