

The Best Food for Focus

Odd as it sounds, the workplace can be entirely counterproductive to getting work done. Consider: As soon as you sit down in the morning, your phone lights up, your e-mail account nags, and the morning headlines cry for your attention. Even when you actually start working, your mind might be in 10 other places, causing you to slog through the day with minimal progress. Face it—our daily lives are chock-full of distractions, much more so than they ever used to be.

But there's still hope for productivity: You can counteract that wandering mind by monitoring how you fuel it. In fact, studies show that you can be up to 200 percent more productive if you make the right eating choices. Here are seven super foods to help you battle the brain drain.

For Extra Brainpower: Salmon or Mackerel

The omega-3 fatty acids found in fish are one of the primary building blocks of brain tissue, so they're essential to boosting brainpower. Salmon is also rich in niacin, which wards off Alzheimer's disease and slows the rate of cognitive decline.

Bonus tip: Want an easy way to hit your 1-2 servings of fish a week? Throw some on a sandwich. Just make sure you pay attention to the nutritional content—it's easy to get caught up in fixin's and not realize that you're piling on the calories.

For Focus: Peppermint Tea

Researchers found that it took a mere whiff of peppermint to increase subjects' concentration and performance on tedious tasks, and a professor in West Virginia claimed that he used the magical herb to improve athletes' performance.

Bonus tip: Think that all tea is created equal? Think again. In today's sugar-laden environment, it's easy to consume an overwhelming percentage of your daily calories in liquid form—some researchers estimate that we consume about a quarter of our day's calories through beverages. Swapping sugar-saturated drinks for smarter choices is an easy way to take pounds off.

For an Energy Boost: A Handful of Trail Mix

Raisins provide potassium, which your body uses to convert sugar into energy. Nuts stock your body with magnesium, which is important in metabolism, nerve function, and muscle function. When magnesium levels are low, your body produces more lactic acid—the same fatigue-inducing substance that you feel at the end of a long workout. Ever notice how hard it is to

concentrate when you're feeling sluggish?

Bonus tip: It's easier than you think to fuel your body properly. With discipline, it can even become second nature.

For Sharper Senses: 1 Tablespoon of Ground Flaxseed Daily

Flax is the best source of alpha-linolenic acid (or ALA)—a healthy fat that improves the workings of the cerebral cortex, the area of the brain that processes sensory information, including that of pleasure. To meet your quota, sprinkle flaxseed on salads or mix it into a smoothie or shake.

Bonus tip: Flax will help you craft a powerfully healthy salad, but some restaurants haven't quite mastered the formula yet. Instead of loading their salad plates with healthy options, they're overloading the dishes with toppings and sauces that weigh the greenery down.

For Short-Term Memory: Coffee

Fresh-brewed joe is the ultimate brain fuel. Caffeine has been shown to retard the aging process and enhance short-term memory performance. In one study, British researchers found that people consuming the caffeine equivalent of one cup of coffee experienced improved attention and problem-solving skills. Need more convincing? Besides boosting alertness for up to 90 minutes, that morning cup is the No. 1 source of antioxidants in the American diet and can help decrease your risk of developing Alzheimer's disease by as much as 60 percent.

Bonus tip: By coffee, we mean the black stuff—before the addition of syrups, sprinkles and whipped cream, which do a body no good.

For Long-Term Memory: Blueberries

Antioxidants in blueberries help protect the brain from free-radical damage, which could decrease your risk of Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases and improve cognitive processing. Wild blueberries, if you can find them—check the freezer section—have even more brain-boosting antioxidants than the cultivated variety.

Bonus tip: Blueberries might seem like a splurge, but buy them frozen and you'll still reap the benefits. They make a healthy and tasty mid-afternoon snack or even appetizer.

To Calm Your Nerves: Low-Fat Yogurt or Mixed Nuts

Scientists in Slovakia gave people 3 grams each of two amino acids—lysine and arginine—or a

placebo, and asked them to deliver a speech. Blood measurements of stress hormones revealed that the amino acid-fortified guys were half as anxious during and after the speech as those who took the placebo. Yogurt is one of the best food sources of lysine; nuts pack loads of arginine.

Bonus tip: Eating healthily doesn't have to break the bank. In fact, if you are consistently eating well, you may be less apt to splurge on food cravings.

**Reference: Men'sHealth: Article – Get Sharp: Foods that improve your focus.*