

# YOUR GOOD HEALTH

## Brain food Mediterranean diet helps your cognitive health, too, experts say

By Michael Huson

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Adopting a Mediterranean-style diet can help your heart, studies have shown. But a growing body of research is showing that making a habit of eating primarily plant-based foods also could help long-term brain health.

“What we have learned in the past few years is a specific brand of diet, termed Mediterranean diet, has really shown remarkable preservation of brain and the ability to lower one’s risk of stroke, dementia and other cognitive issues, even Parkinson’s disease,” said Dr. B.J. Hicks, an Ohio-Health neurologist and stroke expert.

Certain nutrients found in some fruits, vegetables, grains and legumes can help reduce inflammation in the brain, said Susan Berkman, a registered dietician with Ohio State University’s Wexner Medical Center.

“All fruits and vegetables, in general, contain antioxidants, carotenoids, dietary fiber, vitamin C and many vitamins and minerals,” she said. “And those nutrients seem to have the best impact on this cognitive function.”

Also, monounsaturated fats, found in such things as olive oil and avocados, and the omega-3 fatty acids found in fish can help reduce chronic oxidative stress inflammation in the

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brain.

Diseases related to neurological function, such as Alzheimer’s and dementia, have been shown in studies to be related to this type of inflammation.

But the effects of adhering to a Mediterranean diet on brain health is more of a long-term investment than a quick payoff, said Dr. Brendan Kelley, an associate professor of neurology at Ohio State University.

“Like water dripping into a bucket, you don’t notice. But over time, the bucket becomes full,” he said. “It is going to make a major impact on what your life looks like five or 10 years from now.”

Still, no single food is a magic bullet. Most studies fail to show a connection between a particular food and protective effects on the brain. But an overall diet that displaces more processed foods has been shown to result in positive effects.

“If you really tackle this holistically, and have a true balanced approach to your diet, then you are really in good shape as far as preventing or, at least, lower-



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ing your risk of things like stroke or cognitive impairment, and the data backs that up,” Hicks said.

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The same institute had previously studied the long-term effects that a Mediterranean diet had on reducing the risk of Alzheimer’s disease.

Hicks said a radical change isn’t required to make the switch to a Mediterranean-style diet. “You can still eat healthily and eat hearty at the same time,” he said.

“It shouldn’t be a scary ordeal to try to take on adhering to the Mediterranean diet, and that is what I try to tell my patients when we discuss this.”

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