

Health Insights

June 2025

Food for Thought

A new research study showed that a healthy, balanced diet was linked to superior brain health, cognitive function, and mental wellbeing. The study, involving researchers at the University of Warwick, sheds light on how our food preferences not only influence physical health but also significantly impact brain health.

The dietary choices of a large sample from the UK Biobank were analyzed along with a range of physical evaluations, including cognitive function, blood metabolic biomarkers, brain imaging, and genetics—unveiling new insights into the relationship between nutrition and overall wellbeing.

The food preferences of each participant were collected via an online questionnaire, which the team categorized into 10 groups (such as alcohol, fruits, and meats). A balanced diet was associated with better mental health, cognitive function, and even higher amounts of gray matter (linked to intelligence) in the brain compared with those with a less varied diet. The study also highlighted the need for gradual dietary modifications, particularly for individuals accustomed to highly palatable but nutritionally deficient foods. By slowly reducing sugar and fat intake over time, individuals may find themselves naturally gravitating towards healthier food choices.

Lead Author Professor Jianfeng Feng (University of Warwick) emphasized the importance of establishing healthy food preferences early in life. He said: "Developing a healthy balanced diet from an early age is crucial for healthy growth. To foster the development of a healthy balanced diet, both families and schools should offer a diverse range of nutritious meals and cultivate an environment that supports their physical and mental health." Co-Author Wei Cheng (Fudan University) added: "Our findings underscore the associations between dietary patterns and brain health, urging for concerted efforts in promoting nutritional awareness and fostering healthier eating habits across diverse populations."

Dr Richard Pemberton, Certified Lifestyle Physician and GP (Hexagon Health), who was not involved in the study, commented: "This exciting research further demonstrates that a poor diet detrimentally impacts not only our physical health but also our mental and brain health. This study supports the need for urgent government action to optimize health in our children, protecting future generations. We also hope this provides further evidence to motivate us all to make better lifestyle choices, to improve our health and reduce the risk of developing chronic disease."

University of Warwick. "New research shows 'profound' link between dietary choices and brain health." ScienceDaily. ScienceDaily, 24 April 2024. www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2024/04/240424111638.htm.

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Better Brain Health

A brief lapse in memory, such as misplacing your wallet or forgetting a birthday, is often associated with being especially busy or having an excessive amount of stress. What can be problematic is when the episodes of forgetfulness increase and intensify into a more severe problem, such as mild cognitive impairment or even Alzheimer's disease. Read on for six tips to care for your brain's health.

1. Exercise Daily:

Physically active people are less likely to experience a decline in their mental function, according to the Mayo Clinic. The increased blood flow to the brain during exercise aids the natural brain connections that occur during aging. Try choosing an activity that will increase your heart rate, such as hiking, playing tennis, or biking.

2. Eat a Balanced Diet:

Incorporate foods high in monounsaturated fats, polyunsaturated fats and omega-3 fatty acids. These foods can include salmon, nuts, and avocados, for example. It's also important to avoid foods high in trans and saturated fats, such as processed foods and fatty cuts of beef.

3. Get a Good Night's Sleep:

To get a good night's sleep, you should aim for seven to eight consecutive hours of rest per night. This gives the brain a chance to relax after each day, which is critical for a healthy brain and memory.

4. Participate in Social Activities:

Regular social interactions can help decrease memory loss. This can be especially important if you live alone or work remotely. A simple way to incorporate social interaction into your daily life is to connect with loved ones and engage in community events.

5. Activate Your Brain:

To engage in mental stimulation, participate in activities such as reading, brain games, painting, and puzzles.

6. Receive Regular Check-Ups:

Certain health factors, such as cardiovascular health, are critical to brain health and function. At regular check-ups, you're able to get your blood pressure, blood sugar, and cholesterol checked. Your doctor can tell you if these and other numbers are in a healthy range. If not, they can provide care to correct that.

Mental Health Moment

Journaling for Emotional Wellness

One of the ways to deal with any overwhelming emotion is to find a healthy way to express yourself. This makes a journal a helpful tool in managing your mental health.

Journaling can help you:

- Manage anxiety
- Reduce stress
- Cope with depression

Journaling helps control your symptoms and improve your mood by:

- Helping you prioritize problems, fears, and concerns.
- Tracking any symptoms day-to-day so that you can recognize triggers and learn ways to better control them.
- Providing an opportunity for positive self-talk and identifying negative thoughts and behaviors.

When you have a problem and you're stressed, keeping a journal can help you identify what's causing that stress or anxiety. Once you've identified your stressors, you can work on a plan to resolve the problems and reduce your stress.

How to Journal:

- Write every day: Aim to set aside a few minutes every day to write.
- Make it easy: Keep a pen and paper handy at all times. Then, when you want to write down your thoughts, you can.
- Write (or draw) whatever feels right: Your journal doesn't need to follow any certain structure. It's your own private place to discuss and create whatever you want to express your feelings.

Look at your writing time as personal relaxation time. It's a time when you can de-stress and wind down. Write in a place that's relaxing and soothing, maybe with a cup of tea. Look forward to your journaling time, and know that you're doing something good for your mind and body.

