

Food for the Brain

The Rainbow Rule

Fruit and vegetables are an essential part of everyone's diet. They provide fibre (to help digestion and to fill you up without fattening you), water (to contribute to your 2 litres per day requirement) plus of course, vital vitamins and minerals. These nutrients don't just ward off coughs and colds, they will help improve skin condition and help your liver to detoxify alcohol and caffeine.

Aim to eat at least five servings each day (excluding potatoes, although sweet potatoes do count thanks to their high nutrient content). A serving constitutes around 2 heaped tablespoons. Apply the Rainbow Rule – aim to eat a range of different colours as each colour denotes a different health benefit:

Orange fleshed items like carrots, pumpkins and squashes, sweet potatoes and oranges are very rich in the antioxidant vitamin beta carotene, which is beneficial for the skin and eyes.

Red and purple berries are rich in flavonoids which are potent antioxidants to ward off disease.

Tomatoes are rich in lycopene which helps keep eyes healthy and protects the skin from UV damage from the sun.

Onions and apples contain a plant nutrient called quercetin which helps to reduce inflammation for example from allergies and hayfever.

Dark green leafy vegetables (like spinach, watercress and kale) contain iron – which is vital for blood formation and is particularly important for vegans and women who may be deficient in this mineral.

What to eat and why

Fruit and vegetables cheap ones include apples, pears, bananas, berries, plums, salad leaves, tomatoes, onions, carrots, celery and potatoes	The vitamins and minerals help your brain and body work and play hard
Unrefined carbohydrates like brown rice, wholemeal bread, oat cakes, porridge oats and rye bread	Whole grains are digested slowly to supply a steady stream of energy and avoid energy lows and weight gain
Beans, lentils and pulses like chickpeas, kidney beans and baked beans	High in fibre. Release their energy slowly and steadily to fill you up without fattening you
Eggs poached, scrambled or boiled, or in omelettes	Full of B vitamins to boost your mood and energy levels, plus protein to keep your brain functioning fully. Poach, scramble or boil rather than fry
Oily fish like salmon, trout, mackerel, fresh tuna and sardines	Packed with omega 3 brain-boosting fats. Will also help keep skin soft and supple and hormones

	balanced. NB Canned tuna has the omega 3 fats removed
Nuts and seeds such as pumpkin, sunflower and sesame seeds	Contain essential fats and minerals to boost your brain function and memory
Lean meat such as chicken, turkey, lean (not reconstituted) ham and beef	Good sources of protein to provide brain fuel and help your body repair itself after exercise or partying

What to avoid and why

Sugary foods and drinks	Release sugar very quickly into the blood stream to provide a short-lived buzz - followed by a dip in energy. Prompts the body to store the excess as fat. Also damages cells to lead to ageing and wrinkles as well as rotting teeth!
Refined carbohydrates like white bread, white rice and pasta and chips	Release their sugar very quickly to raise blood sugar levels
Hydrogenated fats (added to some processed foods) and trans fats (from fried food)	Cause weight gain, clog arteries and block brain function. Do not buy products listing hydrogenated fats or partially hydrogenated fats in the ingredients, and limit fried food such as takeaways
Fatty meat and full fat dairy products	Easily stored as fat. Worsens inflammatory conditions like eczema and asthma
Processed food like ready meals, takeaways and confectionary items	Contain artificial additives and preservatives linked to allergies and asthma, as well as sugar and saturated fat which lead to weight gain and decreased energy
Caffeine	Upsets blood sugar balance to disturb energy, concentration and weight
Alcohol	Weight gain. Strains the liver so that it cannot detoxify other substances like hormones, resulting in raised circulating oestrogen levels in women and men