

# HEALTHY EATING FOR EXAM SUCCESS

*Eating well is good for your mental as well as your physical health. The brain requires nutrients just like your heart, lungs or muscles do. But which foods are particularly important to keep our grey matter happy and healthy?*



## Keep calm... and carry on eating

No matter how close your test is, try to keep calm. Stress can have an adverse effect on your appetite and skipping meals won't do your concentration any favours.

Despite the current debate as to whether six small meals a day are better than three, while revising, avoid hunger pangs and eat regularly. Embrace the cliché and make breakfast the most important meal of the day, filling up on energy-giving [oats](#) and also [eggs](#), which contain a nutrient called [choline](#), thought to help cognitive performance and improve memory as we age. For lunch, eat foods with a [low glycemic index](#) to keep you going until dinner. For your last meal of the day, make the most of oily fish, especially [salmon](#). The clever swimmers are a great source of omega-3, an essential fatty-acid, with many [health benefits](#) and are believed to help brain function. Not a fish fan? Try chia or flaxseeds, believed to be the best vegetarian source of omega-3.



## Stay hydrated

Water allows many of the chemical reactions in our bodies to take place and therefore, the speed at which our brains can work and process all those notes will be affected if we become dehydrated. The NHS recommends we aim to drink around 1.2 litres of fluid a day - water being the liquid of choice to keep your body functioning on top form.

## Eat for energy

Tempted to reach for something sweet to get you through the afternoon? Excessive sugar consumption is getting particularly bad press at the moment, and with good reason. The temporary high you'll get from a sugar-fix will be followed quickly by crashing blood sugar levels causing, among other things, fatigue.

Opt instead for healthy snacks, packed with wholefoods like dried fruit nuggets and melon bran pots or, if you can't close your books for long enough to cook, snack on blueberries, blackcurrants and other berries, all full of vitamin C, which is thought to help improve mental agility. Vitamin E and zinc are also thought to have a positive impact on the brain so have a helping of pumpkin seeds and walnuts on hand next time hunger strikes.



# 10 SUPERFOODS

## 1. Wholegrains

Like everything else in your body, the brain cannot work without energy. The ability to concentrate and focus comes from an adequate, steady supply of energy - in the form of glucose in our blood to the brain. Achieve this by choosing wholegrains with a low-GI, which release glucose slowly into the bloodstream, keeping you mentally alert throughout the day. Opt for 'brown' wholegrain cereals, granary bread, rice and pasta.



## 2. Oily fish

Essential fatty acids (EFAs) cannot be made by the body which means they must be obtained through diet. The most effective omega-3 fats occur naturally in oily fish in the form of [EPA and DHA](#). Good plant sources include linseed (flaxseed), soya beans, pumpkin seeds, [walnuts](#) and their oils. These fats are important for healthy brain function, the heart, joints and

and memory loss whilst having sufficient levels of both EPA and DHA is thought to help us manage stress and helps make the good mood brain chemical, serotonin. Consider a supplement if you're vegetarian. Those following a vegan diet may wish to supplement daily with a plant-based omega-3 supplement, and as a vegan don't forget to add seeds like linseed and [chia](#) to your diet.

your general wellbeing. What makes oily fish so good is that they contain the active form of these fats, EPA and DHA, in a ready-made form, which enables the body to use it easily. The main sources of oily fish

include [salmon](#), [trout](#), [mackerel](#), herring, [sardines](#), pilchards and kippers. Low DHA levels have been linked to an increased risk of Alzheimer's disease



## 3. Blueberries

Evidence accumulated at [Tufts University](#) in the United States suggests that the consumption of blueberries may be effective in improving or delaying short term memory loss. They're widely available, but you can also look out for dark red and purple fruits and veg which contain the same protective compounds called anthocyanins.



## 4. Tomatoes

There is good evidence to suggest that lycopene, a powerful antioxidant found in [tomatoes](#), could help protect against the kind of free radical damage to cells which occurs in the development of dementia, particularly Alzheimer's. Favour cooked tomatoes and enjoy with

a little [olive oil](#) to optimise absorption and efficacy.



## 5. Vitamins

Certain [B vitamins](#) - B6, B12 and folic acid - are known to reduce levels of a compound called homocysteine in the blood. Elevated levels of homocysteine are associated with increased risk of stroke, cognitive impairment and Alzheimer's disease. [A study](#) of a group of elderly patients with mild cognitive

impairment found that after two years of intervention with high doses of B6, B12 and folic acid there was significantly less brain shrinkage compared to a subset given placebo treatment. Opt for B-rich foods like [chicken](#), fish, [eggs](#) and leafy greens.

## 6. Blackcurrants

Vitamin C has long been thought to have the power to increase mental agility and protect against age-related brain degeneration including dementia and Alzheimer's. One of the best sources of this vital vitamin are [blackcurrants](#). Others include [red peppers](#), citrus fruits and [broccoli](#).



## 7. Pumpkin seeds

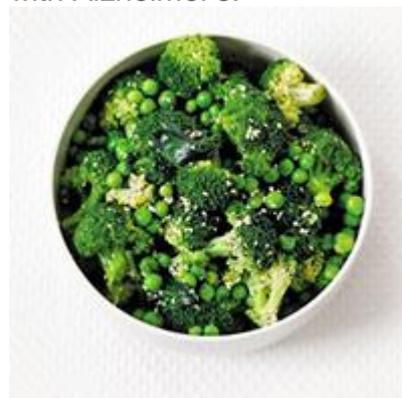
Richer in zinc than many other seeds, pumpkin seeds supply this valuable mineral which is vital for enhancing memory and thinking skills. These little seeds are also full of stress-busting magnesium, B vitamins and tryptophan, the precursor to the good mood chemical serotonin.



## 8. Broccoli

[Broccoli](#) is great source of vitamin K, which is known to enhance cognitive function and improve brainpower. [Researchers have reported](#) that because broccoli is high in compounds called glucosinolates, it can slow the breakdown of the neurotransmitter, acetylcholine, which we need for the central nervous system to perform properly and to keep our brains and our memories sharp. Low

levels of acetylcholine are associated with Alzheimer's.



## 9. Sage

Sage has long had a reputation for improving memory and concentration. Although most studies focus on sage as an essential oil, it could be worth adding fresh sage to your diet too. Add at the end of cooking to protect the beneficial oils



## 10. Nuts

A study published in the American Journal of Epidemiology suggests that a good intake of vitamin E might help to prevent cognitive decline, particularly in the elderly. Nuts are a great source of vitamin E along with leafy green vegetables, asparagus, olives, seeds, eggs, brown rice and wholegrains.



## The importance of exercise

Don't forget that as well as a healthy diet, exercise helps to keep our brains sharp. Research suggests that regular exercise improves cognitive function, slows down the mental aging process and helps us process information more effectively.



**And finally....**

## Get enough sleep

While you want heaps of energy during the day, come bedtime ensure your body and mind are ready to rest. Lack of sleep will make it impossible to understand the detailed theory of X Factor let alone anything else, and you'll be much more likely to reach for a sugary fix to get you through the learning lulls.

Warm milk and herbal teas before bed have a sedative effect, while a carb-rich snack an hour or so before you head upstairs will clear the way for sleep-inducing amino acids to reach the brain.

**With thanks to BBC Good Food!**