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Brain Nutrition

Did any of you see the movie “The Matrix”? And if you did, do you remember the part in the movie where the female lead (Trinity, I think her name was) needed to learn how to operate a helicopter? Now, to learn this new and I am assuming somewhat complex task, she actually didn’t have to spend the rest of the movie in flight school. No, instead, she had a memory upgrade via a computer link into her brain and, BOOM, within seconds she knew how to pilot that helicopter (and, in the process, saved everyone’s butts in the nick of time). Wow, wouldn’t it be cool if real life were like that? That there existed for all of us some random, large “Enter” button that we could all hit when we needed to learn, and retain, information quickly.

Regrettably, our minds don’t work that way. Nope, instead, our gray matter constantly lets us down. For instance, it leaves us to our own embarrassing devices when we need to recall a person’s name quickly to introduce to our spouse. Or, when we are at the grocery store and we know that there was one more thing that we had to get, but we just can’t for the life if us think of what it was. Of course, that one thing will quickly and miraculously pop into your head soon after you have left the store and are already halfway home, or worse yet, at home.

The good news is that forgetting this kind of information is common – and generally not cause to fear that you are on the brink of developing Alzheimer’s disease. The bad news is that memory lapses are typically a sign of the gradual aging of the brain, a human phenomenon that affects everyone.

Studies show that the brain-aging process begins as early as our 20s. As our neurons age and die, the size of our brain shrinks and accumulates lesions known as amyloid plaques and neurofibrillary (throw that word around next party and look like a genius!) tangles. These plaques and tangles are believed to be responsible for Alzheimer’s disease.

On a positive note though, mounting evidence is now showing us that prevention may work for the brain as well as it does for the heart. In fact, one study that I viewed from UCLA showed surprising and powerful results for taking preventive actions in preserving our gray mass. This particular study showed that in a period of only two weeks of memory training (involving diet, exercise, stress reduction and mental-fitness training), volunteers showed a dramatic improvement in their memory performance and brain efficiency tests. Using brain stress tests and MRI brain-imaging tests it was shown that these subjects scored higher on their memory tests, using less brainpower to do it.

Experts agree that, although each person is unique and no two people will respond the same way to specific stimuli, the basic principles about brain-training remain the same for everyone. These principles include: healthy eating, physical exercise, stress reduction and a daily dose of mental-fitness exercises.

Of the above principles listed, the first one, healthy eating, is probably the easiest way for all of us to make a definite difference in our ability to process and recall information. Antioxidants, for example, which are touted for their overall immune-boosting properties, are key brain boosters because they improve the flow of oxygen through the body by fighting free radicals. Some fruits and vegetables high in anti-oxidants are:

- Cranberries
- Blueberries
- Blackberries
- Russet potatoes
- Prunes
- Strawberries
- Apples
- Artichokes
- Broccoli
- Spinach
- Red grapes
- Garlic
- Tomatoes
- Soy

Eating foods that are rich in fiber and nutrients also helps you resist and combat disease that can affect your memory. Foods containing Vitamin C are also well-known for their memory-enhancing properties. Some examples include:

- Cantaloupe
- Black currants
- Blueberries
- Sweet potatoes
- Asparagus
- Kale
- Papaya
- Red Pepper
- Broccoli
- Brussels sprouts
- Oranges
- Kiwi fruit
- Cauliflower

It is also recommended to add red foods to your diet, which not only contain beta-carotene (a precursor of Vitamin A) but also stimulate, strengthen and increase body temperature and circulation, which will increase energy. Red foods affect your muscles, adrenal glands, bladder, lower limbs, spine and reproductive center, making them ideal for combating fatigue, fever, colds, etc. Psychologically, red foods ease depression, promoting a positive attitude, which aids memory.

Key red foods include:

- Watermelon
- Strawberries
- Cherries
- Tomatoes
- Red cabbage
- Radishes
- Red peppers

Good oils, such as olive and flax, also appear to buffer our brain (which is composed of fat) against memory loss and B vitamins are similarly critical.

So, next time you go grocery shopping, don't forget to put some of these brain-building foods into your cart. Of course, I also recommend writing out a list just in case you forget some of them.

Find out more nutrition information, as well as the best exercises you should be doing for your body, under your own trainer. Join today and not only reach your fitness goals, but crush them out of the park!