Brain Food: New Study Shows Healthy Diet Can Protect Against Memory Loss

By Naomi Imatome-Yun
May 07 2015

It might seem like common sense to most of us, but a new report confirms that our eating habits affect the health of our brains.

This new study, published online in *Neurology*, found that eating healthfully is the best way to preserve memory and mental sharpness as you age. The study followed almost 28,000 adults aged 55 and older from 40 different countries. Researchers rated participants' diets over five years, giving higher points for fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, and lower points for red meat and processed foods.

The Study Results Were Striking

The healthiest eaters were 24% less likely to have cognitive decline (memory loss, reasoning ability); those with the worst diets were most likely to have cognitive decline.

The "healthy eating" scale used by researchers had fruits and vegetables at the healthiest end of the scale and red meat and deep-fried foods at the unhealthiest end.

There Was No Magic Ingredient

The researchers from McMaster University determined that there wasn't one magic food or ingredient, but that it was eating a healthier diet overall. Study author, Professor Andrew Smyth, told Forbes:

"The consumption of 'healthy' choices may be beneficial, but the effect may be lost/reduced with the consumption of 'unhealthy' choices. For example, the beneficial effect of fruit may be lost if prepared with high amounts of fats or sugars. Our data suggest that an overall healthy diet is more important than the consumption of any one particular food."

What We Know About the Link Between Diet and Memory

This study adds to the growing body of research that shows that what we eat affects how well our brains age. We asked medical experts in the field to weigh in on the new findings.

"Choosing fruits and vegetables over meats, dairy products, and eggs could cut the risk of serious memory problems," says Physicians Committee president Neal Barnard, MD. "Evidence has shown that what is good for the heart is good for the brain." Dr. Barnard is a clinical researcher and author of *Power Foods for the Brain*.

Matthew Lederman, MD, medical advisor to Forks Over Knives, commented, "In general, any dietary change that increases your consumption of whole plant foods such as fruits, vegetables, and whole grains can positively impact your brain health."

The study was published online before print in *Neurology*.

Sources:

http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/news/fullstory_152397.html

http://www.webmd.com/diet/20150506/healthy-eating-may-shield-the-aging-brain

http://www.medicaldaily.com/eating-healthy-lowers-risk-declining-memorythinking-skills-24-332328

FORKS OVER KNIVES