

HEALTHY CHOICES

Latest tips on the art of living well.

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Staying Sharp: Nutrients to support brain health



A healthy brain depends on the right nutrition

The brain is vastly complex and made up of an estimated 10 billion interconnected neurons which, together with the spinal cord, control every function in the body - from breathing, to learning and memory, to walking.

Signals from the brain to the body are carried along nerve fibres to neurons. As we age, this system can degenerate. But research shows a healthy diet and lifestyle can help us stay sharp.

Healthy brain - Good nutrition

A healthy brain depends on the right nutrition. Fresh, brightly coloured fruits and vegetables, oils, nut and seeds are recommended along with adequate protein, including regular consumption of fish containing Omega-3 fatty acids.

Plant foods are of particular importance as a number of plant-derived components called phyto-nutrients have been found to be important for brain health. The following 5 nutrients are stars for their support of healthy brain function:

1. Omega-3 essential fatty acids
Omega-3 fats are called 'essential' because they cannot be manufactured in the body. They must be consumed in fish. Two-three serves of oily fish a week are recommended and people who don't eat enough fish may wish to take an Omega-3 supplement.

The notable components of Omega-3s are EPA (eicosapentaenoic acid) and DHA (docosahexaenoic acid). These fatty

acids support brain health by protecting healthy cells and contributing to normal circulation. They also help maintain a healthy balance of fats in our blood. As we age, we may need more Omega-3s to maintain healthy cognition and memory. DHA is of particular importance to the brain, as it is a major component of brain tissue. Studies show regular consumption of DHA can help protect normal cognition and memory.



2. Coenzyme Q10
This nutrient is required by nearly every cell in the body for energy production, cell membrane function and stability. CoQ10 is also a very powerful antioxidant that has the ability to replenish Vitamin E. CoQ10 supports brain health during ageing through its antioxidant activity, its involvement in maintaining healthy blood circulation and its protection of healthy cellular powerhouses called mitochondria.
3. & 4. Vitamins C & E
Vitamins C and E are abundant in natural foods such as brightly coloured fruits, vegetables (think kiwifruit and capsicum), oils, nuts and seeds. They act as antioxidants to help protect cellular health. In the brain, this cellular

protection contributes to healthy cognition as we age.



5. Ginkgo
Ginkgo biloba is also known as the 'tree of life'. It is one of the world's oldest living trees that can be traced back 200 million years. Ginkgo is known for its antioxidant activity and protective impact on healthy brain cells. It is also known to protect a healthy arterial system, which supports blood flow to the brain. It also supports healthy blood flow throughout the body.

These nutrients offer a number of benefits, not only to our brain health, but to our overall health and wellbeing. Eating a wide variety of fresh, whole foods will help you to obtain many of these nutrients; supplements may be helpful to obtain higher levels of these and are the most convenient way to include herbs such as Ginkgo.

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