Journaling for emotional wellness. University of Rochester Medical Center. (n.d.). umc.rochester.edu/encyclopedia/content?ContentTypeID=1&ContentID=4552



Sausage Stuffed Zucchini Boats

Ingredients:

- 4 medium zucchini
- 1/2 teaspoon dried Italian seasoning
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 2 teaspoons olive oil
- 1 pound mild Italian sausage, casings removed
- 1/2 cup onion, finely diced
- 1 teaspoon minced garlic
- 2 cups marinara sauce
- 3/4 cup shredded mozzarella cheese
- 1 tablespoon chopped parsley
- Cooking spray

Directions:

1. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees F. Coat a large rectangular baking sheet with cooking spray.
2. Cut the zucchini in half lengthwise, then trim off the stem ends. Use a spoon to carefully scoop the flesh out of the zucchinis.
3. Sprinkle the Italian seasoning, salt, and pepper over the zucchini shells. Arrange the zucchini in the baking dish.
4. Heat the olive oil in a large pan over medium high heat. Add the sausage and cook for 4-5 minutes, breaking up the meat with a spatula.
5. Add the onion and cook for an additional 4 minutes or until onion is softened. Add the garlic and cook for 30 seconds.
6. Season the sausage and vegetable mixture with salt and pepper. Pour the marinara sauce into the pan and bring to a simmer; cook for 5 minutes.
7. Spoon the meat mixture evenly into the zucchini shells, then top with the shredded cheese.
8. Bake for 25 minutes, or until zucchini is tender and cheese is melted and golden brown. Sprinkle with parsley, then serve.

Calories: 345kcal, Carbohydrates: 16g, Protein: 25g, Fat: 23g

Welch, S. (2019, March 5). Stuffed zucchini boats. Dinner at the Zoo. dinneratthezoo.com/stuffed-zucchini-boats/



June Quiz

Food for Thought

1. A balanced diet was associated with better mental health, _____ and even higher amounts of gray matter (linked to _____) in the brain compared to those with a less varied diet.
2. How fast does someone need to make changes to their diet to help with brain and cognitive health?
 - a. Gradually
 - b. Rapidly
 - c. No change needed

Better Brain Health

3. What is one tip to support better brain health?

4. **True or False:** You can stimulate your brain by reading, doing puzzles, and playing brain games.

Mental Health Moment

5. What are the benefits of journaling for mental health?

See page 5 for quiz answers.

Healthy Habits Calendar

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 Start: Stop, Hobby Time! Challenge.	2 Meaningful Monday: Choose a personal challenge for the week to push yourself to grow.	3	4	5 Talented Thursday: Take a moment to appreciate the talents of someone around you.	6 Fit Friday: Try a new fitness class or activity today.	7 Sunshine Saturday: Get outside and soak up some vitamin D.
8	9	10 Team Player Tuesday: Lend a hand to a teammate to make their day easier.	11 Wise Wednesday: Engage in a thoughtful conversation that helps broaden your view.	12	13	14 Supportive Saturday: Reach out to someone who might need encouragement today.
15	16 Challenge Check-In: What book have you been reading?	17	18 Writing Wednesday: Write a letter to your future self.	19 Juneteenth Thirsty Thursday: Enjoy a refreshing infused water.	20	21
22	23 Mindful Eating Monday: Savor every bite and enjoy the flavors of your meal.	24 Tip Tuesday: Practice deep breathing to reduce stress and increase calmness.	25	26	27 Fresh Fruit Friday: Skip the pre-packaged snacks and enjoy a piece of fruit when you get hungry.	28 Successful Saturday: Tackle a task that you have been putting off.
29 Serene Sunday: Start your day with mindfulness or meditation to set a peaceful tone for the day ahead.	30 Challenge Check-In: Did you read something new?					

30 DAY WELLNESS CHALLENGE

Stop, Hobby Time!



Life gets busy. Between work and personal obligations, it can be hard to try new things. Hobbies reduce the stress caused by busy lifestyles while improving your well-being, social connections, and mental health. Try out a new hobby to gain a fresh perspective.

For the next four weeks, try out a new type of hobby: physical, intellectual, creative, or service-oriented. You can try a new hobby each week, or the same hobby more than once! Take a walk outside, learn a new skill, or visit with others. Write down what you did and how it made you feel. You may find something new that is meaningful and enjoyable!

Goal: Try out a new hobby each week.

WEEK 1	Hobby Category:	<input type="checkbox"/> Physical	<input type="checkbox"/> Intellectual	<input type="checkbox"/> Creative	<input type="checkbox"/> Service
	Hobby or Activity Name: _____				
	How did it make you feel? _____				
WEEK 2	Hobby Category:	<input type="checkbox"/> Physical	<input type="checkbox"/> Intellectual	<input type="checkbox"/> Creative	<input type="checkbox"/> Service
	Hobby or Activity Name: _____				
	How did it make you feel? _____				
WEEK 3	Hobby Category:	<input type="checkbox"/> Physical	<input type="checkbox"/> Intellectual	<input type="checkbox"/> Creative	<input type="checkbox"/> Service
	Hobby or Activity Name: _____				
	How did it make you feel? _____				
WEEK 4	Hobby Category:	<input type="checkbox"/> Physical	<input type="checkbox"/> Intellectual	<input type="checkbox"/> Creative	<input type="checkbox"/> Service
	Hobby or Activity Name: _____				
	How did it make you feel? _____				

Answers to Quiz:

- Q1: cognitive function, intelligence
- Q2: a. Gradually
- Q3: Exercise, balanced diet, good night’s sleep, be social, activate your brain and get regular check-ups

- Q4: True
- Q5: It can help you manage anxiety, reduce stress, and cope with depression.