



Brain Food

**8 Superfoods Your
Brain Will Love**



By Ocean Robbins

**FOOD REVOLUTION
NETWORK**

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Dementia has become a global epidemic. Today, there are 55 million people living with dementia worldwide, and that number is expected to grow to 78 million by 2030.^{[1] [2]}

According to an international survey conducted by the Alzheimer's Association, Alzheimer's disease is the most feared disease after cancer. Of those surveyed, almost 40% incorrectly believed you have to have a family history to be at risk for Alzheimer's.^[3]

If you're over 40, the groundwork for dementia may already be in place in your brain. Researchers have found that the pathways for Alzheimer's often start 30 years before the onset of symptoms, and that nearly half of seniors over age 85 die with dementia.^{[4] [5]}

Fortunately, you can do something about all this.

There are clear, scientifically proven steps you can take that will radically increase your chances of adding life to your years.

And it all starts with food.

According to Drs. Dean and Ayesha Sherzai, MD, co-directors of the Brain Health and Alzheimer's Prevention Program at Loma Linda University, leaders of the Healthy Brain Course, and previous speakers in the Food Revolution Summit, over 90% of Alzheimer's cases can be prevented with simple changes to diet and lifestyle.^[6]

90%!

A lot of attention has been paid – and money spent – on pharmaceutical drugs, supplements and exotic “superfoods,” but the real superfoods turn out to be remarkably accessible and affordable.

The foods that can make the biggest difference to the greatest number of people offer critical minerals, vitamins, antioxidants, flavonoids, polyphenols, and a host of other important phytonutrients that are good for your brain. They don't just fight Alzheimer's in the long term — they also support your memory and your mental function starting right away.

We put together this list of the top eight superfoods that have been found to provide brain-boosting benefits. Recent studies have shown some of these superfoods can be critical to the prevention, and in some cases reversal, of Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia. Read on to learn what they are and how you can add them to your diet.

Bon appétit!



1. Turmeric

Turmeric has been popular in India for more than 5,000 years, and is widely thought to be one of the primary reasons why both India's rural and urban populations have among the lowest rates of Alzheimer's disease in the world.^{[7][8]} The plant's orange color comes from a polyphenol, a micronutrient with antioxidant activity called curcumin, which, as it turns out, is something of a miracle compound.^[9]

Many studies have demonstrated curcumin's ability to prevent and even help reverse the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease, as well as other forms of dementia.^[10] Curcumin may also help aging blood vessels to relax and increase blood flow to the brain.^[11]

Enjoy Turmeric:

Turmeric is a flavorful addition to sauces, curries, stir-fries, and casseroles. But, you'll get better curcumin absorption if you combine turmeric with some black pepper and a bit of healthy fat.^[12] Enjoy it often in as many ways as you can.



2. Blueberries

The science illustrating a major link between blueberries and brain health is extensive. They're rich in antioxidant compounds known as anthocyanins, which have been shown to improve brain function.^[13]

A study published in *The Annals of Neurology* analyzed data from 16,000 women with an average age of 74, and found that the women with the highest levels of blueberry consumption delayed their cognitive aging by as much as 2½ years.^[14]

In a study with 9 elderly human participants, a team at the University of Cincinnati found that, compared to a similar group that was given a placebo, participants who were given blueberry juice scored higher on memory tests, had improved word list recall, and experienced lower depressive symptoms.^[15]

While blueberries might be the dementia-fighting champions of the berry universe, they're not the only beneficial berries.

In fact, berries of all types, including strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, and all the rest, bring you critical minerals, vitamins, antioxidants, flavonoids, polyphenols, and a host of other important phytonutrients that are good for your brain, your heart, and your overall health.

Enjoy Blueberries:

When they're in season, you can enjoy blueberries fresh. Out of season, you can easily find them frozen or dried.

You can also add blueberries to salads, breakfast cereals, or smoothies. Or simply eat them by the handful.



3. Greens

Greens — especially cruciferous vegetables such as broccoli, cabbage, kale, collards, and Brussels sprouts — are rich in nutrients that benefit brain health. In 2015, researchers at Rush University in Chicago evaluated the diet and mental function of 950 elderly people.

