

# Brain Food

*for memory and depression*

Brain health begins with a healthy diet. Two approaches that help the heart – the Mediterranean and the DASH diets – are also beneficial for the brain, so doctors combined those diets into a simple plan for memory and mood.

It's called the M.I.N.D Diet, which stands for **M**editerranean-**D**ASH **I**ntervention for **N**eurodegenerative **D**elay. The Mediterranean part emphasizes healthy oils, fish, and nutritious whole grains, while the DASH improves blood pressure by lowering salt. Both limit unhealthy fats, sugars, and red meats.

The MIND diet draws from both of those and sprinkles in foods that protect the brain's memory center, such as berries, fish, and nuts. The results are striking. In a five-year study, the MIND diet lowered the risk of dementia by 35 percent for people who followed it moderately well and up to 53 percent for those who adhered to it rigorously.

The diet helps memory, but can it treat depression? That answer came in 2017, when researchers tested it over a three month period in people with depression. Remarkably, it worked as well as an antidepressant.

Unlike the Mediterranean and DASH diets, the MIND diet had benefits even when it wasn't followed rigidly. It wasn't designed for weight loss (that's part of why it's easy to follow), but it may cause weight loss as a side effect.

In 2016 *U.S. News* rated the MIND diet the third best diet overall for health (numbers 1 and 2 were the Mediterranean and DASH). Try this simple plan out, starting with the easiest steps. You're likely to see benefits with even the smallest changes. We've modified the MIND diet a little below to blend it in with the diet used to treat depression.



All fruits are encouraged in the MIND diet, but blueberries have the best-known memory effects.

## MIND Diet: A Summary

### 1. Foods to eat more of

- Green leafy vegetables (spinach, kale, lettuce, arugula): daily servings.
- Other vegetables: 1-5 servings a day (the depression diet called for 5). Tomatoes are encouraged.
- Nuts and seeds: Five servings a week. Best sources are walnuts, almonds; flax, chia and hemp seeds.
- Berries: Two or more servings a week. The depression diet recommends 3 servings of fruit daily, while the memory diet focused just on berries. Olives are permitted.
- Beans: At least three servings a week. Good options include chickpeas, lentils, baked beans, kidney beans, and edamame.
- Whole grains: 3-8 servings a day
- Fish: 1-2 servings a week, especially oily fish like salmon, tuna, sardines, caviar, mussels.
- Poultry (chicken, turkey): 2-3 serving/week. Best to remove the skin.
- Olive oil: Use it as your main cooking oil (about 3 tab/day). Extra virgin preferred.
- Wine: Possibly one small glass a day (about 1/3-2/3 metric cup). New research links even 1 drink/day to memory problems though so this item may be removed from the diet in future. Drink water with the wine and don't drink on an empty stomach. Avoid alcohol if taking sedatives or sleep medicines. People over 60 or who have past addictions or sleep problems may need to avoid wine.

## 2. Foods to eat less of

- Fried, fast food, and processed food: Max than one serving a week.
- Desserts, sodas, sweets: Less than five servings a week.
- Red meat: Less than four servings a week, favor lean red meats.
- Butter, margarine: Less than 1 tablesp daily.
- Cheese: Less than one serving a week (the depression diet allowed a 1-3 servings a day of hard cheese, feta, or ricotta).

### Further Ideas

All the ideas in this approach come from solid research on brain health. There are a few ingredients you could add on top of the MIND diet that may bring additional benefits:

- Turmeric. This spice helps memory and depression. Other spices with brain benefits include balsamic vinegar, basil, cinnamon, garlic, ginger, marjoram, mustard, oregano, rosemary, saffron, sage, and thyme.
- Tea. 3 cups a day reduces the risk of depression by 37%; 6 cups a day reduces it by 63%. Black and green teas have the best effects. Avoid caffeine after 2 pm.
- Blueberries. These have significant brain benefits. Juice works as well: ¼ cup per day of blueberry juice improves memory.
- Dark chocolate. 1-3 ounces of dark chocolate a day (at least 70% cocoa) has brain and heart benefits.
- Citrus fruits. New research shows these have similar benefits to berries, improving depression and cognitive functioning.
- Oils. While olive oil is preferred by the MIND diet, they also allow the following brain-friendly oils: Canola, avocado, coconut, flaxseed.
- You can substitute healthy spreads like almond butter, cashew butter, or sunflower seed butter for the nuts serving.
- Whole grains include: whole wheat, oats, quinoa, brown and wild rice, rye, amaranth, barley, buckwheat, millet, sorghum, and

triticale. Popcorn and oatmeal count. Look for products that are 100% whole grains, not simply “made with whole grains” which may mean it only has a few added.

- For green leafy vegetables, the darker the better! Spinach, arugula, swiss chard, chicory, collard greens, dandelion greens, kale, romaine lettuce, mustard greens.
- Plain (unsweetened) yogurt is encouraged in this diet, especially Greek yogurt or those rich in probiotics (kefir). Probiotics reduce anxiety and improve medical health.
- Milk: although not addressed in the MIND diet, the depression diet allowed 2-3 daily servings of dairy (milk, feta/ricotta or hard cheese, or yogurt).

### Cookbooks

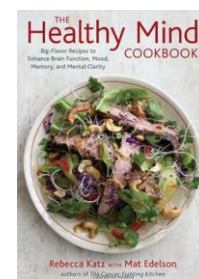
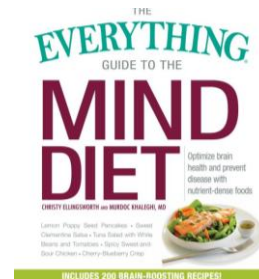
Christy Ellingsworth and Murdoc Khaleghi M.D. *The Everything Guide to the MIND Diet* (2016).

Maggie Moon, MS, RDN. *The MIND Diet* (2016).

Rebecca Katz and Mat Edelson. *The Healthy Mind Cookbook* (2015).

Leslie Korn. *The Good Mood Kitchen* (2017).

America’s Test Kitchen. *The Complete Mediterranean Cookbook* (2016).



### Serving Sizes

Check at: [www.eatforhealth.gov.au/food-essentials/how-much-do-we-need-each-day/serve-sizes](http://www.eatforhealth.gov.au/food-essentials/how-much-do-we-need-each-day/serve-sizes)

### Scientific References

Morris MC, et al. MIND diet slows cognitive decline with aging. *Alzheimers Dement*. 2015 Sep;11(9):1015-22.

Jacka FN, et al. A randomised controlled trial of dietary improvement for adults with major depression (the 'SMILES' trial). *BMC Med*. 2017 Jan 30.