

# foods that nourish the noggin? eat 'em up

by stephanie paterik

Food can be a wonder drug of sorts—reducing our risk for disease, improving our complexion, easing aging's effects on our eyes and, yes, helping to maintain our brains.

While no one meal will make you smarter, experts say some foods and vitamins can help maintain the gray matter you already have by staving off neurodegenerative diseases, like Alzheimer's, that attack the brain.

"Brain food is not one of these sexy things that will increase your IQ," says Roger Clemens, Dr.P.H., spokesman for the American Society for Nutrition and author of the Food, Medicine & Health column for *Food Technology*. "Emerging science suggests certain foods can maintain and preserve brain function in the long term."

You can be good to your noggin by consuming a combination of the following, according to the latest research.

## 1 DHA (DOCOSA- HEXAENOIC ACID)

is a fatty acid derived from certain fish and also can be found in flaxseed and eggs. The American Heart Association has advocated it for years as a way to reduce the risk of heart disease. Now it's believed to help ward off neurodegenerative diseases, too.

## 2 BETA GLUCAN

Recent studies suggest beta glucan, found in natural fibers and yeast extracts, may reduce the risk of developing both tumors and Alzheimer's. "It's preliminary, but it's exciting to explore," Clemens says of the research.



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## 3 FOLIC ACID

More than a decade ago, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration permitted enriched grains and pasta products to be fortified with folic acid to reduce the risk of birth defects of the brain or spine, known as neural tube defects. Folic acid, found in such foods as lentils, asparagus and spinach, also is thought to help fight cardiovascular disease and Alzheimer's.

## 4 GREEN TEAS

Neurological journals are publishing studies that suggest drinking green tea in higher doses reduces brain inflammation and progressive neurodegenerative disorders. It's a critical area of intense research now, Clemens says.

## stay ahead of the curve

For ideas on more ways to prevent or delay Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia, please visit the Alzheimer's Association online at [alz.org](http://alz.org).

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## 5 POMEGRANATE JUICE

Some properties found in pomegranates could fight one of the leading causes of Alzheimer's, and also might lessen aggression. "A combination of these compounds may play a role in brain health," Clemens says.



## brain drain

It may sound simple, but the single worst thing you can do to your brain is to consume distilled spirits, says Roger Clemens, Dr.P.H., spokesman for the American Society for Nutrition.

Alcohol is a neurotoxin, which means it literally pickles the brain. Drinks such as vodka and rum affect carbohydrates, which your brain needs to thrive, and they slow down metabolism. Distilled spirits also drain the body of vitamin B and affect liver function, Clemens says.