

Taking Charge of Your Brain Health

Make Healthy Food Choices

The human brain, sometimes called the “3 pound universe within,” is one of your most vital organs. It plays a role in every action and every thought and just like the rest of your body, it needs to be looked after. By making healthy lifestyle choices now, you may be able to reduce your risk of developing Alzheimer’s disease and improve your brain’s ability to sustain long-term health.

This sheet is part of a series that provides practical action steps, based on current research, which you can take to improve your brain health. Will it prevent Alzheimer’s disease? There are no guarantees, but healthy lifestyle choices will help keep your brain as healthy as possible as you age. And since a healthier brain can withstand illness better, it’s important to take action on the things you can control -- lifestyle choices.



Most of us are aware that healthy eating is good for us and can reduce the risk of diseases such as heart disease, stroke and diabetes. But did you know that these health problems also increase your risk of developing Alzheimer’s disease? Healthy food choices not only improve your general health, they are also beneficial to brain health. Scientific evidence indicates that long-term healthy dietary choices help maintain brain function, slow memory decline and may help reduce your risk for Alzheimer’s disease.

Canada’s Food Guide for Healthy Eating is designed to help us make wise food choices by translating the science of healthy eating into a practical pattern of food choices that meet our need for nutrients, promote health and minimize the risk of nutrition-related diseases.

Health Canada’s five **Guidelines for Healthy Eating**:

1. Enjoy a variety of foods.
2. Emphasize cereals, breads, other grain products, vegetables and fruit.
3. Choose lower-fat dairy products, leaner meats and food prepared with little or no fat.
4. Achieve and maintain a healthy body weight by enjoying regular physical activity and healthy eating.

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Up for
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5. Limit salt, alcohol and caffeine.

You can boost the nutrition that feeds your brain even further by choosing the right fats and including foods rich in anti-oxidants.

Take Action on Healthy Food Choices

- Put a rainbow of colours on your plate.
 - Blue/purple fruits and vegetables tend to be packed with anti-oxidants. Blackberries, blueberries, purple cabbage, and plums are all great food choices.
 - Go green every day with fruits and vegetables that are good for your brain and also benefit bones, teeth and vision. Green options include avocados, broccoli, celery, cucumbers, peas, spinach, pears, honeydew melon and many more.
 - Choose white, tan and brown fruits and vegetables such as bananas, cauliflower, potatoes, turnips, onions and garlic.
 - Add sunshine to your plate with orange and yellow fruits and vegetables such as grapefruit, cantaloupe, butternut squash, peaches, papaya, oranges, sweet potatoes, yellow peppers and lemons.
 - Reach for reds every day. Beets, raspberries, red grapes, radishes, tomatoes, red peppers, watermelon, rhubarb, pomegranates, and cherries are just a few excellent red choices.
- Eat high fibre breads, cereals and grains and low-fat animal proteins. Add pizzazz to dishes with herbs, spices, nuts, and olives. You don't have to give up flavour to maintain a healthy diet.
- Maintain a healthy weight by choosing appropriate portion sizes, eating healthy snacks, and drinking plenty of water. Plan meals in advance so that you don't leave healthy eating to chance.
- Include foods rich in omega-3 oils such as cold-water fish (eg. trout, salmon and walnuts).

- When it comes to food and brain health, set reasonable goals and be patient with yourself. By following basic healthy eating guidelines, your brain fitness has the potential to improve.

Resources: Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating: www.hc-sc.gc.ca (Food and Nutrition)

Note: Your abilities, health situation and interests should be taken into consideration when choosing brain healthy activities. If you have questions about your own situation, speak to your doctor or health-care provider.

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