



BRAIN WAVES

We all know that the food we eat can affect our bodies. But what about the greater impact food can have on our brain?

Food can directly affect everything in our body from our mood and energy levels to our memory and function.

Brain fog is a common term used to describe people who experience symptoms of confusion, forgetfulness, lack of focus and mental clarity. Reassuringly, paying more attention to the foods we eat as sources of optimal fuel for our body and brain can help nourish the brain cells and protect against early signs of ageing. This can help to prevent the progression of Alzheimer's and dementia and also slow the decline for those who already have it.

WHEN TO WORRY

What are the signs that there is something to worry about? The following are all indications that your forgetfulness may have strayed beyond what we consider a normal part of the ageing process:

- Repeatedly asking the same questions
- Forgetting common words when speaking
- Mixing words up – saying 'bed' instead of 'table', for example
- Taking longer to complete familiar tasks, such as following a recipe
- Putting items in inappropriate places, such as putting a wallet in the fridge
- Getting lost while walking or driving around a familiar neighbourhood
- Undergoing sudden changes in mood or behaviour for no apparent reason
- Becoming less able to follow directions

Increasing forgetfulness, alongside changes in your ability to concentrate, and a slowing down of the speed with which you can process information, may be signs of mild cognitive impairment which can sometimes progress to Alzheimer's or dementia, but not always. You can develop mild cognitive impairment without your memory loss progressing and without developing the whole spectrum of symptoms associated with dementia.

LIFESTYLE

Studies show that people with the healthiest habits in mid-life

have a lower risk of dementia later on especially if they do three or more of the following – take regular exercise, avoid smoking, drink only in moderation, and maintain a healthy weight and diet.

DIET

In order to provide adequate nutrients for optimal brain health, the Mediterranean diet is a good one to follow. Researchers investigating the MIND diet (which is the Mediterranean-DASH Intervention for Neurodegenerative Delay) found that if people strictly adhered to it, the nutritional benefits could reduce the risk of Alzheimer's by up to 53%.

SLEEP

Reduced sleep increases the risk of Alzheimer's. Beta-amyloid protein is cleared away during sleep when your cerebrospinal fluid washes out toxins from your body. The best sleep position for this to happen is on your side.

OMEGA 3

Omega 3 fats, and particularly DHA, found in food like oily fish can prevent amyloid plaque formation and aggregation, improve cerebral blood flow and reduce inflammation making them important in the fight against not only Alzheimer's, but also vascular dementia. They can also help to prevent abnormal blood clotting and lower blood pressure.

B VITAMINS

Certain nutrients, and in particular the B vitamins, can slow the atrophy of specific brain regions that are a key component of Alzheimer's. People taking specific levels of B vitamins had 90% less brain shrinkage compared to those taking a placebo.

SUPPLEMENTS

Taking a programme of supplements that gives you specific combinations of nutrients is often more effective than taking a few individual nutrients as nutrients work not only individually, but synergistically with each other. In effect, a combined supplement programme is greater than the sum of its parts.

VITAMIN D

Get safe sun exposure and know your vitamin D level. If you are moderately deficient in vitamin D, you have a 53% increased risk of dementia. Your risk increases by 125% if you are severely deficient.

PROBIOTICS

Your brain and gut are very much connected as good bacteria has a direct effect on your memory, mood and cognition. Scientists often call the gut the 'second brain' because it is filled with the same neurotransmitters as your brain. Both probiotics and prebiotics (they promote the growth of the probiotics) have anti-inflammatory effects, which we know is important in the treatment of both vascular dementia and Alzheimer's.

HEAVY METALS

Aluminium and mercury are both classed as neurotoxins and thought to pose an increased risk of developing Alzheimer's. The saying 'mad as a hatter' refers to the traditional practice of polishing top hats with mercury. We may not wear top hats so much anymore, but you will still find mercury in some dental amalgams and also in fish which is why it's best to choose small wild fish like sardines, mackerel and herring, and avoid tuna and swordfish.

TRAINING

It is worth doing all you can to keep your brain active and healthy. Taking part in leisure activities such as reading, dancing and playing board games and musical instruments has been shown to reduce the risk of dementia. The more activities you do, and the more often you do them, the greater the benefits. Doing crosswords has been found to particularly beneficial in delaying memory decline – by 2.5 years.

TESTING

Glenville Nutrition Clinic in Galway have put together a Brain Protection Profile that tests for heavy metals like aluminium and mercury, deficiencies of vitamin D, omega 3 and all the vitamins and minerals. It also tests for homocysteine and HbA1c to check if a person is diabetic.



If you are concerned about your brain health, or wish to be assessed, contact Sorcha Molloy at Glenville Nutrition Clinic for more information or to make an appointment. 091 726344, galwayinfo@glenvillenutrition.ie