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EAT RIGHT FOR MIGHT

One of the best paths to brain health is proper diet and nutrition. But what should we eat for a healthier and sharper mind?

By Alzheimer's OC in Collaboration with Social Services

Research tells us time and time again that lifestyle has a profound effect on brain health. What we eat and drink, how much we exercise, how well we sleep, the way we socialize, how we stimulate our brain and how we manage stress are all critically important. Healthy eating during the COVID-19 pandemic is more important than ever for maintaining both physical and mental health.

One of the best ways to take care of our brain is through

proper diet and nutrition. What should we eat for a healthier and sharper mind? Although there is no single best type of food for our brain, there are some foods that are linked to better brain power. Research tells us that we should eat foods that protect our heart and blood, because there is a special connection between heart health and brain health.

The Mediterranean Diet

The Mediterranean diet is one of the most studied and



researched diets in the world. Research began in the 1960s when it was observed that people in Mediterranean countries, like Greece and Italy, were much healthier compared to Americans. Researchers specifically noticed that heart disease caused fewer deaths in these countries. The Mediterranean-style diet has also been shown to reduce the risk of Alzheimer's and other conditions and diseases, such as diabetes, stroke and heart disease.

- **Enjoy fruits and veggies aplenty:** This diet features high consumption of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans, nuts, seeds

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Research of the Mediterranean diet observed that people in countries like Greece and Italy were much healthier compared to Americans. Fewer deaths were caused by heart disease. Further, the Mediterranean diet has been shown to reduce the risk of Alzheimer's, diabetes, stroke and heart disease.

This diet also emphasizes moderate portions of dairy products and limited intake of red meat. This may be difficult for a lot of people because milk and cheese are widely consumed in our diets. It may also be challenging to cut down on red meat—specifically beef, pork, and lamb. However, it's important to make small changes. Try replacing beef with healthy fish like salmon, sardines, trout, tuna, shrimp, crabs, etc. Remember that this diet is plant based and not meat based. In other words, red meat should be eaten only occasionally and more emphasis should be given to healthy fats.

- **Love your legumes:** The Mediterranean diet also consists of legumes—beans, peas, lentils, peanuts and chickpeas—which are very healthy and nutritious. These foods are typically low in fat and do not contain any cholesterol, which is important because these

and olive oil. Specifically, fresh fruits and vegetables should be eaten every single day. Some examples are tomatoes, broccoli, kale, spinach, onion, cauliflower, carrots, Brussels sprouts, cucumber. Some good examples of brain-healthy fruits include apples, bananas, oranges, dates, strawberries, cherries and blueberries. Fresh fruits and vegetables contain important vitamins, minerals, fiber and phytochemicals that protect our brain and body from diseases.

- **Shop for healthy grains and fats:** We should eat whole grains and healthy fats every

day. Some examples of whole grains include whole oats, brown rice, rye, barley, corn and buckwheat. Examples of healthy fats include olive oil, which should be the primary source of fat, because it has been shown to lower bad cholesterol levels. If you like to spread butter on a piece of toast, instead try dipping the bread in olive oil. Other healthy sources of fats include nuts, seeds, olives, avocados and avocado oil.

- **Eat these foods weekly:** According to the Mediterranean diet, there are certain foods that should be consumed weekly, such as fish, poultry, beans and eggs.



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foods also are good sources of protein. If you are trying to limit your intake of red meat and are having trouble doing so, try to eat more beans instead. Eat them by themselves, or include them in soups, salads or casseroles.

What to Drink?

Your first choice of drink should always be water. Try to avoid juice and soda, because most juice is very high in sugar. If you enjoy juice or smoothies, try to make your own at home and try to include as many fresh fruits and vegetables as possible. Coffee and tea are completely acceptable, but you want to avoid adding too much creamer or sugar. Instead, try adding almond milk or honey in your drinks. Additionally, try to avoid having caffeine after 1 p.m. so it does not disrupt your sleep cycle.

