

BRAIN FOODS

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Keeping our brains healthy is an important part of healthy ageing and longevity. Studies have shown that diversity and flexibility can help us to build new neural pathways which keep us in good cognitive health. Learning an instrument or a new language later in life can keep the brain active and alert. Neuroplasticity and flexibility has also proved to be key in keeping us neurologically well. This means that being flexible in your thinking, allowing yourself to be silly and laughing a lot and not taking things too seriously has been scientifically proven to have a positive impact on our brain health.

Food can also impact on brain health. Having foods and beverages which are processed, or high in sugar, trans fats and aspartame have all shown to negatively impact on neurological wellbeing. Our brain is part of the nervous system and, as with all body systems, the nervous system requires nourishment from our diets to remain well.

It is never too late to give your brain a boost. Whether you are young and want to lay the best foundations, or older and deciding to nourish yourself better.

I am currently developing brain health menus for the Dementia Care facilities within our Nellsar Care Homes. Incorporating foods and ingredients that have been trialled in research with positive outcomes in nutrient-rich brain support.

Three foods that can help boost brain health are:

Oily Fish

Oily fish like sardines, mackerel, anchovies, salmon and herring all contain Omega 3 fats. These are essential for the health and maintenance of the myelin sheath that covers our nerve networks. 60% of our brain is fat. Having enough Omega 3 in the diet can help improve speaking ability, motor skills and memory.

Blueberries

These purple powerhouses are full of antioxidants which can reduce oxidative stress and inflammation which may contribute to brain ageing and neuro-degeneration. Some antioxidants have also been shown to improve communication between brain cells.

Turmeric

According to Healthline, turmeric or curcumin may help improve memory in people with Alzheimer's. It may also help clear the amyloid plaques that are a hallmark of this disease.

It can ease depression as it boosts serotonin and dopamine, which both improve mood. One study found curcumin improved depression symptoms just as much as an antidepressant over six weeks.

Curcumin boosts brain-derived neurotrophic factor, a type of growth hormone that helps brain cells grow. It may help delay age-related mental decline, but more research is needed.

Foods such as these are easy to add into our Home menus and are well liked. As our menu development progresses, I will be sharing more brain-healthy recipes and how we use them in our Homes.