

PALEO, PRITIKIN or? PIZZA HUT?

Which foods really boost our brain?

Brain fitness doctor Dr Jenny Brockis shares her tips on eating to improve brain function.



It seems hardly a day goes by without us being bombarded with new advice on what to eat, what not to eat and the next big thing guaranteed to keep us healthy. Much of this is often contradictory, making it hard to know the difference between fact, fiction and wishful thinking.

Years of nutritional research have revealed how our choice of foods influences our memory, general cognitive skills, mood and mental wellbeing. Getting it right is important to boost focus and thinking at all ages. Our food choices influence how well our kids learn (and behave) at school; it affects how well we operate in the workplace; and of course how well we maintain our cognition as we age.

In 2014 researchers at Yale University School of Public Health undertook a meta-analysis of all mainstream diets to see if one diet really did provide a significant advantage. What they discovered was that most diets had some merit, however the one most important attribute that stood out by the proverbial mile was this: eat real food.

This means enjoying a wide selection of different foods, that are preferably fresh, locally sourced and unprocessed. Living in Australia we are blessed with ready access to high quality seasonal produce at any time of year.

Eliminating certain food groups - carbohydrates, fats or proteins just makes it harder to eat in a balanced way.

Adding in a bucket-load of vitamins doesn't substitute for healthy food choices either and the so-called super-foods are insufficient on

their own. If you feel compelled to purchase the latest superfood sourced from a remote jungle location, carried by a yak for ten days before being transported urgently to your nearest grocery store, that's fine; as long as you are also including other brain healthy foods.

The top contenders for boosting focus, memory and better cognition are the Mediterranean and MIND diets.

SLIM readers will already be familiar with the Mediterranean style of eating. Leafy greens, cold water oily fish such as salmon or mackerel or other lean protein, deeply pigmented berries such as blueberries and strawberries, some seeds and nuts, some whole grains, a good dollop of olive oil, a small glass (125 mls - I did say small!) of red wine and you are good to go. Following the Mediterranean diet has, in longitudinal studies been linked to better cognitive health, improved mood and better memory.

Beyond the crystal clear waters of the Mediterranean, the new kid on the dietary block is the aptly called MIND (Mediterranean-DASH Intervention for Neurodegenerative Delay) diet. What's particularly exciting here is that studies of this way of eating (which is very similar to the Mediterranean diet) have been associated with a 35 percent lower risk of Alzheimer's disease. It incorporates all those foods shown by the research to be good for the brain and it's easy to follow.

*Dr Jenny Brockis is the Brain Fitness Doctor and author of **Future Brain: The 12 Keys to Create Your High Performance Brain** (Wiley) available online and at all good bookstores. Visit drjennybrockis.com*

Brain friendly foods

It is suggested you pick from the following 10 food groups as advised by Martha Morris from Rush University Medical Centre.

- 1. GO GREEN.** Mum was right - six servings a week of leafy green vegetables such as spinach, kale, Asian greens and salad greens.
- 2. MORE VEGGIES.** Not all vegetables are green. Include a wide variety of different coloured veggies on your plate - at least one every day - carrots, capsicum, eggplant, squash, your choice.
- 3 GO NUTS.** Previously maligned for being guilty of causing weight-gain - nuts are packed with good fats and vitamins. Five serves a week, (that's five small handfuls) is all that's required.
- 4. BERRY DELIGHTFUL.** Two or more serves a week of blueberries, strawberries, blackberries, or cherries to pack a powerful anti-oxidant punch.
- 5. BEANS.** Lentils, chickpeas, kidney beans or baked beans. Eat beans three times a week.
- 6. WHOLE GRAINS.** For those not allergic or Coeliac, three servings a day.
- 7. GO FISH.** Naturally fish would have to be included for the Omega-3 content - once a week. Too easy!
- 8. CHICKEN.** Chicken or turkey twice a week.
- 9. OLIVE OIL.** Extra virgin for your salads and cooking - Don't forget not to heat it too high.
- 10. WINE.** One glass a day (that's 125 mls!).