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Health and Emotional Wellness Tidbits

Six Foods to Fuel Your Brain

When you feed your body, you fuel your brain. The foods you eat provide energy your brain cells need to communicate and function properly. “You want to make sure you nourish your body and mind regularly,” says Laura Jeffer, RD, LD, with Cleveland (Ohio) Clinic’s Department of Nutrition Therapy.

If you are eating like the Greeks, chances are you’re nourishing your mind in the right way. A study in the March issue of the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition suggests that following a Mediterranean style diet may reduce the rate of cognitive decline in old age. This diet focuses on the consumption of fruits, vegetables, legumes, olive oil and fish - all of which contain the nutrients your brain needs.

Here’s a look at some brain “super foods” that evidence suggests may be particularly nourishing for brain cells.

☺ **Fatty Fish** - about two-thirds of the brain is composed of fats which improve communication between brain cells. Among these fats are omega-3 fatty acids found prominently in fish such as salmon, herring, mackerel and tuna. If you are not a fish eater, you can try flaxseed or walnuts.

☺ **Avocados** - this brain booster contains oleic acid, an omega-9 acid, which is also important for brain health. Other good sources include almonds, olive oil and peanut oil.

☺ **Blueberries** - these berries, along with purple grapes and other berries that have purple, black or blue skins are great sources of antioxidant vitamins that help control oxygen free radicals that damage brain cells.

☺ **Broccoli** - broccoli and other cruciferous veggies (cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, kale, etc) are rich in antioxidants and other nutrients that help protect the brain from toxins.

☺ **Beans** - kidney beans and other legumes are rich in vitamin B and provide glucose to fuel the brain, while the fiber they contain slows the absorption of glucose, helping maintain stable energy levels, and support alertness and concentration.

☺ **Spinach** - it won’t necessarily make you as strong as Popeye, but spinach and other dark green leafy vegetables are good sources of iron, which facilitates production of neurotransmitters involved in learning and memory. Spinach also has antioxidant vitamins that help protect the brain.

Eating patterns such as the Mediterranean diet are good for your heart and thus are beneficial to your brain. There are a lot of components of the heart-healthy diet and the brain-healthy diet that overlap and utilizing these foods will be good for mind and body.

What About Those Diet Sodas?

Daily diet sodas may be linked to a higher incidence of stroke and heart attack. Sodas that contain artificial sweeteners may be bad for your blood vessels: researchers have found that people who drank diet soda every day were 48% more likely to have a stroke, heart attack or die from a vascular cause than people who drank no soda. There is no significant association found between drinking regular soda and the incidence of vascular events.

The study population included more than 2,500 participants. Since the study was observational, and researchers based their findings on study participants’ reports of how much and what type of soda they drank, but did not put them in groups or control variables, a cause and effect relationship cannot be inferred. However, it does suggest that a regular consumption of diet soda may have a negative effect on cardiovascular system.

By Fran Carnes
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Some Pets Can Make You Sick



An epidemiologist at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is also a veterinarian with a pet dog and cat and the mother of 2 young children. She provided information about how certain pets can make people sick and the steps you can take to help protect yourself and your families. The following is her report that was written to health care providers that I modified...

Pet ownership has many positive benefits. They comfort us and give us companionship. But as much as I love animals, I know that some -- especially those that are frequently linked to outbreaks of human illness -- are not the best animals to choose as pets. This is especially true for certain high-risk groups of people, including children younger than 5 years or immunocompromised patients such as patients with cancer, HIV etc.



Salmonella is most commonly transmitted through contaminated food. However, *Salmonella* is also one of many organisms that can be spread between people and their pets. Many *Salmonella* infections occur in people who have contact with certain types of animals - what I refer to as "risky" pets. These include reptiles, such as turtles, snakes, or lizards; amphibians, especially frogs; poultry, including chicks, chickens, and ducklings; and rodents, such as hamsters. Infected animals can appear happy, healthy, and clean and still be shedding *Salmonella* or other pathogens spread by non-humans that can lead to human illness. In fact, small turtles are so risky that their sale as pets has been banned since 1975.

It is important to know that directly handling these pets isn't the only way people can get sick; the environments where the animals live and roam, such as water from a frog or turtle tank, can be just as contaminated as the animal itself. In several recent outbreaks of human *Salmonella* infections linked to the water of frogs, turtles, and chicks, most of the infected patients or the parents of infected children said they didn't even know that these animals could cause *Salmonella* infections.



So what can you do? Healthcare providers can help prevent the spread of *Salmonella* or other infections transmitted by animals by asking high-risk patients and parents about contact with animals, both in the home and away from home, in public places such as fairs, schools, and petting zoos. They can share prevention recommendations, such as advising patients that some pets are not appropriate for children younger than five years old or other high-risk patients. They can remind all patients that they can take simple precautions to reduce their risk for an infection including using good hand washing practices. This includes washing hands thoroughly after handling animals or anything in the animal's environment.



Know the symptoms of *Salmonella* infection which most commonly cause acute gastroenteritis with fever, diarrhea, abdominal cramps, vomiting, and often bloody stools. The incubation period is 12-72 hours and the illness duration is typically from 4-7 days. Most *Salmonella* infections do not require treatment other than oral rehydration, although patients with severe diarrhea may require rehydration with intravenous fluids. Antimicrobial therapy is not usually indicated unless you suspect that the patient has invasive disease. Serious illnesses that can result from a *Salmonella* infection include sepsis, joint infections, and meningitis, and infections can result in death, especially in patients with underlying health conditions, such as HIV infection, other immunocompromising conditions, and sickle cell anemia.