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bonus 1

# The Brain- Healthy Plate

**NUTRITION GUIDE FOR DEMENTIA**

The MIND diet made simple, easy meals for small appetites, mealtime fixes, and 10 surprising supplements worth asking the doctor about.

**DR. FERNANDO VERA, OT**

DR. VERA'S DEMENTIA ACTION MANUALS

## WHY FOOD MATTERS

# What goes on the plate shows up in the brain.

You can't cure dementia with food. But what someone eats and drinks affects energy, mood, sleep, constipation, infections and confusion, and all of those affect behavior. A hungry, thirsty or constipated brain is a stressed brain.

## Meet the MIND diet

MIND stands for **Mediterranean-DASH Intervention for Neurodegenerative Delay**. It blends two heart-healthy eating styles and focuses on the foods most linked with brain health: leafy greens, berries, nuts, beans, whole grains, fish and olive oil.

In large long-term studies of older adults, people who ate closest to the MIND pattern had slower memory decline than those who ate least like it. It isn't a strict diet. It's a simple set of "eat more" and "eat less" habits that fit any budget and any kitchen.

## What the research can and can't say

### ✓ What we know

Healthy eating patterns like MIND and Mediterranean are linked with better brain and heart health, healthier weight and blood pressure, and fewer strokes.

### ✗ What we don't know

No diet has been shown to stop or reverse dementia. Think of good food as support for the whole person, not a treatment.

### DR. VERA'S TIP

*Don't overhaul everything at once. Pick two "eat more" foods this week, like berries at breakfast and a handful of nuts in the afternoon. Small swaps stick.*

## WHY IT MATTERS FOR THE BRAIN

# How the MIND diet supports brain health

The MIND foods were chosen because each one feeds the brain in a specific way. Here's what the research links them with.



### Slower memory decline

In a large study of older adults, those who ate most like MIND had thinking skills similar to people about **7.5 years younger** than those who ate least like it.



### Lower Alzheimer's risk in studies

People who followed MIND closely had up to **53% lower** rates of Alzheimer's disease over several years. Even moderate followers had about **35% lower** rates.



### Calms inflammation

Berries, greens, olive oil and nuts are rich in antioxidants and polyphenols that help protect brain cells from inflammation and oxidative stress.



### Healthier blood flow to the brain

Like its parent diets (Mediterranean and DASH), MIND supports healthy blood pressure and blood vessels, lowering the risk of strokes that can worsen memory.



### Steadier energy and mood

Whole grains, beans and protein keep blood sugar steady, which can mean fewer late-day crashes, irritability and restlessness.



### Better digestion

Fiber from beans, vegetables and whole grains helps prevent constipation, a common hidden cause of discomfort, agitation and confusion.

## What each food brings to the brain

| FOOD                 | KEY NUTRIENTS             | HOW IT HELPS                                      |
|----------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Leafy greens         | Folate, vitamin K, lutein | Linked with slower memory decline in older adults |
| Berries              | Flavonoids (anthocyanins) | Antioxidants that protect brain cells             |
| Fish                 | Omega-3 (DHA, EPA)        | A building block of brain cell walls              |
| Nuts                 | Vitamin E, healthy fats   | Antioxidant protection for the brain              |
| Beans & whole grains | Fiber, B vitamins         | Steady energy, gut and heart health               |
| Olive oil            | Polyphenols, healthy fats | Supports blood vessels and lowers inflammation    |

**The honest part:** most of these findings come from studies that follow people's eating habits over time. They show a link, not proof. In a 2023 clinical trial, older adults on the MIND diet and on a comparison healthy diet both improved slightly on memory tests. Good food supports the brain and body, but it is not a treatment for dementia.

## THE MIND DIET AT A GLANCE

# 10 foods to eat more of

6+ servings a week

### Leafy greens

Spinach, kale, collards, romaine. Blend into smoothies or stir into soups and eggs.

1+ a day

### Other vegetables

Carrots, peppers, broccoli, squash. Soft-cooked and finger-sized works best.

2+ times a week

### Berries

Blueberries and strawberries. Fresh or frozen are equally good.

5 handfuls a week

### Nuts

Walnuts, almonds, pecans. Use nut butters if chewing is hard.

3+ times a week

### Beans & lentils

Soups, chili, hummus, refried beans. Cheap and filling.

3 servings a day

### Whole grains

Oatmeal, brown rice, whole-wheat bread, whole-grain pasta.

1+ time a week

### Fish

Salmon, sardines, tuna, trout. Canned counts.

2+ times a week

### Poultry

Chicken or turkey instead of red meat.

