



## TBH Focus

Body | *Eat Smart*

- Sticking to a healthy diet—and maintaining a healthy weight—are key to a healthy brain. In addition, studies have linked too much body fat, especially in the belly, with an increased risk of dementia.
- Following a diet that's high in brain-healthy foods—especially cold-water fish and other sources of omega 3-fats, and fruits and veggies that are rich in antioxidants—has been associated with a lower risk of dementia. The Mediterranean diet is a great example of this approach to eating.
- Diet matters to everyday performance: Alcohol, caffeine, and sugar can have a short-term impact on focus and memory, so it's important to balance them as we age.

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## The TBH Science

While there's no such thing as a “smart food,” everything we put into our mouths can impact our brain health. The best way to keep cognition at its peak is to stick to a balanced diet made up of a variety of nutrient-dense foods that are low in fat and calories, such as the Mediterranean diet, which has been linked to a decreased risk of dementia. It's based on fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, healthy fats (olives and olive oil, nuts, avocado), and seafood and lean proteins. In fact, many of these foods have been shown to improve brain health. For example, the antioxidants in dark green veggies (spinach, kale, arugula) and brightly colored berries help protect brain cells from damage caused by free radicals. And foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids, such as cold-water fish, flaxseeds, and nuts have been found in studies to lower the risk of dementia and Alzheimer's disease. One of the most recent studies found that omega-3's from seafood sources in particular were associated with greater brain volume in post-menopausal women. It can also help to cut back on caffeine and alcohol; too much of either can interfere with memory and focus. Overeating can lead to weight gain, which matters because obesity is a risk factor for mental decline. And anyone with a chronic condition that increases the risk of a brain disorder (diabetes, high blood pressure) should follow a diet that is suited to his or her condition.

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## You Will Need

- “Food For Thoughts” worksheets (see Resources)
- The “TBH Recipe Challenge Game” (see Resources)
- Samples of brain-healthy foods (enough for participants to try)
- Recipe or index cards to use for the “TBH Recipe Challenge Game”
- Pens or pencils



- Introduce the activity. Use the TBH Focus and TBH Science to talk about the importance of eating a brain-healthy diet.
  - Have group talk about ways in which they could make their own diets more brain-healthy.
  - Offer brain-healthy foods for participants to try. (Use the “TBH Brain-Healthy Foods List” in Resources.)
  - TBH Recipe Challenge Game: Have group play the “TBH Recipe Challenge Game” (see Resources).
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You can boost brain health by following a diet high in omega 3 fatty acids (cold-water fish, nuts, flaxseeds, olives); brightly colored fruits and veggies; whole grains; and lean proteins—such as the Mediterranean Diet. Keep caffeine and alcohol in balance as both can impair focus and memory. Above all, pay attention to the scale—obesity raises the risk of dementia.

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### Expert Opportunity

Invite a nutritionist who can discuss diet as it applies to the science of brain health, managing medical conditions such as diabetes and hypertension, etc. to introduce the activity.

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### Resources

See the Resources section of your online Toolkit for all worksheets, links and additional materials for this activity.