A moderate amount of red wine—one glass per day—is fine. Of course, this is completely optional, and if you don't already drink wine, this does not mean you should start now!

Envision Your Meals

So, what should a typical day of meals look like? For breakfast, go for Greek yogurt with oats and strawberries. For lunch, a spinach and arugula salad with walnuts, tomatoes, cucumber and onion, with a light salad dressing of olive or avocado

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oil. For dinner, try salmon with a side of steamed broccoli, asparagus and sweet potatoes. If you get hungry during the day, snack on as much fruits and vegetables as you like. Try carrots and celery dipped in hummus. If you crave something sweet, dates or dark chocolate are good options.

Back to the Lifestyle Idea

The Mediterranean-style diet is about more than just food—it's truly a lifestyle! In addition to healthy food choices, consider mealtime routines. Listen to your favorite music as you prepare food. Make dinner plans with a good friend—try a virtual session for extra safety precautions. Make mealtimes as enjoyable and pleasurable as possible. Experiment with different food groups, because you might discover new foods that you really enjoy. Be creative and incorporate these

foods into your snacks and meals to make them nutritious and interesting. Get moving after a meal by going for a brisk walk around the neighborhood.

The Mediterranean-style diet contributes to a healthy heart and a healthy brain. And remember, there are many reasons why someone may notice changes in thinking or memory abilities—stress, sleep, medication and many other causes—so it's really important you talk to your doctor if you notice changes.

Call Social Services at

949-597-4267 from

8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday

through Friday. Or visit us at

lagunawoodsvillage.com by

clicking the **Social Services**

tab under **Residents**.

ALZHEIMER'S ORANGE COUNTY PROGRAMMING

Educational events aimed at improving brain health and reducing the risk of cognitive decline.

The following events are hosted by Alzheimer's Orange County in collaboration with Laguna Woods Village Social Services.

4 Weeks to a Better Memory Series

Join us for a stimulating, fun, evidence-based four-week memory training program in which you will learn the fundamentals of memory and walk away with practical steps to enhance yours. Weekly two-hour sessions are designed for healthy older adults with normal-aging memory challenges who wish to improve or maintain their memory ability. This program is not intended for people with a diagnosis of cognitive impairment, Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia.

Wednesdays, 10 a.m. to noon, March 10, 17, 24, 31

RSVP: <http://bit.ly/2Jdz6W9> or call
844-373-4400

Nutrition for a Healthier Mind

Do you know how the foods on your plate impact your mind? Join this one-hour presentation to understand age-related changes in memory and learning, and learn how nutrition and diet impact your cognitive health. Learn what foods you should eat and what foods to avoid for a healthier brain and body.

Monday, March 1, 1 to 2 p.m.

RSVP: <http://bit.ly/34C1ZTm> or call
844-373-4400

Unlocking the Power of Sleep for Brain Health

There is a common myth that older adults need less sleep than younger adults, but research



tells us this is not true! Join this one-hour presentation to learn how sleep affects the brain, how much sleep and what kind of sleep adults need for optimal health, and how to develop better sleep hygiene for greater brain function.

Monday, March 15, 1 to 2 p.m.

RSVP: <http://bit.ly/2Jhel3E> or call
844-373-4400

The Role of Physical and Mental Exercise for Brain Health

Physical and mental exercise have countless benefits for the health of our minds. Join us for this one-hour class as we explore what research and clinical practice has taught us about the importance of physical and mental exercise in maximizing our brain health.

Monday, March 29, 1 to 2 p.m.

RSVP: <http://bit.ly/3mIRq7g> or call
844-373-4400

Visit <https://www.alzoc.org/events/> for the full calendar of Alzheimer's Orange County events. Contact us by calling 844-HELP-ALZ (844-435-7259) or emailing help@alzoc.org.

Alzheimer's
ORANGE COUNTY


Laguna Woods Village®
SOCIAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT