



The Food Bank
of Western Massachusetts

From the Food Bank Kitchen

Eat Right to Stay Sharp

Many brain health experts are now focusing on food as a critical defense against mild memory loss, dementia, and cognitive decline. With over 5 million Americans already living with Alzheimer's disease, and one in five suffering from mild cognitive impairment (MCI), recent studies suggest that people on a Mediterranean-type diet — high in antioxidant-rich fruits and vegetables, whole grains, beans, and fatty fish and low in refined carbohydrates and saturated fats — tend to fend off cognitive decline longer and be less prone to developing full-blown Alzheimer's. Many studies suggest that “you are what you eat” when it comes to preserving and improving memory. There is also a major benefit from regular physical activity in maintaining cognitive abilities and memory. Try these tips:

Switch to slow-burning complex carbohydrates: Eating lots of refined carbs like white bread and rice, sugar-sweetened sodas and desserts stimulates insulin levels and raises blood sugar. High blood sugars over time can cause blood vessel damage and increased levels of beta-amyloid, a fibrous plaque that harms brain cells. Choose whole grain pasta, brown rice and whole wheat bread, and fresh fruit over high sugar desserts. Limit sugary juices, or mix them with water or seltzer.

Choose fats wisely: Minimize intake of saturated fats such as beef, processed meats, butter and whole fat milk and cheese. Try to avoid *trans* fats (labels listing “hydrogenated” oils are also a clue to the presence of these). Choose fatty fish like wild salmon or sardines rich in anti-inflammatory omega-3 fatty acids, which may help cut production of plaque in the brain and may slow the progression of dementia and cognitive decline. Eat walnuts, peanuts, pistachios, almonds, sunflower seeds, flax seed, olive oil, and avocado regularly to get healthy monounsaturated fats.

Eat “Superfoods” berries and leafy greens: Antioxidant-rich fruits like blueberries, strawberries and red, orange and green vegetables, especially leafy greens like spinach, kale, and broccoli help prevent the cell-damaging process that occurs naturally in the brain as we age. High potassium fruits and veggies help with high blood pressure; these include winter squash, spinach, sweet potatoes, bananas, and melon. Aim for 2 to 2½ cups of vegetables and 2 cups of fruit daily.

Add spices: India has lower rates of Alzheimer's, perhaps linked to the widespread use of spices like turmeric. **Curcumin**, found in the curry-flavoring spice turmeric, is a potent antioxidant and anti-inflammatory. Consider adding turmeric to your food regularly. Other anti-inflammatory spices recommended are ginger, oregano, thyme, rosemary, and cinnamon.

Exercise: Balance physical activity with a healthy diet to maintain a healthy weight. A “prescription” of 150 minutes or more per week of moderate activity like walking, joining an aerobics class, using a stationary bike, or swimming can help preserve memory and slow down cognitive decline.

Article Source: Natural Awakenings, March 2013 by Lisa Marshall

Recommended Websites: nutrition.gov/life-stages/seniors; nihseniorhealth.gov; webmd.com/healthy-aging

Quinoa Pilaf

4 servings

A nice alternative to rice!

Adapted from earthlychoice.com

Quinoa is a type of seed considered to be a “superfood”. High in protein and fiber, it helps maintain healthy blood sugar.

1 Tbsp vegetable oil (canola or olive suggested)
1 small onion, chopped
2 carrots, diced finely
1 cup raw quinoa
2 cups low-sodium vegetable or chicken broth

¾ cup chopped walnuts
¼ cup chopped fresh parsley (optional)

Nutrition Info: Calories 290, Fat 12 gm, Sat Fat 1 gm, Sodium 115 mg, Carbs 37 gm, Fiber 4 gm, Protein 8 gm

Directions: Heat oil in saucepan over medium-high heat. Cook onion in oil for 5 minutes or until translucent. Add carrot and cook for 3 minutes more. Stir in quinoa and vegetable broth. Bring to a boil. Reduce to simmer, cover and cook 15-20 minutes, or until quinoa is tender and fluffy. In a bowl toss quinoa together with walnuts and parsley. Serve hot or at room temperature.

Blueberry Salsa Salad

Source: [SparkPeople Recipes](#)

Serves 6

4 cups Romaine Lettuce (or any other leafy green)
1 ½ cup fresh blueberries
1 large apple
½ large red onion
4 Tbsp fresh cilantro
½ cup cider vinegar

1 Tbsp olive oil
1 Tbsp sugar

Nutrition Info: Calories 81, Total Fat 3 gm, Sodium 8 mg, Carbohydrate 16 gm, Fiber 3 gm, Protein 1 gm

Directions: Chop onion and apple into small cubes and dice cilantro. Toss in a large bowl with lettuce and blueberries. In a jar shake oil, vinegar and sugar until well blended, then toss over salad.

Mediterranean Bean Salad

Source: American Institute for Cancer Research [AICR.org](#)

Makes eight - 3/4 cup servings

Salad:

1 (15-oz) can garbanzo beans, rinsed and drained
1 (15-oz) can butter beans, rinsed and drained (cooked fresh beans may be substituted)
1 (15-oz) can dark red kidney beans, rinsed and drained
½ small red onion, chopped fine
1 celery stalk, chopped fine
2-4 garlic cloves, minced
½ to 1 cup fresh parsley, chopped fine
¼ cup basil, chopped fine (OR 1 Tbsp dried basil)
1 Tbsp fresh rosemary, chopped fine (OR 1 tsp dried rosemary)
2 tomatoes, diced

Dressing:

3 Tbsp extra virgin olive oil
1 Tbsp vinegar (either white wine or apple cider work well)
Juice of one lemon
½ Tbsp dried Italian seasoning
Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

Nutrition Info: Calories 190, Total Fat 7 gm, Sodium 228 mg, Carbohydrate 26 gm, Fiber 8 gm, Protein 9 gm

Directions: In large bowl combine beans. Mix in onion, celery, garlic, parsley, basil and rosemary, adding tomatoes last to keep them from breaking apart. In separate mixing bowl, whisk together dressing ingredients. Add dressing to beans and toss gently to coat. Chill for at least an hour to allow beans to absorb the flavor of the dressing. Re-toss gently and serve.

Peanut Butter Hummus

Made with chickpeas and [peanut butter](#) instead of tahini. Serves 6

1 (15 oz) can chickpeas (garbanzo beans), drained and rinsed
Juice squeezed from 1 lemon (about 3 tablespoons)
4 Tbsp smooth peanut butter
¼ teaspoon salt and pinch of pepper
1 clove garlic, minced or crushed with garlic press
2 Tbsp olive oil
2 Tbsp milk or water

Alternate recipe: Decrease peanut butter to 3 Tbsp, omit adding water or milk, and add 3 Tbsp plain fat-free Greek yogurt along with 1 teaspoon of ground cumin for a creamier texture and different flavor. Process until smooth. Add an extra tablespoon or 2 of yogurt or 1/2 to 1 tablespoon of extra olive oil and re-blend if mixture is too thick.

Alternate recipe source: [Nigella Lawson](#)

Nutrition Info per ¼ cup serving: Calories 180, Fat 5 gm, Saturated Fat 2 gm, Sodium 320 mg, Carbohydrate 16 gm, Fiber 4 gm, Protein 6 gm

Recipe source: [mideastfood.about.com](#)

Directions: In a blender or food processor, add all ingredients and process until smooth. Add more water, milk, or yogurt one tablespoon at a time if mixture is too thick. Taste and adjust lemon juice and salt as desired. Serve on pita bread, crackers, or dip for vegetables. It can also be used instead of mayo in a sandwich or to bind tuna or chicken salad.