

# The Naturally Supporting Brain Health

by Melissa Cohen

Nutritional Therapist BSc (Hons), mBANT, mlFM, NLP Practitioner



Without optimal brain health, our memory, cognition, emotion, sleep, and balance can be challenged. Many of my clients have symptoms of “foggy head”, low mood, low memory and low concentration and these symptoms have been shown to improve

through nutrition.

For any of you reading this with thyroid disorders, you may be thinking, “Is there a connection between brain health and thyroid?” As most of you will know, the thyroid regulates metabolism in every organ of the body, including the brain. Hypothyroidism in adults can show symptoms of mental sluggishness known as “foggy head”. I know of many cases where patients are misdiagnosed as depressed and given anti-depressants only to receive the correct diagnosis of hypothyroidism later. Conversely, patients with hyperthyroidism may display symptoms of anxiety, nervousness, and impaired sleep. It is important to regularly test thyroid levels whether you have been diagnosed or have thyroid imbalance in the family.

The brain contains billions of neurons that transmit chemical signals to regulate blood pressure, mood, water balance and physical movement. These neurons fire at about 200 times per second to about a thousand other neurons, a little like a chemical cascade effect. For every thought, feeling and action, numerous neurons are firing to enable us to function. Not surprisingly, the brain is the most energy demanding organ in the body, which thrives on glucose and oxygen to perform.

In addition to glucose and oxygen, the brain requires fat as 70% of the brain is made up of fat. That is why eating Essential Fatty Acids (EFAs) found in oily fish, nuts, seeds, and vegetables are important - our bodies cannot produce these and therefore relies on consumption.

My previous articles all talk about how important balance is and the brain is no exception to this rule. Too much glucose can lead to advance aging of cells and signs of this are memory and cognition decline.

Therefore, slow releasing carbohydrates in the form of oats, wholemeal rice, quinoa, pulses, and lentils are more protective and it could be argued that refined sugars are damaging to the brain. Research suggests

that a diet high in sugar can reduce neurons and impact memory and cognition.

Sadly, we all know people who have suffered from dementia and it is a heartbreaking and cruel disease to witness. The World Health Organisation (WHO) describes dementia as a syndrome in which there is a deterioration in memory, thinking, behaviour and the ability to perform everyday activities.

This mainly impacts older people with currently 50 million people globally living with dementia and nearly 10 million cases every year. There is evidence, though, that there are increasingly more people facing neurological challenges at middle age. This could be due to environmental factors including modern technology such as mobile phones, poor diet, life stress and genetics. With the average life span in the UK being 81 years old, it is important to enjoy old age optimally both physically and mentally.

A study in 2008 examined specific foods which increased cognition outlined in the table below:

Nutrient	Food Sources
Omega 3 Fatty Acids	Salmon, herring, tuna, mackerel, flaxseeds, krill, chia seeds, mixed seeds, almonds, walnuts, hazelnuts
Curcumin	Turmeric powder (you can buy turmeric root or curcumin as a supplement)
Flavanoids	Cacao, green tea, citrus and berries, red wine
B vitamin supplementation	B6, B12, folate (B9)
Vitamin D	Liver, oily fish (see omega 3) mushrooms (though I suggest supplementing with D3 if not living in a warm climate)
Vitamin E	Avocados, nuts, olives, extra virgin olive oil
Choline	Egg yolks, beef, chicken, turkey

Did you know the brain contains the highest amount of cholesterol in the body? A study in 2019 suggested that having higher cholesterol in later life increases cognition. Unsaturated fats increase the body's good cholesterol, and these are found in fish and vegetable fats as stated previously. This is different to increased cholesterol due to saturated fats (animal fats)

and excess sugar, stress and alcohol which has shown to be detrimental to brain function.

Oxygen, as outlined earlier, is also essential for the brain and for metabolism. The brain uses an abundance of oxygen due to a high turnover of activity. This makes the brain more susceptible to oxidative stress. Please have a read of my previous article entitled, "Oxidative Stress", which explains this in more detail. In my opinion, this is the main cause of brain dysfunction. Oxidative stress is more apparent through the ageing process. A diet rich in antioxidants, can counteract this, along with lowered stress and a low pollutant environment.

List of foods high in antioxidants:

- Acai berry
- Goji berry
- Cacao Powder
- Prunes
- Raisins
- Berries
- Plums
- Oranges
- Grapes
- Kiwi
- Cantaloupe Melon

Most of the dietary research leads to recommending the "Mediterranean Diet" in boosting brain health as it is rich in vegetables, fruits, nuts, seeds, whole grains, and oily fish. A study of 17,000 people found that those who followed a "Mediterranean diet" reduced their risk of thinking and memory decline by approximately 20%.

The next time you are food shopping, make sure you have an array of dark green leafy vegetables, extra virgin olive oil, nuts and seeds, wild salmon and an occasional glass of red wine.



## Nutrient Dense Recipes to Support Brain Health

### Acai Berry Bowl – Serves 2

#### Ingredients

2 tbsps. oats  
3 tbsps. crushed almonds  
1 tsp coconut oil  
1 tsp raw honey or organic maple syrup  
1 large banana  
1.5 cups of frozen berries  
1 cup of baby spinach  
2/3 cup of almond milk  
1 heaped tbsp chia seeds  
1 heaped tbsp grounded flax seeds  
1 heaped tbsp Acai Powder  
1 tsp cinnamon  
1 cup of strawberries  
1 cup blueberries  
1 kiwi  
2 tsps. hemp seeds

#### Method

Toast oats and crushed almonds in a pan on a medium heat, adding coconut oil and honey for 2 minutes

maximum

Place banana, frozen berries, spinach, almond milk, seeds, acai powder and cinnamon into a blender, and blend well.

Divide into bowls and top with strawberries, blueberries, kiwi, hemp seeds and granola.

### Cacao Smoothie – Serves 1

#### Ingredients:

1-2 tsps. raw cacao  
½ avocado  
¾ glass of plant-based milk  
2 ice cubes  
Handful of berries  
1 tbsp pumpkin seeds  
1 tsp of organic maple syrup

#### Method:

Blend and serve

If you would like further nutritional advice or testing you can contact me on [melissa@melissa-cohen.com](mailto:melissa@melissa-cohen.com) to arrange an appointment. Additionally, if you would like to hear more about how I work drop me an email to arrange a complimentary 10-minute chat.

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