

## A MEAL FOR THE MIND

Growing up, I don't know how many times I heard that I should be having more almonds to improve my memory. I always dismissed the advice once I grew older since I considered myself a doctor and a woman of science now. Almonds for memory indeed! How could something I ate have any effect on my memory? Just doesn't make sense, right?

Wrong.

It turns out that diet seems to have a vital role in not only development of the brain but also in keeping it healthy throughout life. In fact, a very important turn in human evolution, brain wise, seems to have taken place when our diets improved. Particularly, when we learned to catch fish. Anthropological research suggests that the size of our brains became larger during the time that we began to populate near sources of fish.

There are many studies suggesting the reasons as to how certain food groups help our memory and cognitive function (thought process, problem solving etc), and more still are pouring in but some foods, spices and herbs have been credibly linked with benefits for the brain and I, for one, see no harm in adding more of these to our plates.

### TURMERIC (HALDI)

Turmeric has been linked to slowing down cognitive decline in the elderly. Its effects have specially been studied on the neurodegenerative Alzheimer's disease. It appears to have both anti-inflammatory and anti-oxidant actions. This means that the plaques that form in the brain leading to degeneration, largely because of the cumulative inflammatory processes, may be cleared away or slowed down, while it also binds free radicals (destructive molecules that lead to aging and cancer) and promotes healing.



Active compound: curcumin and curcuminoids

### FISH

A study published in the Lancet, 1998 by Hibeln JR saw a direct decline in the prevalence of clinical depression in countries where fish formed a main component of the diet, for example, in Japan and Taiwan, suggesting a role of nutrition in mental illness. Fish (some more than others) are rich in omega-3 fatty acids, which are found to be an important component of brain cell membranes, which goes to show that a diet rich in omega-3 fatty acids is favourable to the development of the human brain.



Experimental studies done on rats with trauma to the brain showed that adding fish oil to their diet helped to stop the cascade of brain cell damage that is triggered when there is a traumatic brain injury. Not only that, it also appears to increase the production of dopamine, a neurotransmitter that is vital to transmitting electrical signals between brain cells.

Active compound: DHA

## NUTS AND SEEDS

Nuts and seeds contain one of the very important fatty acids, known as ALA. Long term intake of nuts and seeds, especially oily nuts like walnuts that are high in omega-3 fatty acids (specially ALA), are shown to be not only good for long-term memory that declines as we age, but also seem to have cardio-protective function, and may help lowering the risk of stroke. Seeds such as flaxseeds and chia seeds are also high in these good fats that seem to be key in slowing down the brain's aging process, and are easily added to an everyday diet.



Active Compound: ALA

## FRUITS AND BERRIES

Fruits and berries contain a class of bioactive compounds called flavonoids which, through research, have been linked to a protective effect against neurodegenerative diseases. Also, citrus fruits contain vast amounts of Vitamin C and Riboflavin, both of which have antioxidant and healing properties that help fight inflammation and cell injury in brain cells.



Active Compound: Flavonoids and vitamins