



**Secrets
of a
Brain-Healthy
Diet**



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It's no secret that what you eat can have a huge affect on the health of your heart. Now there's mounting evidence that the foods you ingest can also help or hinder your brain. To help you decide how to best ward off cognitive decline, here's a look at some brain-healthy food plans.

THE DASH DIET

Ranked Best Diet Overall for eighth year in a row by U.S. News and World Report, the **DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) diet** was developed by the National Institutes of Health to prevent and control hypertension. It's a balanced food plan that's low in sodium, saturated fat, trans fat and cholesterol, and downplays processed foods. Instead, it focuses on the following food groups:

- Fruits and vegetables
- Nuts
- Seeds
- Legumes
- Whole grains
- Poultry, fish and lean meats
- Low-fat dairy



DASH diet plan - check with your physician on what your daily calories intake should be.

Type of food	Servings on a 2000 Calorie diet
Grains and grain products (at least 3 <u>whole grain</u> foods each day)	7 - 8
Fruits	4 - 5
Vegetables	4 - 5
Low fat or non fat dairy foods	2 - 3
Lean meats, fish, poultry	2 or less
Nuts, seeds, and legumes	4 - 5 per week
Fats and sweets	limited

The DASH diet is also abundant in potassium, calcium, magnesium and antioxidants like vitamins A and C, which can prevent a wide range of chronic diseases.

More proof that treating high blood pressure helps

In 2018, preliminary research findings of the SPRINT MIND trial showed that aggressive treatment of high blood pressure resulted in fewer new cases of mild cognitive impairment and dementia.

The DASH Diet Trial of 459 adults, published in 1997, showed that participants who followed the DASH diet over two weeks had a greater lowering of blood pressure than those who followed a typical American diet or even one that was rich in fruits and vegetables. Although this study didn't deal with cognitive health head on, high blood pressure is a risk factor for Alzheimer's disease and dementia.

A later study, which followed 3,831 seniors without dementia for 11 years, dealt more directly with the impact of diet on brain health. It found that those

who most closely followed the DASH diet had the least decline in mental skills-- though researchers were uncertain whether the diet itself slowed decline or if it was related to another lifestyle factor shared by people who eat a healthy diet.

THE MEDITERRANEAN DIET

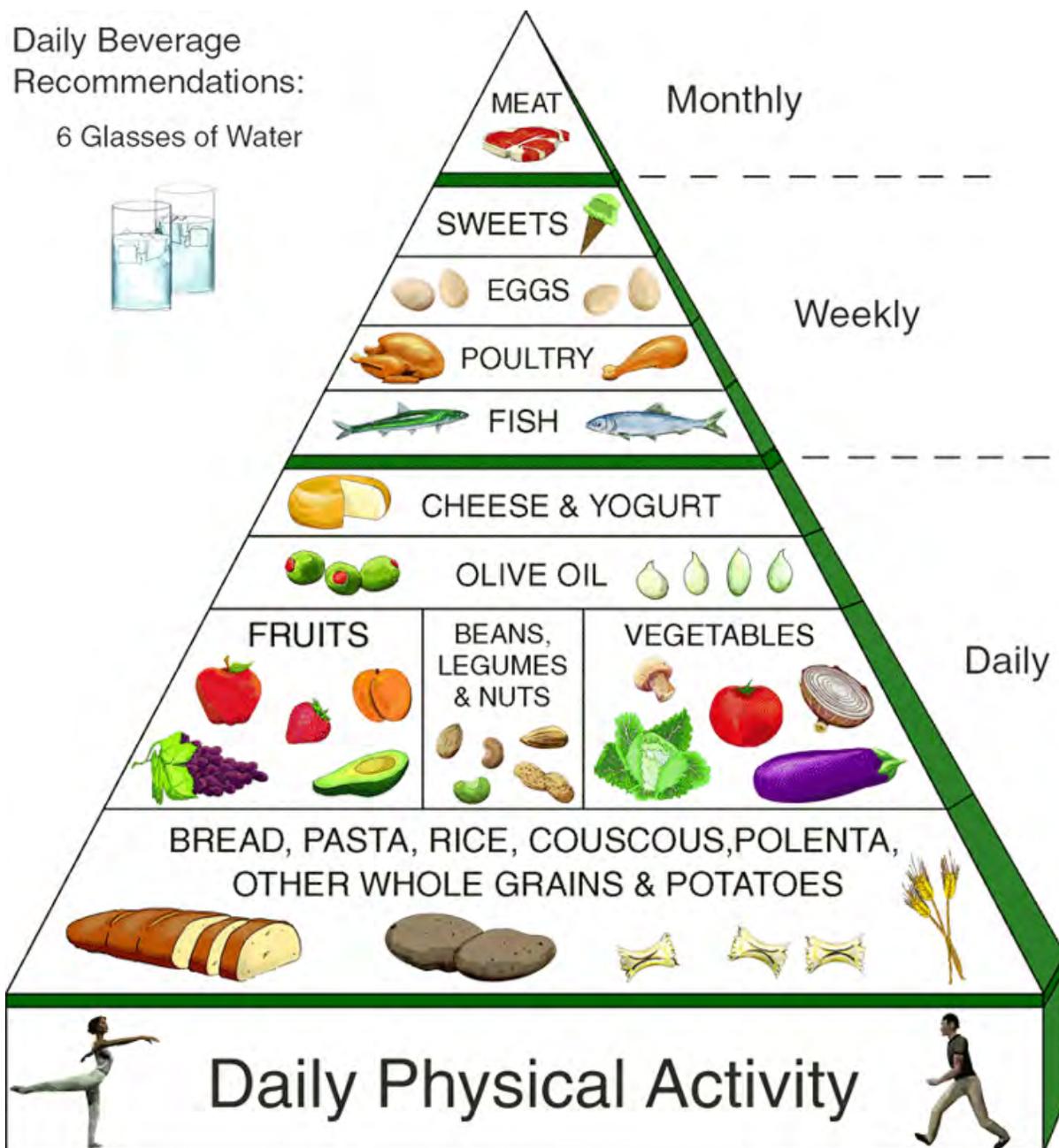
Another heart-healthy diet that can help people maintain their cognitive levels is the **Mediterranean diet**, which is more of a general eating pattern and lifestyle—two of its recommendations include eating meals with family and friends and getting plenty of exercise. It also allows wine in moderation.

