

#FYI

Foods that support brain health and sharpen memory

Nutrition is crucial for the development of our health, and it's vital that we pay attention to whether the foods we consume are actually meeting our nutritional requirements. Of the many organs we have, the brain requires specific components for its development.

Discussed below are some of the most important compounds and their food sources needed for good brain health.

Omega-3 fatty acids

Omega-3 is usually the first key component to show up in anyone's research for good brain foods, and rightly so. It is one of the healthy fats responsible for boosting memory. It is present in large quantities in fatty fish such as salmon and sardines, as well as locally abundant fishes like hilsa, mola, and pangas.

This component is not only essential for boosting memory but also helps slow down cognitive decline and memory loss in elderly people.

Vitamin K and Folate

Folate is a B9 vitamin responsible for producing neurotransmitters like dopamine and serotonin, which affect a person's



various moods, while Vitamin K supports optimal blood flow to the brain.

Both these compounds are found in large amounts in leafy green vegetables. These leafy greens help stabilise mood swings, especially in young people, and support increased mental clarity. For adults and elderly people, vitamin K also helps improve cognitive function and protect against minor forms of dementia.

Antioxidants

While antioxidants are widely known for their various health benefits, it may come as a surprise to learn how vital their role in



brain health is.

Citrus fruits like oranges, which are rich in antioxidants, protect the brain against "oxidative stress", something which increases memory loss and brain fog. A higher intake of antioxidants can help prevent diseases linked to memory loss in the elderly, while for younger people, it improves memory and the ability to focus.

Vitamin E

Nuts are quite popular in the list of good brain foods, possibly because informally, they can be termed as a "nutrient package". Nuts such as walnuts, cashews, Brazil nuts, and almonds contain high concentrations of Vitamin E as well as Omega-3s.

While omega-3s help with many brain functions, vitamin E is what helps the neurons (brain cells) use that Omega-3. Vitamin E itself is also an antioxidant, so it carries other benefits too.

That is why nuts should be consumed regularly by all age groups, as they help with sharper memory, better ability to focus

and prevent cognitive decline.

Choline

Unknown to many, choline is a very important component present in every body cell, responsible for making the neurotransmitter "acetylcholine," which impacts learning and memory. The best source for choline is eggs, especially the yolk, which contains high amounts of this component.

Including eggs in the diet regularly has many benefits, but specifically for the brain, the intake of choline helps with faster information processing, greater memory support and also protects against cognitive decline. Eggs should therefore be consumed by all age groups unless medically advised otherwise, due to specific medical conditions.

While many of these foods have overlaps in the benefits they provide, each of them can contribute to brain health through different compounds, which are equally crucial to maintain a healthy brain and aid its development.

By Raidah Hasan
Photo: Collected

#PERSPECTIVE

Winter on a Plate: What Comfort Tastes Like This Season

Winter appears in Dhaka just like an unsent text: unexpected. The moment the weather drops just enough for us to nag about it, we start craving for warm foods, romanticising life with a hot cup between our cold hands.

Waking up and seeing the fog rolling over the country and arriving into our concrete alleyways, our brain automatically starts thinking about food that make us feel warm and cosy. The thought of surviving the humidity is no longer a concern, so planning for street food hopping becomes a regular routine.

The first thing winter does is how food smells as you walk outside; the smells of wood smoke, and it becomes sweeter when the roadside pitha stores sit next to each other. It became our makeshift town square, where people of all ages gathered around.

From the corporate titan in a crisp suit to the teenager in a hoodie, both are waiting for the hot pithas in this chilly weather.

Rafiq Mia, a 35-year-old rickshaw puller, expertly parks his rickshaw on the roadside, and waits closely near the chittoi pitha shop and curiously looks at the process of its making.

"Nothing can match the warmth of the roadside chittoi pitha dipped in extra spicy shorshe bhorta; it just hits like a fireball in this cold weather. It's the only thing that makes the cold evenings worth it," he says. I completely agree with it; even if you are not hungry, your brain will be go, "one pitha won't hurt in this chilly weather."

Labonnya, a Master's student, whose desk is currently buried under term papers and research, is looking for warmth in a ramen bowl. "Ramen is not just a noodle



to me; it's a salty and savoury treat that instantly fulfils my tired soul," she added, also noting how her glasses fogged up with every bite.

"When winter finally knocks on the door, the first thing I do is shop for different kinds of ramen for my wintry nights." It's a different kind of sentiment, something that echoes through the city and all ages of people, even the ones who count calories before anything.

Shahriar, a local fitness enthusiast who most probably does push-ups in his sleep, is surprisingly relaxed about the season. "People think winter is only for hibernating, but that's definitely not for me, because I make soups that feel like heaven in a bowl,"



he says, while pouring ginger-tulsi tea from a thermos.

"A thick chicken or vegetable soup gives me an internal boost to hit the gym when everyone else is under the blanket," adds Shahriar.

On the other hand, there is 39-year-old Rafi, a corporate professional who drives from Jatrabari to 300 feet Nila Market with his friends and family every winter weekend, just to eat duck meat and chaler roti. "Winter without hashar mangsho is impossible for me, because this is the only time I can enjoy it perfectly," he says.

Yet, for so many, winter is the season when the family kitchens converts into full-on a pitha-making corner, such as the

household of Fatema Begum, a 48-year-old woman, who makes different kinds of pithas for herself and her family. "My kids follow the smell of Nolen Gur that comes from my mother's house, and its aroma fills all the house," states Fatema.

A lot of people remember these kinds of moments from their childhood with their mother and siblings.

Throwing a complete curve ball to the routine is Sadman, a 27-year-old graphic designer, who shows the quirky side of winter cravings. "Usually everyone goes for the hot foods, but have any of you tried malai kulfi during shivering cold?" he asks with a mischievous smile.

"It will freeze your brain, and that feeling of numbness hits different. Plus, it reminds me of my childhood with my cousins when we used to sneak from our parents and have ice cream during the winter season," he adds.

Winter in Bangladesh is brief but sweet and memorable to us. What I love most about winter is how tea starts a conversation, coffee blends into late-night thoughts, and hot chocolate brings comfort and self-care. So, when someone asks me what my comfort food for winter is, I could never give them a single answer.

Wrapped in blankets at night while scrolling through photos, it suddenly hits you that winter is not just a season to us. It reminds us to slow down a little, sip something warm and sweet, and spend time with loved ones.

By Faria Nowshin Tazin
Photo: Collected