After adjusting for variables such as education, exercise and family history of dementia, the researchers found that those participants who ate leafy green vegetables, such as spinach and kale, once or twice a day experienced significantly less cognitive decline than those who didn't. In fact, **participants who ate greens halted their mental decline by an average of 11 years.** ^[16]

In another study published in *The Annals of Neurology*, researchers tracked the diet and lifestyle choices of 13,388 women over the course of 29 years. These women were given a series of tests measuring their cognitive function. Cognitive function in women with the highest consumption of cruciferous vegetables declined less than women who ate less of these vegetables. ^[17]

Enjoy Greens:

Green vegetables can be enjoyed raw as a salad, and can also be steamed, baked, dehydrated into chips, used as a wrap — even broiled.



4. Coffee

If you greet the morning with the aroma of freshly brewing coffee, you're enjoying a pleasure shared by billions of people worldwide.

Until recently, you wouldn't have expected to see coffee listed as a health food. For decades we've been advised to drink less of it. But it turns out that much of that advice is debatable.

In fact, there's a lot of evidence that coffee brings some significant benefits (though definitely not for everyone).

For one thing, coffee is a vasodilator, meaning it causes blood vessels to expand, which is good for your circulation. And it seems to have a particular effect on the blood vessels that feed your brain — making it an ally in the fight against all forms of dementia.

The Cardiovascular Risk Factors, Aging and Dementia study tracked more than 1,500 randomly selected Finnish people for 21 years, examining a broad range of diet and lifestyle choices and how they correlated with health outcomes. The study found that when people at midlife drank 3-5 cups of coffee per day (which sounds like a lot!), they experienced a 65% decreased risk of dementia as they grew older in comparison to non-coffee drinkers.^[18]

A 13-year study of more than 80,000 Japanese adults found those who

drank at least one cup of coffee per day had a 20% reduced risk of stroke.^[19] And in another study, 34,670 women in Sweden were tracked for more than 10 years — those who did not drink any coffee were at an elevated risk of stroke, while the women who drank at least one cup per day reduced their risk of stroke by 22–25%.^[20] Coffee consumption has also been shown to be good for your reaction time, memory, vigilance, and general cognitive function.^[21]

For all its benefits, coffee isn't for everybody. Caffeine makes some people jittery, anxious, and restless. And it can become addictive. Many consistent coffee drinkers find that if they miss more than a day or two, they get headaches and feel miserable.^[22]

If you tend to be lethargic, coffee can make life brighter. For many people, it feels like an “on switch” to start their day.

But if you're someone who tends to be hyper-stimulated and whose adrenals can run on overdrive, coffee might add more stress than joy to your life.

As in all things, listen to your body, and see what you discover.

Pregnant women take note

Fetuses are highly sensitive to caffeine so it may be best to avoid it during pregnancy.^[23] Also, coffee that comes packed with sugar, artificial flavorings, factory farmed milk, and high fructose corn syrup may not be a net benefit to anyone's health, especially unborn babies.^[24]



But what about decaf?

Unfortunately, few studies exist on the health effects of decaffeinated coffee. But there are studies telling us decaffeinated coffee has about 75% of the antioxidants of the caffeinated version.^[25]

Dr. Gary Wenk, a Professor of Psychology & Neuroscience & Molecular Virology, Immunology and Medical Genetics at the Ohio State University and Medical Center, is a leading authority on chronic brain inflammation and Alzheimer's disease. He writes, "With or without the caffeine, coffee is rich in biologically active substances. So drink up and enjoy a good night's sleep with the knowledge that your cup of decaf is effectively protecting your brain and body."

According to Dr. Wenk, whether caffeinated or not, coffee is rich in many phenols and other antioxidants including caffeic acid, chlorogenic acid, quinides, trigonelline, and ferulic acid, all

of which have potent health-boosting benefits. Ferulic acid may be the most beneficial compound of all — it can decrease blood glucose levels, reduce the level of cholesterol and triglycerides, and is a potent anti-inflammatory that Dr. Wenk's own laboratory has shown is capable of significantly reducing brain inflammation that is thought to underlie the risk of Parkinson's and Alzheimer's disease.^[26]

Enjoy Coffee Responsibly:

Because coffee accounts for almost half of the total exports from tropical countries, coffee production has a massive impact on the lives and livelihoods of hundreds of millions of families and farmers.^[27] Regrettably, many of them are living in poverty. Therefore, the kinds of coffee we choose have a profound impact on the kind of world we shape for future generations. Fair trade, shade grown, and organic coffee are the types to reach for if you want to help to shape a fairer, and healthier world.



