



A good diet to boost your brain

Advice on how to take care of your brain



The link between diet and health has been known for a long time. Hippocrates (460-370 BC) already had this to say: “Let food be your only medicine.” That adage may well still be topical today because more and more research studies show just how necessary certain nutrients are for the sound working of our organs in general and of the brain in particular.



Make your choice!

Food for our body is like petrol for our car (without petrol the car will not go far while fuel quality influences engine performance and the service life of its moving parts; exactly the same thing applies to the food we eat). To function well, our brain needs 40 nutritional components: 15 minerals and trace elements, 8 amino acids, 13 vitamins and 4 fatty acids. Unfortunately, no miracle food contains them all and might be eaten daily to make our brain function well. The only food which does contain all of these 40 substances is mother's milk, i.e. impossible for us to consume on a daily basis...

Only a balanced diet will enable all or at least a large proportion of these substances to be supplied. But what exactly is a balanced diet?

A balanced diet



A balanced diet does not simply involve eating everything with a preference for the things we like; instead it means eating everything while placing emphasis on certain foodstuffs, especially fruit, vegetables and good fats (omega 3 and 6), but at the same time cutting down on fast-acting sugars (sweets, cakes and fizzy drinks), alcohol and saturated fats (charcuterie, dairy products, red meat...).

Also, as part of a balanced diet, it is advisable to eat three meals a day and especially not to miss breakfast. Breakfast must in fact provide 25% of our daily nutritional requirements (1800-2000 calories for a woman and 2200-2400 calories for a man).

In addition, a balanced diet must supply 50 to 55% carbohydrates (remember: slow-acting and not fast-acting sugars), 30 to 35% lipids (fats), 10 to 15% proteins, vitamins and trace elements.

Last but not least, you must make sure to chew well and take your time when eating; the sensation of a full stomach is in fact triggered after 20 minutes and will let the brain know that it has been fed.

If you want to have a well-balanced diet and by the same token nourish your brain well, these few recommendations must be followed carefully.

Diet and the brain

After these brief comments on a balanced diet it is now time to return to the brain. The brain is a complex network, which might be likened to a fishing net through which the nerve impulses circulate.

Although the brain accounts for just 2% of our body mass, it absorbs 20% of the oxygen that we breathe and 20% of the food energy that we consume. What is more, the brain is a priority organ so that if it feels a shortage it will take its nutrition directly from the other organs at the risk of weakening them. Its energy needs are very high, especially as it works constantly, day and night, without ever taking a break.

To function properly, the brain must be fed continuously especially with useful sugars (slow-acting sugars). The best proof that it is working well is a stable and moderate blood sugar level. This implies that the supply of slow-acting sugars must be spread over the whole day and that fast-acting sugars (such as fizzy drinks, cakes, chocolate bars, sweets...) must be avoided as they create blood sugar level peaks followed by a reaction of hypoglycaemia (lack of sugar).

In addition, as mentioned earlier, a balanced diet will have a positive impact on the brain.

Conversely, diets which cause shortages, certain medicines, alcohol, saturated fats, fizzy drinks, confectionery and other kinds of refined sugar or tobacco... are enemies of the brain.

The ideal diet for our brain must be rich in fruit and vegetables (to supply vitamins and slow-acting sugars), polyunsaturated fats (omegas 3 and 9) and iron and low in fast-acting sugars, saturated fat and red meat. Good hydration is also essential to keep the brain active.

These may all seem to be no more than very general comments. We shall now go on to see more specifically which particular foods or groups of foods should be chosen to boost your brain.

Essential foods to boost the brain

Here is a non-exhaustive list of foods that are essential to keep your brain fit.

*** Carbohydrates with a low glycaemic index**

Their intake must be spread over the whole day.

*Prefer: **fruit, vegetables, wholegrain cereals, pulses (lentils, split peas, dry beans)...***



*** Oily fish and other sources of omega 3 and 9**

These are part of the composition of the brain cells.

*Prefer: **salmon, sardines, mackerel, herring, tuna, shellfish and crustaceans, flaxseed, rapeseed oil, olive oil, grapeseed oil...***



*** Dark green leafy vegetables**

They contain vitamins of the B complex, especially B9, essential to the brain.

*Prefer: **spinach, broccoli, lettuce...***



*** Citrus fruit**

Rich in vitamins of the C and B complexes that are useful for the brain.

*Prefer: **oranges, grapefruit, mandarins, lemons...***



*** Berries**

Eating berries, especially blueberries, has an effect on the memory.

*Prefer: **blueberries, blackberries, raspberries, goji berries, cranberries, gooseberries..***



*** Walnuts and other types of food containing vitamin E**

Vitamin E counteracts cognitive decline.

*Prefer: **walnuts, almonds, hazelnuts, avocados, asparagus, spinach..***



*** Eggs**

Eggs have a high choline content; this is a precursor of acetylcholine which tends to enhance the memory.

*** Les antioxydants**

These protect the brain against oxidative stress and have an impact on the memory.

*Prefer: **turmeric, green tea, royal jelly, dark chocolate (at least 70% cocoa content, but with moderation: two squares daily), coloured vegetables and fruit (spinach, peppers, grapes, soft fruit)...***



*** Water**

70% of our body consists of water. A lack of water creates memory problems and learning difficulties

Not less than 1 litre daily