

# Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

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## “Five Brain Booster Foods”

Studies show that what you eat can affect your brain power and cognitive prowess. Cognitive health refers to one’s ability to think clearly, learn, and remember. Over five million Americans have limited brain function with Alzheimer's disease (AD). One in three seniors dies with (not necessarily from) Alzheimer's disease or other types of dementia. People are keen to adopt ways of decreasing their chances of dementia and to finding ways to improve function of their brain. False claims have been rampant with articles pushing the notion that this can be achieved with coffee, cocoa, water, antioxidants, etc. Some studies have linked the Mediterranean diet (high in fish oils, nuts, and grains and including maybe a little red wine) with advantageous effects on neurologic and mental health. Studies show that small changes to your diet can improve cognitive health and performance. According to the National Institute on Aging (NIA) a healthy diet can help reduce the risk of many chronic diseases such as heart disease or diabetes. It may also help keep your brain healthy. The NIA defines a healthy diet as one that consists of fruits and vegetables, lean meats, fish, and poultry, low-fat or nonfat dairy products, and whole grains. Also limit solid fats, sugar, and salt. Be sure to control portion sizes and drink enough water and other fluids. Here are five foods that can boost cognitive function. **Fruits and Vegetables.** Various fruits and vegetables are rich in polyphenols. An ever-expanding corpus of research supports the positive association between polyphenol intake and cognitive benefit. There are many fruits (i.e., cherries, berries, apples, grapes, oranges), vegetables, certain fungi, and fermented products that are high in polyphenols and are purported to have anti-aging properties. **Eggs.** Eggs may boost cognitive function, according to the results of a study published in *Current Developments in Nutrition*. The thinking on the health ramifications of eating eggs has changed in recent years. According to the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, a daily egg can be of a healthy eating pattern. **Fatty Fish.** Fatty fish, such as salmon, albacore tuna, and mackerel, are high in omega-3 fatty acids—and the omega-3 obtained from foods such as oily fish could be associated with enhanced memory function. **Almonds.** Almonds are rich in monounsaturated fats,  $\alpha$ -tocopherol, and fibers, which exert anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effects. This could explain their ability to delay age-related cognitive decline. **Coffee.** Coffee is linked to better performance on cognitive tests in older adults and decreased risk of dementia. Decaffeinated coffee also boosted alertness compared with placebo, but without the jittery effect experienced by some participants.

In the America that I love, I am still cautious about miraculous promises of increasing brain function with diet alone.

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