

## Brain Foods

Editorial Staff

Brain health should definitely be on your patients' list of health and wellness priorities; if not, gently remind them that if necessary, they can live without a kidney, spleen, teeth, hair and other assorted elements of their body, but without a brain - well, there's not much they can do after that. That means it's important to find ways to keep the brain as fit as possible for as long as possible.

There are several ways to promote brain health, [including exercising](#), which increases blood flow to the brain and encourages the growth of new brain cells; and keeping your mind sharp by playing challenging board games such as chess, [which improves memory](#) by requiring you to remember previous moves and conceptualize future moves and combinations. (Evidence suggests an active mind also may reduce the risk of Alzheimer's disease.) And then there's eating the right foods - another great way to maximize brain health. Here are three examples of nutrients known to promote brain health:

*Omega-3 fatty acids* are associated with various health benefits; with respect to the brain, [DHA \(docosahexaenoic acid\)](#) is the major polyunsaturated fatty acid found in the brain and is linked to brain development and function. Good sources of omega-3s include seafood (especially cold-water fish) and supplements; manufacturers also have begun adding DHA to some dairy products.

*Choline, a water-soluble B vitamin, is a chemical building block of every cell in the body; that makes it a pretty important nutrient. Evidence suggests choline may improve memory and protect against senility in old age. Good sources of choline include egg yolks, skim milk, soybeans and lentils.*

*Folic acid, otherwise known as vitamin B9, is well-known for its effect on fetal development: adequate daily folic acid intake can reduce the risk of birth defects such as cleft palate/lip. It's also great for improving cognitive function (your ability to think clearly and remember things), suggesting it may help protect against the development of Alzheimer's. Spinach, asparagus and avocado are all good sources of folic acid; many cereals are also fortified with B9, and it is a staple of many daily multivitamin supplements.*

Recommend these and other key brain nutrients to your patients as part of an overall health and wellness strategy. If you don't think their dietary habits will ensure adequate intake of the above, consider recommending supplements to achieve the same goal.

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