

Protecting Your Brain: Food, Lifestyle, and the Promise of Prevention

You know that moment when you open the pantry and can't remember what you came for? Most of us shrug off those lapses, but they remind us how precious brain health really is. The question is: Can what we eat and how we live make a real difference?

The short answer is yes, and growing research continues to confirm it.

The Plant-Forward Advantage

A plant-forward way of eating, rich in colorful vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans, nuts, and seeds, provides the brain with a steady supply of antioxidants, healthy fats, and vitamins that protect against inflammation and oxidative stress. These plant foods help lower blood pressure, improve cholesterol, stabilize blood sugar, and enhance blood flow to the brain, all factors tied to lower risk for Alzheimer's and other dementias. Diets such as the MIND, DASH, and Mediterranean patterns, which emphasize plants over animal products, consistently show slower rates of cognitive decline and better memory performance over time.

While new Alzheimer's drugs such as monoclonal antibodies have offered a glimmer of hope, they come with steep costs, complex administration, and potential side effects. Meanwhile, the foods on your plate and the habits in your daily routine are proving to be powerful, safer tools for prevention and long-term brain support.



The B-Vitamin Advantage

A new 15-year Japanese study published in the European Journal of Clinical Nutrition found that people who consumed the most riboflavin (vitamin B₂) had up to a 49% lower risk of disabling dementia compared with those who ate the least. Other B vitamins, such as folate and B6, also played protective roles.

Top Riboflavin-Rich Plant Foods

- Almonds – one of the richest plant-based sources
- Mushrooms – crimini, portobello, and oyster
- Spinach, kale, broccoli, lentils, and kidney beans – modest but steady contributors

These nutrients help maintain mitochondrial energy production and reduce oxidative stress in brain cells – two processes directly linked to cognitive decline.

Lithium: A Trace Mineral With Big Potential

Harvard researchers recently highlighted a surprising link between lithium depletion and Alzheimer's pathology in animal studies. Low-dose lithium, naturally found in certain grains (oats, barley, wheat), legumes (lentils), vegetables (tomatoes, leafy greens, cabbage), and nuts (walnuts, cashews), may help protect neurons and regulate inflammation. While pharmaceutical lithium carries risks, trace amounts from food and mineral water appear safe and may gently support brain resilience.

The Lifestyle Edge

Add regular exercise, restorative sleep, stress management, and social engagement, and you've built a fortress around your brain. This holistic lifestyle approach isn't just complementary; it's potentially preventive.

So as your doctor reaches for the prescription pad, ask for an intervention that includes a holistic approach to managing your problem. Maybe you won't need the drug for long, or at all.

Food. Movement. Connection. Purpose.

These are the true long-term therapies for a thriving brain.

James A. Thompson, MD
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**NOVEMBER IS
ALZHEIMER'S
AWARENESS
MONTH**