5. Tea

The story of tea begins in China. According to legend, in 2737 BC, the Chinese Emperor Shen Nung, a renowned herbalist, was sitting beneath a tree while his servant boiled drinking water. Some leaves from the tree blew into the water, and emperor Shen Nung decided to try the infusion his servant had accidentally created. And thus the Emperor enjoyed the first teatime in the history of the world.

It would take another several thousand years before tea became the national drink of China — around the year 700 AD.

Today, next to water, tea is the most widely consumed beverage in the world. (Yes, even ahead of Coca-Cola®.) Yet, we're only now discovering how powerful tea really is.

There are four types of tea: white, green, oolong, and black. All of these can be derived from the same plant. Of the four types of tea, white and green are the least processed. They have the highest levels of antioxidants, and the lowest levels of caffeine.

Tea consumption has been linked to reduced rates of Alzheimer's Disease.^[28] Of course, unless it's been decaffeinated, tea has caffeine. As mentioned above with coffee, the health effects of caffeine are a controversial topic. But in moderation, a considerable body of evidence shows that tea may be good for increasing your memory.^[29] While all types of tea have potent brain-boosting powers, green and white tea have the highest levels of beneficial antioxidants.

Enjoy Tea:

If you're going to buy pre-bottled tea, it's best to check the label to be sure it's either unsweetened, or only lightly sweetened. And if you brew it yourself, try it plain, or with a squeeze of lemon and/or a dab of sweetener. Enjoy teatime!



6. Legumes

In 2004, researchers from Japan, Sweden, Greece, and Australia teamed up for a fascinating study.

They wanted to see if there was any one food group that was consistently linked with a longer lifespan in every nation and group. And they found one.

Legumes.

Whether it was the Swedes dining on brown beans and peas, the Japanese eating soy, or Mediterraneans enjoying chickpeas, lentils, and white beans, one thing was clear. The more legumes people ate, the longer they lived.

As the researchers looked at data across all the populations combined, legumes were the food that showed up with the most plausible, consistent, and statistically significant results.

Over the course of the study, every 20-gram (two tablespoons) increase in daily legume consumption was correlated with an 8% reduction in risk of death.^[30]

The legume family includes thousands of colorful varieties of beans, peas, lentils, soybeans, and even peanuts. They grow in pods, and like nuts and seeds, each legume has the potential to sprout and grow into a new plant.

Legumes contain folate, iron, magnesium and potassium, which can help with general body function and also with neuron firing.

They figure prominently in most Alzheimer's prevention diets. They also contain choline, a B-vitamin that boosts acetylcholine — a neurotransmitter critical for brain function).^[31]





Enjoy Legumes:

Add a serving of legumes a few times a week to your menu. Soak and then cook dry beans, or even just take them from a can — you'll be reaping some health-giving benefits. Worried about flatulence?

The compounds in legumes most likely to cause gas are the oligosaccharides that can't be broken down before they reach the colon.

Because the oligosaccharides arrive in the colon relatively undigested, they are fermented by bacteria, which can result in intestinal gas.

You can bring down levels of the offending oligosaccharides dramatically by soaking your legumes well, and rinsing them every twelve or so hours.

You can soak beans for 48 hours. For lentils and split peas, 8-12 hours will do.

Over the course of a couple days, legumes can begin to germinate, which changes their composition and increases digestibility. You're actually beginning the sprouting process.

Rinse your legumes one final time before putting them in a pressure cooker and covering them with plenty of fresh water — it should reach at least 2" (5 cm) above the legumes themselves.

Add a piece of kombu, about 4" (10 cm) long, to the pot (kombu, an edible seaweed, has a unique ability to neutralize any remaining gas-producing compounds in beans).

Cook your legumes until they're tender — enjoy!

7. Omega-3 Fatty Acids

There are three types of omega-3 fatty acids — ALA (alpha-linolenic acid), EPA (eicosapentaenoic acid), and DHA (docosahexaenoic acid).

All three are critical to human health. DHA, in particular, is a major structural fat in the human brain and eyes, representing about 97% of all omega-3 fats in the brain and 93% of all omega-3 fats in the retina.^[32] It's a major structural component of the cerebral cortex — the part of the brain responsible for memory, language, creativity, emotion, and attention.^[33]

Having adequate levels of DHA can protect you from age-related mental decline, and significantly reduce your risk of dementia and Alzheimer's. Seniors with higher levels of DHA are 47% less likely to develop dementia and 39% less likely to develop Alzheimer's compared with seniors who have low levels.^[34]

People whose diets contain daily omega-3s have also been shown to have a 26% lower risk of having brain lesions that cause dementia compared with those who do not.^[35]

These fatty acids help your brain to stay in top shape.

