



## **Diet and exercise for brain health**

Diet and exercise are often on the minds of anyone who wants to lose or maintain weight, but did you know both of these are also linked to a healthy brain?

In many ways, the old cliché “You are what you eat” is true. Food has a major impact on brain health. Research has shown that certain foods help maintain healthy cognitive function and has also proven that some types of foods are detrimental to brain health.

According to Paul Nussbaum, Ph.D., ABPP, clinical neuropsychologist and founder of Brain Health Center, Inc., there are two major classes of brain health foods: omega-3 fatty acids and antioxidants. Unfortunately, the body doesn’t make either of these things naturally, so we must consume them in foods.

Examples of foods containing omega-3s include fish such as salmon, halibut, sardines, albacore, trout and herring, as well as some nuts like walnuts and flaxseed and oils like canola oil. Some other common foods that contain omega-3 fatty acids include shrimp, clams, light chunk tuna, catfish, cod, and spinach. Beans and berries are two of the most common types of foods that are rich in antioxidants.

Physical exercise, particularly aerobic exercise, has a positive effect on the brain on many levels. When a person is exercising, their heart rate increases, allowing more oxygen to pump into the brain. Exercise also releases hormones that lead to brain cell growth and stimulates the growth of new connections between those cells.

“Try to remove the unhealthy foods a little bit at a time,” Dr. Nussbaum advises. “Substitute in the good foods – the fish, plant based foods, nuts, beans. If you’re going to eat meat, make it lean game and try to keep that red meat intake at a minimum”

### Physical health checklist

- ✓ Exercise most days of the week for at least 30 minutes.
- ✓ Be active for most of the day.
- ✓ Eat eight ounces of fish rich in omega-3 fats weekly.
- ✓ Eat unsalted nuts daily.
- ✓ Eat seven fist-sized servings of fruits and vegetables daily.
- ✓ Eat green leafy vegetables daily.

- ✓ Reduce intake of processed foods and sugar.