

10 brain power food



Summer's likely been a big brain drain. Don't deny you've been overloading on empty calories in grab-and-go foods that are low on nutrients for the noggin.

Well, time to get back into the game and boost your brain-power with snacks that matter to your grey matter.

With summer setting and September's must-dos piling up, fuel up with foods to maximize overall mind health.

"A healthy mid-day snack is key to boosting energy and nourishing the brain for better concentration and improved thinking power," says Erin MacGregor (howtoeat.ca), professional home economist and dietitian at Sunnybrook Hospital.

Fabulous brain fuel comes from high-fibre carbohydrates and fruits, says B.C.-based nutrition consultant and dietitian Natalie Brown, (whiterockdietitian.com) along with antioxidants, vitamin C and Omega-3 from fish.

"The brain requires good nutrition just as much as the rest of the physical body does," says Brown.

Refined sugar, fat and salt are sure to drain your brain, says Brown, so put down those "potato chips, cookies and other sweets and treats."

Use your brain and take MacGregor's snack suggestions:

1 Go nuts! Walnuts, a source of Omega-3 fatty acids, are essential in the normal development of the brain during childhood, and appear to boost memory function, says MacGregor.

2 Plant a seed of creativity. Pumpkin seeds are an excellent source of zinc, known to



JOANNE RICHARD

Life

improve memory and cognition. Sprinkle them over yogurt or use them in a homemade granola bar recipe (howtoeat.ca/homemade-granola-bars/).

3 Nothing blue about blueberries. Polyphenols found in blueberries fight against the accumulation of toxic proteins, which are found in greater quantities in diseases of the brain such as Alzheimer's, according to a new study at Tufts University and University of Maryland Baltimore County. So grab a handful or add them to a healthy fruit smoothie or homemade fruit/yogurt popsicle.

4 Tuck into those tomatoes. "Lycopene, an anti-oxidant found in tomatoes, is known to reduce free radical damage which occurs in the development of dementia," MacGregor says. Cherry tomatoes are a perfect snack option.

5 Go for the whole grains. "Carbohydrates in whole grains convert to glucose which is the brain's primary source of energy," MacGregor says. Whole grains also deliver added benefits including fibre, brain-boosting B vitamins and essential fatty acids, much of which is removed in processing. "Whole grain bread, crackers, whole oat granola or a sprinkling of wheat germ in yogurt can all work as great snack options."

6 Get cracking! Eggs are a natural source of choline, essential for the normal function of brain and nerve cells. Have hard-cooked eggs ready in the fridge for a quick and portable snack, suggests MacGregor.

7 An apple a day ... "A leading source of the anti-oxidant quercetin, apples — specifically their skins — can defend your delicate brain cells from damage which may lead to cognitive decline."

8 Avocado gets an A+. "Containing a bevy of brain boosters, avocado is a superstar," says MacGregor. They are a natural source of folate, vitamin E and Omega-3 fatty acids, all shown to prevent the progression of Alzheimer's disease.

9 Get your greens on! "Studies have shown that woman who eat more vegetables, specifically leafy greens, show slower rates of cognitive decline," she says. Give kale chips a try, preferably the homemade kind.

10 Chocolate fix: The antioxidant-rich, dark variety can improve blood flow to the brain and improve memory. "Look for natural cocoa powder or minimally processed dark chocolate to ensure the flavonol content remains high," says MacGregor, who recommends combining avocado and cocoa powder in a brain boosting mousse (howtoeat.ca/howto-recipe-makeover-chocolate-avocado-mousse/).

✉ joanne.richard@sunmedia.ca

📧 @joannerichard_

