

## Food for Thought – Nutrition for Cognitive Health

Brain function and memory are dependent on a variety of factors, including sleep habits, exercise, and genetics. There is also strong evidence that diet plays a major role in brain health. The ideal menu for enhancing memory and brain function promotes blood flow to the brain – a similar approach is recommended to nourish and protect your heart. Research indicates that the Mediterranean Diet helps keep aging brains sharp, and a growing body of evidence links certain foods and nutrients with better cognitive function, memory and alertness.

**Blackberries, blueberries and cherries** are a rich source of anthocyanins and other flavonoids that may boost memory function. Enjoy a handful of berries for a snack, mixed into cereal or baked into an antioxidant-rich pie. You can reap these benefits from fresh, frozen or dried berries and cherries.

**Eat your veggies.** This age-old message is easy to remember! Consuming cruciferous vegetables including broccoli, cabbage and dark leafy greens may help improve memory. Try a kale salad, steamed spinach, or substitute collard greens for a tortilla in your next sandwich wrap. A broccoli and cabbage stir-fry is an excellent option for lunch or dinner.

**Seafood, algae, and fatty fish** including salmon, bluefin tuna, sardines and herring are some of the best sources of omega-3 fatty acids. This group of polyunsaturated fats are essential for brain health. Docosahexaenoic acid, or DHA, in particular, may help improve memory in healthy young adults. Grill, bake or broil fish in place of meat at least two times per week for adequate intake. Try salmon tacos with red cabbage slaw, snack on sardines or enjoy seared tuna on salad greens for dinner. If you don't eat fish, discuss other food options and supplementation with a registered dietitian nutritionist. Fish oil, seaweed or microalgae supplements are alternative sources of DHA.

**Walnuts** not only benefit the cardiovascular system, they also may improve cognitive function. Add a half dozen walnut halves to oatmeal or a salad for added crunch. Incorporating these foods into your diet will not only benefit the brain, it may also help maintain a functional heart and aid in weight management. There is no guarantee that these foods will prevent memory loss, but regular consumption can help support lifelong optimal health.