

WELLNESS

To Keep Your Brain Young, Follow the MIND Diet

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Brain health is trending—even in the travel industry. To wit: The resort Kamalaya in Koh Samui recently launched a Brain Enhancement Program aimed at optimizing neurological function and preventing cognitive decline; Lanserhof Tegernsee in the Bavarian Alps recently launched a Brain Health Program that combines neurofeedback therapy with a holistic approach.

Combining brain wellness with a wellness vacation makes sense—after all, keeping the brain in top shape not only reduces the risk of neurodegenerative diseases, but helps keep the entire body healthy, too. Plus, rates of Alzheimer's and dementia have been steadily increasing: One study predicts that the number of people with

dementia worldwide will increase from 57 million in 2019 to 152 million by 2050.

If that kind of freaks you out, keep this in mind: The right diet can have a positive impact on aging—and that includes the aging brain. One easy and affordable diet that's been shown to keep the brain functioning at its best for as long as possible is the MIND diet, an eating regimen entirely focused on brain health. According to recent studies, including one published in Neurology in 2024, the MIND diet helps prevent cognitive decline, keep the brain young, and the memory active. Read on to find out what it is—and how to follow it.

What is the MIND diet?

The MIND diet is an amalgamation of two diets recognized as among the healthiest on the planet:

The Mediterranean diet

The DASH (Dietary Approach to Stop Hypertension) diet, aimed at combating high blood pressure

This dietary approach was first identified in 2015 by Dr.

Martha Clare Morris and her colleagues at Rush

University Medical Center, and encourages the

consumption of natural, unprocessed foods that are rich in brain-protecting nutrients. In particular, it focuses on plant-based foods, which have been shown to reduce inflammation and help the body maintain a healthy weight. The diet recommends limiting foods of animal origin, which are rich in saturated fats and associated with inflammation and brain decline.

The benefits of the MIND diet

Protects against cognitive decline, keeping the brain young. Prevents degenerative diseases such as dementia and Alzheimer's. Helps maintain a resilient memory.

According to some recent studies, it may protect against cardiovascular disease, may protect against high blood pressure, may help prevent diabetes, fights systemic

inflammation, a risk factor for cognitive decline and helps with weight management.

Who should follow the MIND diet?

Because the diet is a blend of two well-studied and respected diets, it's considered safe for almost every. That said, it is always a good idea to consult a doctor or nutritionist before embarking on any new wellness plan.

What foods can you eat on the MIND diet?

The MIND diet is easy to put into practice and sustainable over a long period of time. It identifies nine categories of “mind healthy” foods that are beneficial for the brain and recommends that they're included in a weekly menu. It also discourages the consumption of six other categories of foods that are linked to brain deterioration.

The MIND diet primarily prioritizes vegetables and fruits of all colors and varieties because they are rich in fiber, high in nutrients, and offer anti-inflammatory properties. Here's what else is on the list:

- Green leafy vegetables such as spinach, chard, arugula, lettuce, kale, and collard greens (six servings minimum per week)
- Other vegetables such as broccoli, cauliflower, carrots, red peppers, and radishes
- Berries such as blueberries, blackberries, strawberries and raspberries—these are preferred to other fruits because of their high content of anthocyanin antioxidants which are beneficial for brain health (one serving daily)
- Nuts such as walnuts, almonds, hazelnuts, cashews, Brazil nuts (two to three times a week)
- Olive oil. Rich in vitamin E, it is preferred over other oils—even for cooking
- Whole grains such as brown rice, quinoa, spelt, and oats, as well as whole grain pasta and bread (three servings per day)

- Legumes such as chickpeas, beans, lentils, soybeans, and mung beans (three servings per week)
- Lean proteins such as chicken, turkey, and tofu
- Fish rich in anti-inflammatory omega-3s such as salmon, mackerel, sardines, tuna, and trout (once a week)
- Fermented foods such as yogurt and kefir

What not to eat on the MIND diet

The MIND diet recommends limiting or avoiding foods that cause inflammation. Wine should also be limited to no more than one glass per day. Among the other foods to drastically limit or entirely avoid:

Red meat

Butter and margarine

Cheeses

Fried foods

Sweets

Processed foods and fast food

A sample one-day menu for the MIND diet

Sounds pretty straightforward, right? Here's a look at what a day following the MIND diet could look like in practice:

Breakfast options

- Greek yogurt with berries, almonds, and chopped walnuts
- Oatmeal with strawberries and cashew or almond butter

Lunch options

- Mixed green salad with grilled chicken breast served with olive oil, lemon, or apple cider vinegar and whole grain crackers

- Steamed salmon with pumpkin and sunflower seeds on a bed of arugula or spinach salad, drizzled with olive oil and mustard dressing

Dinner options

- Brown rice or spelt with vegetables and baked tofu
- Quinoa bowl with chickpeas, broccoli, spinach, and avocado, dressed with olive oil and herbs such as basil, oregano, and parsley