

The Antidepressant Diet

A new antidepressant was discovered in 2017: food. We're not talking about the chemical rush of caffeine, sugar, and alcohol. This food works slowly, improving brain health by reducing inflammation and providing nutrients that strengthen and repair brain cells.

In two controlled studies, this diet reduced depression with an effect that compares well to that of antidepressants. Researchers developed it by taking the top diet for physical health, the Mediterranean diet, and sprinkling in some brain super-foods like dark green vegetables and berries.

Other studies have found that this antidepressant diet improves memory and lowers the risk of dementia by up to 50% (in a similar form called the MIND Diet).

No foods are outlawed, and there's no calorie counting, but this diet proved better at sustaining weight loss than calorie-restricting plans. The reason is that these foods work like diet pills, reducing inflammation in the gut and modulating metabolic hormones. Too much sugar and fat can cause those hormones to spike, which stresses the brain and furthers the vicious cycle of weight gain.

The exact recommendations for the diet are on the next page, but the point is not to stress about the numbers. Focus instead of eating more of the top foods, and less of the ones at the bottom. Following this diet half-way still yields benefits, and the more you stick with it the better it works.

The diet asks you to shift all of your butter and oil to extra virgin olive oil. You can use that for cooking, baking, and spreads. It also suggests replacing all of your breads and carbs with 100% whole grains.

Whole grains are important because they contain brain-healthy nutrients like fiber, protein, vitamins, antioxidants, and phytochemicals. The labeling is tricky on this one. Look for products labeled "100% whole

wheat" or "100% whole grains" or those that list a whole grain as the first ingredient (or the second after water). Products that advertise "made with whole grains" or "multigrains" or "wheat bread" probably won't do. Those labels mean they just sprinkled a few whole grains in with the white-bread.

Oatmeal and popcorn are whole grains. So

The diet encourages all fruits, but the best brain benefits are found in blueberries



are most sprouted breads like Ezekiel. You can even find 100% whole-grain snacks, such as pretzels, SunChips, Way Better chips, Mary's Gone Crackers, Ak-Mak Sesame Cracker, and some Kashi products. These are great substitutes for the white-flour alternatives, just don't go overboard with them (their salt content can be addictive).

The diet asks you to limit various sweets, including sodas and diet sodas (which mess with metabolism). Processed foods are restricted because the chemical additives they contain (the ones that are hard to pronounce) have negative effects on brain health. This includes most prepackaged, frozen, or prepared foods.

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. *The Healthy Mind Cookbook* (2015).

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

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

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Eat more...		One serving is
Vegetables	At least 6 servings/day. At least one of those servings should be a green leafy vegetable or tomato, and no more than one should be a potato (unless it's a sweet potato).	Leafy vegetables: ½ cup cooked or 1 cup raw. Other vegetables: ½ cup raw or cooked. Aim for dark greens (spinach, arugula, collards) and vegetables with variety of colors.
Fruit	At least 3 servings/day. Include berries in at least one of those servings.	½ cup fresh, frozen, canned, cooked fruit; 1 ½ tablespoons dried fruit. Juice counts, but should be limited to ½ cup per day because of the sugar content.
Nuts, seeds, olives	At least 1 serving/day.	1 ounce per day of nuts, seeds (about ¼ cup), and/or 3 ounces of olives (about ½ cup). For the nuts, you can use spreads like almond or cashew butter.
Whole grains	At least 5-8 servings/day (eat closer to 8 if you are more physically active).	1 slice of bread; ½ cup cooked grains like rice or pasta; ¼ cup oats or muesli; 2/3 cup breakfast cereal; 2-3 crispbread crackers.
Fish	At least 2 servings/week. At least one of those should be salmon.	3 ounces cooked
Beans	At least 4 servings/week. Hummus and tofu count	½ cup beans, or 1/3 cup hummus or tofu
Olive oil	At least 3 tablespoons/day.	Extra virgin olive oil is preferred.
Eat in moderation...		One serving is
Red meat	Maximum 3-4 servings/week	3-4 ounces cooked. Use lean red meats.
Poultry	Maximum 2-3 servings/week	3 ounces cooked (=one breast or a leg + thigh).
Dairy	Maximum 3 servings/day of milk, cheese, yogurt	2-3 servings per day. Unsweetened greek yogurt is preferred and, if eating cheese, hard cheese, feta, and ricotta are preferred.
Eggs	Maximum 6 eggs/week	
Eat less...		
Extras	Maximum of 3 x 120 ounce servings/week of sweets, sugary drinks, white bread, butter, margarine, deli meats (bacon, sausage, salami, pancetta); packaged condiments like jelly, ketchup, and mayonnaise; and fried, fast, and processed foods.	
Alcohol	Maximum 1.5 standard drinks/day. Red wine is preferred. 1.5 standard drinks = 6.8 ounces wine, 2 bottles beer (1 bottle if it's high gravity), 2 ounces spirits, 5 ounces sherry or port	
Extra credit...		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vinegar and spices are good for the brain, particularly balsamic vinegar, basil, tumeric, cinnamon, garlic, ginger, marjoram, mustard, oregano, rosemary, saffron, sage, and thyme. • Tea. 3-6 cups of tea a day lowers the risk of depression, particularly black, green, and white teas. Coffee is helpful too, though it's antidepressant effects max out at 1 mug of coffee a day (and it can worsen depression at levels beyond that). Avoid caffeine after 2 pm. • Dark chocolate. 1-3 ounces of dark chocolate a day (at least 70% cocoa) has brain and heart benefits. 		