



Feed Your Brain

Eating omega 3 rich food can keep our brain young. It is the food that has long been known to also keep our heart and blood vessels healthy. Kohila Govindaraju, nutritionist, unlocks some of the secrets of omega 3.

Nutrition choices not only have a major effect on the way we look and feel, but also directly affect the way we think. Our diet affects the brain chemicals that influence our mood and behaviour, thought process and even emotional reactions.

The best sources of omega 3 fatty acids are fatty fish like salmon, mackerel (not King), tuna, and sardines. Packed with omega 3 fatty acids, they help guard the heart and brain. The DHA from fish goes straight to our brain and is important for cognitive behaviour, memory, and brain performance.

What's So Special about Omega 3 Fats?

Omega 3 fatty acids are indispensable for normal brain function and vision! They lower cholesterol, triglycerides, blood pressure, fight wrinkles and improve learning, mood and memory. DHA (Docosahexaenoic acid), the hottest buzz word in nutritional medicine, is one of the omega 3 fatty acids, vital for the development and functional integrity of the brain. EPA (Eicosapentaenoic acid), another omega 3 fatty acid, together with DHA, helps reduce risk of heart disease.

Foods rich in omega 3 fatty acid along with folate, vitamin B12, are mood-lifting and improve learning. A fish meal with whole grains, nuts, berries, and vegetables does a good job in boosting the brain energy that elate kids with A levels. It is interesting to know that the lowest rates of dyslexia (learning difficulty), are found in Japan for their fish eating culture!

Along with regular exercise, omega 3 fatty foods will raise the levels of serotonin and dopamine, the brain chemicals that reduce the chances of getting depressed. Studies have revealed that high fish consumption reduces the risk of dementia and cognitive decline. To reap the benefits of omega 3 fatty acids, American Heart Association recommends consuming two fatty fish (200g) meals per week as an important part of our heart healthy diet.

Let's Go Fish!

Feeding our kids is not difficult. My friend makes delicious tuna patties, with onion, pepper and cilantro (coriander) leaves every week, which her kids really enjoy! The herbs like parsley, cilantro will help get rid of mercury and other toxins from the body. Omega 3 not only helps us get smarter but also keeps us beautiful by protecting our skin from damage by the sun!

Allergic to fish? How about a tablespoon of flax seeds instead ...or a handful of walnuts? These foods contain ALA (Alpha Linolenic Acid), a parent compound that is converted to DHA and EPA. In addition to ALA, flax seeds contain fibre, vitamin E, and calcium.

Walnuts are a real nutritional powerhouse, packed with iron, phosphorus, and zinc. A delicious cereal with walnut and bananas, or a flax seed whole grain toast with an egg for breakfast, will kickstart our brain in the morning.

Having said that, fish is still better than flaxseed or walnuts. That is because the conversion of ALA to DHA and EPA is not very efficient, which means, we may not get the full benefits. So, let's plan our diet with fish as a primary source of omega 3 fatty acids. Consumption of fish is like a savings plan for our brain.

Normal oxidation of fatty acids is a necessary part of cellular functioning, but excessive oxidation of omega 3 fatty acids may produce disease states. Vitamin C from fruits helps greatly to reduce this excessive fatty acid oxidation.

Taking steps to keep yourself healthy is a wise investment of time and energy. To protect our brain and heart, let us practise healthy eating by having wholegrains, lean protein, omega 3 rich fish & nuts, fruits, vegetables, and limit the fried, and sugar rich foods. Watch out for hydrogenated spreads that reduce the effect of the brain's most essential omega 3! Our brain is affected by what we put into our body as much as what we do with it.