While ALA is found in some plant foods, EPA and DHA are found mainly in fish and certain algae. The human body can convert ALA to EPA and DHA, although the efficiency of conversion varies from person to person.^[36] Some people may do just fine if they eat plenty of ALA. Others seem to benefit from some direct form of DHA or EPA — whether from fish, a fish oil supplement, or an algae-based supplement.^[37]

The plant foods highest in ALA are flax seeds and chia seeds. Walnuts and hemp seeds are also sources. EPA and DHA are found in salmon, anchovies, herring, sardines, and some other fatty fish — as well as in some forms of algae.

If you choose to eat fish, you do need to look out for mercury and heavy metal contamination. Wild salmon, sardines, and herring are all fish that are high in omega-3s and relatively low in contamination.^[38] Watch out for farmed salmon, though, as it often has much higher levels of mercury and heavy metals.^[39] Some people also prefer to take molecularly distilled fish oil supplements.

Many people are also concerned about the ethics of eating fish — including the fact that the oceans are being devastated by overfishing, and the reality that a growing share of the global fish supply comes from cruel and unsustainable fish farms.^[40]



If you choose not to eat fish, whether for health, ethical or environmental reasons, it's almost certainly best for you to incorporate abundant ALA omega-3s into your diet (especially featuring ground chia and/or flax seeds on a regular basis), and most experts would agree that you should probably take an algal DHA supplement, too. For pregnant women, especially, some form of direct DHA consumption is very strongly recommended.^[41]

Enjoy Omega-3 Fatty Acids:

While flax oil is high in omega-3 fatty acids, the whole flax seed delivers not only ALA, but also highly nutritious lignans and fiber.^[42] But you do need to grind it up first or it will likely pass

straight through your digestive tract and come out whole on the other end.

You can get a dedicated coffee grinder to make your own fresh flax meal — or buy it ground, and keep it in the freezer because the oils are highly perishable. Chia seeds are delicious made into puddings, added to smoothies and juices, or sprinkled on a salad.

If you decide to take a supplement how much do you need? There's no official recommendation, but most experts suggest a minimum of 250-500 mg of combined EPA and DHA each day for healthy adults.^[43]



8. Red Grapes

Red grapes contain resveratrol, a polyphenol which reduces the levels of amyloid-beta peptides in patients with Alzheimer's disease. Studies have also shown grapes can enhance brain health and delay the onset of degenerative neural diseases. According to one study published in the *British Journal of Nutrition*, grape juice can even improve the brain function of older people who have already displayed mild cognitive impairment.^[44]

Enjoy Red Grapes:

Eat red grapes (especially muscadine grapes, which have the highest resveratrol levels found in nature). While alcohol's not great for anybody, studies indicate that consuming moderate amounts of red wine (5 ounces or less per day) can be a way to enjoy resveratrol. For this reason, if you're going to consume alcohol, red wine is probably your best option. But you can also get the same benefits, without the alcohol,

simply by drinking red grape juice. And eating red grapes is best of all, because it gives you the fiber and other nutrients from the whole grape!

And here's something you may not know about resveratrol. It turns out that organic agriculture could matter, too. This is because resveratrol is produced as a protectant against potential invaders like molds and fungi. When modern pesticides and fungicides are applied, less resveratrol is required to protect the plant — so less is produced. That's why resveratrol levels seem to be highest in organically grown red grapes.^[45]

To get the most out of this brain-protecting superfood, one study found eating the equivalent of 2 1/4 cups of grapes per day was the most beneficial.^[46]



Brain-Boosting Superfoods Checklist

Alzheimer's Disease & Dementia

✓ Turmeric



✓ Tea



✓ Omega-3 Fatty Acids



✓ Red Grapes



Improves Cognitive Function

✓ Coffee



✓ Blueberries



✓ Greens



✓ Legumes



✓ Red Grapes



Improves Memory

✓ Coffee



✓ Blueberries



✓ Tea



Protects from Mental Decline

✓ Omega-3 Fatty Acids



Reduces Risk of Stroke

✓ Coffee



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Endnotes

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