

# IN THE KNOW ABOUT NUTRITION

Volume: 2017 Issue: 4

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## *Diet and Memory: Are They Related?*

We have all heard the saying “You are what you eat”. We know now more than ever how true this is. The old doctor Hippocrates once said “Let food be thy medicine, and let medicine be thy food” to make the point that what you eat can act as a remedy. As we all know, the older we get the harder it is to remember things. In the best. This is a natural thing but what if we could delay memory loss by the way we eat?

### Memory and Diet Connection

Memory loss is often characterized by cells in the brain that no longer communicate or communicate more slowly, most commonly due to dead brain cells or inflammation in the brain. Harvard Medical School has published studies suggesting that those with high cholesterol levels are at higher risk for memory loss and Alzheimer’s. High cholesterol levels can damage blood vessels that carry oxygen to the brain which can trigger memory loss. High blood sugars have also been shown to speed up memory loss making diabetes a risk factor for dementia. Managing your diet can not only help reduce your risk for diseases but prolong the onset of memory loss or even improve your memory abilities.

### Foods That May Cause Memory Loss

Although there is a genetic component to how early you may experience simple memory loss or even Alzheimer’s, you can delay it as long as possible by eating a better diet. The foods that can be a trigger for memory loss are those that also cause inflammation:

- Microwave Popcorn
  - Contains diacetyl which may increase amyloid plaques that have been linked to Alzheimer’s
- Beer
  - Contains nitrites which has been linked to Alzheimer’s
- Refined Grains & Sugar
  - White bread, flour, pastas, rice, and sugar
  - May cause insulin spike that can be harmful
- Processed meats
  - Contains nitrosamines that triggers the liver to release chemicals that are toxic to the brain

It is important to note that this does not mean you have to stop eating these foods. This means you should eat these brain protectors more often .



## Foods That May Help Memory

As we mentioned earlier inflammation in the brain is the leading cause for memory loss and Alzheimer's onset, therefore eating foods that can reduce inflammation is the key.

- Leafy Green Vegetables
  - Great source of vitamins and minerals
- Salmon/Cold Water Fish
  - Omega-3 fatty acids help reduce inflammation
- Berries and Dark Skinned Fruit
  - Antioxidants help reduce inflammation
- Extra-Virgin Olive Oil
  - Omega-3 fatty acids help reduce inflammation
- Walnuts and other tree nuts
  - Rich in Omega-3 fatty acids

## Is There A Diet I Can Follow?

Interestingly, many of the foods that help reduce inflammation are all foods that are common in the *Mediterranean Diet*. This diet is famous for helping heart health but also is great for overall health, including memory. The basic components of the diet are fruits, vegetables, and whole-grains as the carbohydrates. Less red meat and more fish that are high in Omega-3 fats as the main protein source. Oils like olive oil instead of butter to reduce saturated fats and increase unsaturated fats. A sample diet for one day can be:

- Breakfast
  - Yogurt with blueberries and chopped walnuts
- Lunch
  - Greek Salad with grilled chicken or shrimp
- Dinner
  - Baked salmon with lemon and garlic with asparagus cooked in olive oil.

Remember to try to eat 4-5 vegetables, 3-4 fruits, 2 protein, 3 dairy and 5-6 grains with 3 grains being whole grains every day.

## Other Thoughts

Apart from changing parts of your diet, there are several other things you can do to preserve your memory as long as possible. Exercise has been shown to help with memory. Doing crossword puzzles or other mind stimulating activities keep the brain engaged longer. Quitting smoking and excessive alcohol consumption along with a good night's sleep will go a long way in prolonging your mental and physical health.



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