Like the DASH diet it is loaded with fruits and vegetables (nine servings per week) and whole grains. It also advocates replacing butter with heart healthy oils like olive oil, which is high in potent antioxidants that can lower inflammation, a contributor to impaired brain function. This diet, which encourages plant-based eating, emphasizes beans and legumes. Although it does allow some flesh protein, researchers recommend substituting chicken and fish for red meat.



A summary of all the research on the Mediterranean diet, published in 2008, found that the food plan was associated with a reduced risk of cardiovascular mortality as well as overall mortality. On top of this, the summary, which included more than 1.5 million healthy adults, showed that the diet lead to a 13 percent reduction in Parkinson’s disease and Alzheimer’s disease.

Finally, another study, published in 2013, showed that the food plan (see below graphic) helped maintain cognition. The top 50 percent of the subjects who followed the Mediterranean diet closely were 19 percent less likely to develop thinking and memory problems than participants who followed the diet more loosely. With 17,478 participants, this study was the largest ever to look at which foods affected memory and thought processes.





THE MIND DIET

A newer food plan that is being touted as the best one for your brain is the **MIND (Mediterranean DASH Intervention for Neurodegenerative Delay) diet**. This eating plan, which is a hybrid of the Mediterranean and DASH diets, focuses on foods linked to improved cognitive function and delayed decline. The diet is broken down into 15 elements, including 10 recommended food groups as well as five unhealthy groups to avoid.

10 Brain-Healthy Food Groups

- Beans
- Fish
- Poultry
- Whole grains
- Green leafy vegetables
- Other Vegetables
- Berries
- Nuts
- Olive Oil
- Wine

Five Unhealthy Food Groups

- Butter
- Cheese
- Sweets
- Red Meat
- Fried Foods

MIND-recommended foods are rich in nutrients such as vitamin E, found in nuts, plant oils, seeds, and leafy greens. Although the MIND diet only recommends eating about two servings of veggies per day, researchers suggest you consume nutrient-rich leafy greens like kale, spinach or collards at least six times per week. The diet also includes plenty of B vitamins, such as folate, and vitamins C and D, all of which have been found in multiple analyses and randomized controlled studies to help neurons cope with aging.

The MIND diet trial, which followed 923 people for an average of 4.5 years, showed that the MIND diet was more effective overall than the DASH or Mediterranean plans. Participants who only moderately adhered to the MIND eating plan showed a whopping 35 percent reduction risk in Alzheimer's Disease. However, when participants followed their diets closely, those eating the Mediterranean way showed a 54 percent reduction in the risk of developing Alzheimer's Disease, one percent higher than those who closely followed the MIND diet.

REVISE YOUR OVERALL LIFESTYLE

Although healthy eating plays a big role, many other factors affect brain health and the risk of developing dementia, which probably develops because of complex interactions among lifestyle and other factors like age, genetics and coexisting medical conditions.

So, although there's no surefire way to prevent dementia, a growing body of research shows that lifestyle changes can make a huge difference. In fact, this 2017 report claims that one-third of the world's dementia cases could be prevented by taking actions like quitting smoking, treating depression, losing weight and exercising.

Remember, cognitive decline is not an inevitable consequence of aging if you are willing to do what it takes to optimize your brain health. Although you can't do anything about genetics, you can do something about lifestyle.

10 Tips to Help Implement a Brain-Healthy Diet

1. Plan meals around vegetables rather than entrees (even consider adding veggies to your breakfast).
2. Make veggies half your plate.
3. Replace saturated fat with olive oil (aim for one to four tablespoons per day).
4. Snack on fruit, veggies and small amounts of nuts and seeds.
5. Reduce refined sugar.
6. Limit processed foods, which are high in sodium, fats and other additives that may be harmful.
7. Enjoy whole grain cereals, breads, crackers and whole grain rice and pasta.
8. Prepare soups made with lentils, beans, and lots of vegetables use soup greens including kale and spinach
9. Add beans and other legumes as well as whole grains like barley and quinoa to salads.
10. Cook in batches to reduce time in kitchen.

Would you like more information on how to stay fit and healthy? Check out these additional resources from Blakeford.

The Road to Fitness: Building and Sticking to a Plan
Learning to Be Mindful
Blakeford's Wellness Playlist on YouTube



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LET'S TALK

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