

# How bit is that the supply of the

Nutrition



How to eat for optimum cognitive performance  
In order to work fast, your brain needs a steady supply of ready-to-use fuel.

Why? Because the brain's job is to think, not to process food. And also, the brain does not have any ' food storage capacity.' The fuel in this case is glucose. In practice, the brain utilizes about 120g of glucose, or 420kcal (1760kj) per day, irrespective of how much thinking or learning we are doing (6). The tricky bit is that the supply of the fuel needs to be steady. Why? Because both a drop and a high in blood glucose can have a negative effect on the ability to concentrate.

A drop in glucose levels in your blood, even if you are overall healthy, is likely to make you feel tired, nervous, restless, and unable to concentrate and think clearly. On the other hand, a sudden spike in blood glucose is not good for your brain either. A snack high in carbs or a sweet drink can give you an initial boost in energy, but this peak in glucose level in your blood will be quickly brought down by insulin (assuming you don't have any metabolic/diabetic problems), resulting in another low. You're likely to go searching for another ' sugar fix,' resulting in another sugar high and subsequent low.

This yo-yo effect although it may initially help you to focus, is not good for longer-term work and your overall health. What you eat and how you eat is important to effective focus and other mental capabilities. Read on to learn more about focus-enhancing nutrition.

Here are some suggestions for ' focus-boosting' nutrition<sup>1</sup>. Eat ' Brain friendly food' As I said above, brain food is simple and plain glucose. It's

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practically the only nutrient our brain is able to use. Without any ‘ food storage capacity,’ the brain needs a continuous supply of glucose. But glucose is a simple sugar and disappears quickly from our bloodstream. So we need to eat something that would release glucose in a continuous way without harmful highs and lows.

How can you ensure your brain is ‘ fed’ appropriately? By eating so called ‘ brain friendly’ food: Complex carbohydrates (complex sugars) are great for providing slow-release glucose. Foods in this group include: grains and whole-grain breads and pastry, starchy vegetables such as potatoes, corn, and pulses (beans, peas, lentils). Proteins are also important, although not a direct source of brain food. Fats are a rich source of energy that is slowly released, so it acts as storage in times of starvation.

Omega-3 fatty acids, present in some fish (mackerel, herring, tuna, salmon) and nuts, may help improve concentration and academic ability.

Antioxidants—nutrients of various kinds, whose main role is to get rid of free radicals, which damage brain cells. Foods rich in antioxidants are berries, cherries, citrus and other fruits, and vegetables, such as spinach, broccoli, carrots, some herbs and spices (onion, garlic, cinnamon, basil), and some kinds of tea (green and white). 2. Avoid “ Brain unfriendly” food: Simple sugars (simple carbohydrates) such as sweets, biscuits, fruit juice, and jams are like an injection of fuel that causes a temporary boost in energy, but is used up or stored away (by insulin) quickly and causes a low—not good! Junk food is not only calorie-rich and nutrition poor, but also rich in saturated trans fats, which are considered to have adverse effect on cognition.

3. Be smart about how you eatHow to eat is as important as what to eat when it comes to brain-friendly nutrition. As we already know, the key to a steady intellectual 'workout' is a steady supply of glucose. Eating 3 meals a day, even if well balanced, still creates three spikes of 'glucose highs' in our system, leading to lows a couple of hours after the meal.

A morning and afternoon tea, or a small snack, should keep the blood glucose levels steady. It's best to eat something with complex carbs and some protein to keep a steady supply of glucose for the brain. A grain & nuts bar, low-fat yoghurt with muesli, or a slice of wholemeal bread with cheese should keep us going until the next meal.