

The MIND Diet

Everyday Food Choices for Brain Health

What is the MIND diet?

MIND stands for **Mediterranean-DASH Intervention for Neurodegenerative Delay**. Developed by Dr. Martha Clare Morris and colleagues at Rush University, it blends the Mediterranean diet with the DASH eating plan, which was designed to help lower blood pressure. It emphasizes vegetables, berries, beans, whole grains, nuts, olive oil, and fish, with special attention to leafy greens and berries. Researchers created it to study whether these food choices could help preserve memory and thinking as we age.¹

What should I eat?

Every day

- **Leafy green vegetables:** Aim for one serving daily. Try spinach, kale, collard greens, romaine lettuce, or mixed greens. A serving is about 1 cup raw or ½ cup cooked.
- **Other vegetables:** Eat at least one additional serving. Choose a variety, such as broccoli, carrots, peppers, tomatoes, or squash.
- **Whole grains:** Aim for three servings daily. One serving could be a slice of whole-grain bread or ½ cup of cooked oatmeal, brown rice, or whole-grain pasta.
- **Olive oil:** Use it as your main oil for cooking and salad dressings, replacing butter rather than simply adding more fat to your meals.²

Throughout the week

- **Berries:** Aim for ½ cup at least twice a week; more often is a great goal. Blueberries, strawberries, raspberries, and blackberries are all good options.
- **Nuts:** Have a small handful (about 1 ounce) at least five days a week. Choose unsalted varieties.
- **Beans and lentils:** Include at least three servings weekly. A serving is about ½ cup cooked. Try black beans, chickpeas, lentils, or kidney beans.
- **Fish and poultry:** Eat nonfried fish at least once weekly and skinless chicken or turkey at least twice weekly. A portion is about 3–5 ounces. Bake, grill, or roast rather than deep-fry.²

These are goals to work toward, not a pass-or-fail test.

What should I limit?

You don't need to eat these foods at all. These are just upper limits.¹

- **Red and processed meats:** No more than three servings weekly. This includes beef, pork, bacon, sausage, and hot dogs.
- **Fried and fast foods:** No more than once weekly.
- **Sweets and pastries:** Fewer than five servings weekly.
- **Butter and cheese:** Use butter sparingly, and keep full-fat cheese portions small and occasional.

Choose water or unsweetened drinks instead of soda, sweet tea, and other sugary beverages.⁴

What about wine?

Some early descriptions of the MIND diet included wine. You do not need alcohol to follow this eating plan, and you should not start drinking for brain health. The major MIND diet trial left out the wine recommendation for safety reasons.²

A simple day of meals

Breakfast	Oatmeal topped with blueberries and walnuts
Lunch	Spinach salad with chickpeas, tomatoes, and olive oil–lemon dressing, plus whole-grain toast
Dinner	Baked salmon, brown rice, and roasted broccoli
Snack	Fresh fruit or plain, unsweetened yogurt

Make it easier

Start with one or two changes: add greens to lunch, replace a pastry with berries, or make a bean-based dinner. Frozen vegetables and unsweetened frozen berries count. Low-sodium canned beans are another convenient option. You do not need specialty products or expensive ingredients.⁵

What does the research show?

Studies that follow people over time have linked closer adherence to the MIND diet with a lower risk of dementia, but these studies cannot prove that the diet caused the benefit.¹ A large three-year clinical trial did not find a significant advantage for memory and thinking compared with a comparison diet. Both groups received counseling and modest calorie reduction, and both groups lost weight and improved on thinking tests.³ The MIND diet is a reasonable, healthy way to eat, not a proven way to prevent or reverse Alzheimer’s disease.

Food is one part of brain health. Regular physical activity, good sleep, social connection, and managing blood pressure and other health conditions matter, too.⁶

This handout provides general education. Your clinician or registered dietitian can help adjust the plan for your medical needs, food allergies, and weight goals.

Sources

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