



memory sharpeners

what you can do

What NOT to Eat

Paul E. Bendheim, MD, author of *The Brain Training Revolution*, suggests avoiding these types of food because of their negative effect on brain health:

* **salty foods**, such as chips and high-sodium canned soups

* **processed foods** high in simple sugars, including sweetened juices, candy, and cookies

* **foods high in saturated fat and cholesterol**, such as red meat and high-fat dairy products

* **foods high in trans fats**, designated on labels by the words "partially hydrogenated."

It's no secret that our brain power tends to diminish as we age. Maintaining a healthful diet and lifestyle is your best bet for staving off decline—but a wide range of dietary supplements can help too.

According to the *Journal of Nutrition*, "dietary supplementation with fruit or vegetable extracts high in antioxidants (e.g., blueberries and Concord grape juice) can decrease the enhanced vulnerability to oxidative stress that occurs in aging."

"I am a huge believer in a healthy, well-balanced diet that is high in fruits and vegetables, with whole-grain carbohydrates, lean sources of protein, and sparing use of healthy fats and sugars," says brain-health expert Cynthia Green, PhD. "Several studies have found that subjects who report following this kind of diet over their lifetime have an associated reduced risk for dementia."

Getting regular exercise, managing emotional well-being, and keeping off excess weight are additional lifestyle keys, according to Dr. Green. "The data on weight at middle age, especially visceral (belly) fat ratio, and increased risk for memory loss later in life is compelling," she says. "A recent study found that participants who were overweight with a high ratio of visceral body fat had a lower brain-matter volume."

Natural Brain Boosters

A number of herbs have been shown to enhance brain function. *Ginkgo biloba* can stave off memory loss and confusion, and also enhances concentration. Ashwagandha, rosemary, garlic, and holy basil are memory boosters. Lemon balm and sage show promise in relieving symptoms of mild to moderate Alzheimer's disease. Bacopa, which has been used traditionally in India for nervous disorders, has also been shown to improve memory, focus, and mental acuity.

Other helpful supplements include coenzyme Q10, which has slowed the degeneration of neurons in patients with Frederick's ataxia and Parkinson's disease; L-carnitine, which may improve mental functioning in patients with mild Alzheimer's or senile dementia; and phosphatidylserine, which is a potent memory rejuvenator.

Go Fishing

Omega-3 fatty acids are known to play a key role in brain function. They are highly concentrated in the brain and appear to be vital for memory. The best dietary sources are fatty fish such as salmon, sardines, and tuna. Or look for fish oil supplements that include both docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) and eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA). A recent study concluded that "DHA is related to brain health throughout the lifespan."

"A good multivitamin and certain supplements can be a solid 'insurance policy' for our diet," says Dr. Green. "For example, I have folks who detest fish but could really use the benefits of omega-3 fatty acids in their diets. In that case, I would absolutely support using an omega-3 supplement from a reputable source." ■■■

The Mind and the Mushroom
"Lion's mane," or *Hericium erinaceus*, has been used in traditional Chinese medicine to treat digestive ailments. Recent research shows this mushroom may also improve mild cognitive impairment.

SELECTED SOURCES "Alzheimer's Disease, Amnesic Mild Cognitive Impairment, and Age-Associated Memory Impairment..." by P. M. Kidd, *Altern Med Rev*, 6/08 ■ *The Brain Training Revolution* by Paul E. Bendheim, MD (\$24.99, Sourcebooks, 2009) ■ "Effects of *Ginkgo biloba* in Dementia: Systematic Review and Meta-analysis" by S. Weinmann et al., *BMC Geriatr*, 3/10 ■ "Grape Juice, Berries, and Walnuts Affect Brain Aging and Behavior" by J. A. Joseph et al., 9/09; "Serum Phospholipid Docosahexaenoic Acid Is Associated with Cognitive Functioning During Middle Adulthood" by M. F. Muldoon et al., 4/10, *J Nutr* ■ *The Health Benefits of Medicinal Mushrooms* by Mark Stengler, ND (\$4.95, Basic Health, 2005) ■ *Herbal Therapy and Supplements* by Merrill A. Kuhn, RN, PhD, ND, and David Winston, RH (AHG) (\$44.95, Wolters Kluwer, 2008) ■ "Improving Effects of the Mushroom Yamabushitake (*Hericium erinaceus*) on Mild Cognitive Impairment" by K. Mori et al., *Phytother Res*, 3/09 ■ Personal communication: Cynthia R. Green, PhD, author of *Brainpower Game Plan: Food, Moves, and Games to Clear Brain Fog, Boost Memory, and Age-Proof Your Mind in 4 Weeks* (\$25.99, Rodale, 2009), 5/10