Main cooking oil

### Olive oil

Use it for cooking, dressings and dipping bread.

6–8 cups a day

### Water

Not officially part of MIND, but essential. See the hydration page.

## 5 foods to eat less of

Under 4 a week

**Red & processed meat**

Under 1 Tbsp a day

**Butter & stick margarine**

Under 1 serving a week

**Cheese**

Under 5 a week

**Pastries & sweets**

Under 1 a week

**Fried & fast food**

The original MIND diet also allows one glass of wine a day. We leave it out: alcohol can worsen confusion, falls and sleep, and it mixes badly with many dementia medications.

CUT OUT AND TAKE TO THE STORE

# Brain-healthy grocery list

Check what you need. Frozen and canned versions are just as good and last longer.

## Produce

- ☐ Spinach or kale
- ☐ Romaine or mixed greens
- ☐ Carrots
- ☐ Broccoli
- ☐ Bell peppers
- ☐ Sweet potatoes
- ☐ Bananas
- ☐ Avocados

## Berries (fresh or frozen)

- ☐ Blueberries
- ☐ Strawberries
- ☐ Mixed berry bag

## Protein

- ☐ Salmon or trout
- ☐ Canned tuna or sardines
- ☐ Chicken or turkey
- ☐ Eggs
- ☐ Plain Greek yogurt

## Beans & grains

- ☐ Canned black or pinto beans
- ☐ Lentils
- ☐ Old-fashioned oats
- ☐ Brown rice
- ☐ Whole-wheat bread
- ☐ Whole-grain pasta

## Nuts & oils

- ☐ Walnuts
- ☐ Almonds
- ☐ Peanut or almond butter
- ☐ Extra-virgin olive oil

## Easy extras

- ☐ Hummus
- ☐ Low-sodium broth
- ☐ Unsweetened cocoa powder
- ☐ Herbal tea (decaf)
- ☐ Cinnamon

### DR. VERA'S TIP

*Shop with a list and stick to it. Fewer choices in the cart means fewer sweets and processed foods at home.*

## NO FANCY COOKING

# 7 easy meals & snacks

Soft, familiar and easy to eat. Serve one food at a time if the plate feels overwhelming.

1

### **Berry oatmeal**

Oats cooked soft with blueberries, a spoon of walnut butter and cinnamon. Warm, sweet and easy to swallow.

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2

### **Green smoothie**

Spinach, frozen berries, banana, Greek yogurt and milk. A great way to hide greens for picky eaters.

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3

### **Finger-food lunch box**

Hummus, soft carrot sticks, whole-wheat pita triangles, cheese cubes and grapes cut in half. No utensils needed.

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4

### **Salmon & sweet potato**

Baked salmon with olive oil and lemon, soft sweet potato and steamed broccoli.

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5

### **One-pot lentil soup**

Lentils, carrots, spinach and broth. Freezes well and is easy to reheat.

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6

### **Chicken & bean burrito bowl**

Brown rice, black beans, chicken, mild salsa and avocado. Serve in a bowl with a spoon.

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7

### **Afternoon snack plate**

A few walnuts, berries and a cup of decaf tea around 3 p.m. to steady energy before sundowning hours.

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#### **DR. VERA'S TIP**

*Offer the biggest meal when they eat best. For many people that's breakfast or lunch, not dinner.*

# Mealtime troubleshooting

| THE PROBLEM                   | TRY THIS                                                                                                            |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Won't eat or eats very little | Use a smaller plate, offer one food at a time, and try finger foods. Eat together, since people copy what they see. |
| Can't see the food            | Use a plate that contrasts with the food, like a red or blue plate for mashed potatoes or rice.                     |
| Forgets they already ate      | Don't argue. Say "Let me get you a little something," and keep a basket of healthy snacks out.                      |
| Gets up and wanders at meals  | Turn off the TV, clear the table, and offer food they can carry, like a sandwich or wrap.                           |
| Coughs or chokes while eating | Call the doctor and ask for a swallow evaluation by a speech therapist. Don't ignore this sign.                     |
| Losing weight without trying  | Tell the doctor. Add healthy calories: nut butter, avocado, olive oil, smoothies, full-fat yogurt.                  |

## Hydration: the hidden cause of sudden confusion

Older adults feel thirst less, and people with dementia often forget to drink. Even mild dehydration can bring on confusion, dizziness, falls, constipation and urinary infections, all of which can look like a sudden worsening of dementia.

### Easy ways to add fluids

- ✓ Offer a drink every time you sit down together
- ✓ Use a clear or brightly colored cup
- ✓ Serve soups, smoothies, watermelon and oranges
- ✓ Keep a filled cup in sight, not in the kitchen

### Call the doctor if you see

- ✓ Sudden new confusion or sleepiness
- ✓ Very dark urine or no urine for 8+ hours
- ✓ Dizziness or a fall
- ✓ Burning or foul-smelling urine

BRING THIS PAGE TO THE NEXT APPOINTMENT

# 10 surprising supplements worth asking the doctor about

The most surprising fact: the biggest wins usually come from fixing a **deficiency**, not from fancy "brain pills." Here's what the research says, ranked from strongest to weakest.

| SUPPLEMENT                                                    | WHY IT MAY HELP                                                                                                                         | WATCH OUT                                                    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1. Vitamin B12</b><br><b>TEST FIRST</b>                    | Low B12 is common after 60, and it can cause memory problems, confusion and tingling that improve with treatment. Ask for a blood test. | Metformin and acid reducers (like omeprazole) lower B12.     |
| <b>2. Vitamin D</b><br><b>TEST FIRST</b>                      | Low levels are common in older adults who stay indoors, and are linked with bone loss, falls and low mood. Ask for a blood level.       | More is not better. Very high doses can cause harm.          |
| <b>3. B-complex (B6, B12, folate)</b><br><b>SOME EVIDENCE</b> | In older adults with memory problems and high homocysteine (a blood marker), B vitamins slowed brain shrinkage in a clinical trial.     | Ask the doctor to check homocysteine first.                  |
| <b>4. Daily multivitamin</b><br><b>SOME EVIDENCE</b>          | Large trials in older adults found a small benefit for memory from a basic daily multivitamin. Surprisingly simple.                     | Choose a basic brand. Skip mega-dose formulas.               |
| <b>5. Omega-3 (fish oil)</b><br><b>MIXED</b>                  | Omega-3 fats (DHA, EPA) are building blocks of the brain. Eating fish is best; supplements have shown mixed results.                    | Can thin the blood. Check if on blood thinners.              |
| <b>6. Cocoa flavanols</b><br><b>SOME EVIDENCE</b>             | In a large trial, cocoa flavanols helped memory in older adults who ate poorly. Unsweetened cocoa powder is a food-first option.        | Skip chocolate bars. The sugar cancels the benefit.          |
| <b>7. Magnesium (glycinate)</b><br><b>LIMITED</b>             | May help relaxation, sleep and constipation. Many older adults don't get enough.                                                        | Avoid with kidney disease. Can loosen stools.                |
| <b>8. Melatonin (low dose)</b><br><b>MIXED</b>                | May help with sleep timing and evening restlessness in some people. Start very low (0.5–1 mg).                                          | Can cause morning grogginess and increase fall risk.         |
| <b>9. Vitamin E</b><br><b>DOCTOR ONLY</b>                     | One trial found high-dose vitamin E slowed loss of daily-living skills in mild to moderate Alzheimer's.                                 | High doses raise bleeding risk. Use only with a doctor's OK. |
| <b>10. Citicoline</b><br><b>LIMITED</b>                       | Small studies suggest it may help memory, mainly in people with vascular (stroke-related) memory problems.                              | Evidence is early. Discuss with the doctor.                  |

**TEST FIRST** fixes a proven deficiency  
**SOME / MIXED** modest or mixed trial results  
**LIMITED / DOCTOR ONLY** early evidence or real risks

# Before you buy any supplement

## Always check with the doctor or pharmacist first

Supplements can interact with blood thinners, heart and blood pressure medicines, diabetes medicines and dementia medications. Bring the bottles to the next appointment and ask, "Is this safe with everything else they take?"

## Skip these: surprising ones that don't deliver

| PRODUCT                                         | WHAT RESEARCH SHOWS                                                                                                       |
|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| "Memory" pills promising to reverse memory loss | No supplement has been shown to reverse dementia. Some brands have faced government action over misleading memory claims. |
| Ginkgo biloba                                   | A large trial in older adults found it did not prevent dementia, and it can increase bleeding risk.                       |
| Coconut oil                                     | Popular online, but there's no good evidence it helps memory, and it's high in saturated fat.                             |
| Mega-dose "brain stacks"                        | More pills mean more interactions and more cost, with no proof of more benefit.                                           |

## A smart 3-step plan

### 1. Test

Ask for B12, vitamin D and, if possible, homocysteine blood tests.

### 2. Fix

Treat any deficiency with the dose the doctor recommends.

### 3. Food first

Use the MIND foods in this guide for everything else.

This guide is for education only and is not medical advice. Always check with the person's doctor or pharmacist before changing diet, starting supplements or beginning exercise, especially with other health conditions or medications.