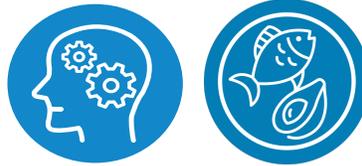


## BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



### Nutrition and Brain Health Part 5: Fish Helps You Think-Across the Lifespan

Nutrition is a core protective factor to promoting brain health and fighting brain illness. Throughout our **BRAIN HEALTH BOOST!** series, the Brain Health Initiative provides information to support your nutritional health-boosting your mood, thinking, immunity, energy level, sleep, stress resilience, and overall physical health. Nutrition makes a difference.

The Brain Health Initiative and researchers from around the world have been studying and taking action on a variety of different lifestyle factors to protect your brain health and optimize your daily performance across the lifespan. Further, the scientists and clinicians investigate factors that reduce your risk of cognitive impairment, Alzheimer's disease, and dementia, as well as other brain illness.

In fact, researchers have been trying to determine the key parts of diet for years. The old news about nutrition and brain health is that the Mediterranean diet is beneficial. As we have shared in previous **BOOSTS**, numerous studies show a diet rich in fruit, vegetables, nuts, olive oil, fish, and whole grains improves cognitive performance. That is all still important, but no study has been able to determine the critical components of the Mediterranean diet that makes it so good for your brain — until now.

The National Institutes of Health evaluated the lifestyles of over 7,750 participants and followed them for 5 to 10 years. Participants filled out questionnaires to determine their eating habits, and participated by phone in cognitive tests of memory, language, and attention. The data was used to determine the dietary factors most important in lowering your risk of cognitive impairment and cognitive decline.

The **new** news is your mother was right: fish *is* good for you. Fish was the single most important dietary factor in lowering the risk of cognitive impairment. Vegetables were second best, and all other foods showed smaller, insignificant effects. Moreover, of all the foods evaluated, only fish was associated with a lower risk of cognitive decline. Eating fish lowered the risk of both cognitive impairment and cognitive decline.

Andrew E. Budson, MD, Chief of Cognitive & Behavioral Neurology at the Veterans Affairs (VA) Boston Healthcare System and lecturer in neurology at Harvard Medical School, says the take away

from this study is to reduce your risk of cognitive impairment and decline, eat a Mediterranean-style diet, including fish several times per week.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO PROTECT YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

There are lots of good fish to eat, including Atlantic mackerel, black sea bass, catfish, clams, cod, crab, crawfish, flounder, haddock, lobster, salmon, sardines, scallops, shrimp, skate, sole, squid, tilapia, trout, and canned light tuna.

Be careful about fish that may have high levels of mercury, such as swordfish and bigeye tuna; these fish should only be eaten rarely.

### Nutritional Value of Fish

The 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans (updated, July 2019) recommends:

- At least 8 ounces of seafood (less for young children) per week based on a 2,000 calorie diet.
- Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding to consume between 8 and 12 ounces of a variety of seafood per week, from choices that are lower in mercury.

**Fish are part of a healthy eating pattern and provide:**

- Protein
- Healthy omega-3 fats (called DHA and EPA)
- More vitamin B12 and vitamin D than any other type of food
- Iron which is important for infants, young children, and women who are pregnant or who could become pregnant
- Other minerals like selenium, zinc, and iodine

| Best Choices<br>EAT 2 TO 3 SERVINGS A WEEK |                                   |  | OR  | Good Choices<br>EAT 1 SERVING A WEEK |  |  |
|--|-----------------------------------|--|---|--------------------------------------|--|--|
| Anchovy                                    | Herring                           | Scallop                                      | Bluefish  | Monkfish                             | Tuna, albacore/<br>white tuna,<br>canned and<br>fresh/frozen |  |
| Atlantic croaker                           | Lobster,<br>American<br>and spiny | Shad   | Buffalofish                                       | Rockfish                             | Tuna, yellowfin  |  |
| Atlantic mackerel                          | Mullet                            | Shrimp                                       | Carp  | Sablefish                            | Weakfish/<br>seatrout  |  |
| Black sea bass                             | Oyster                            | Skate  | Chilean sea bass/<br>Patagonian<br>toothfish      | Sheepshead                           | White croaker/<br>Pacific croaker                            |  |
| Butterfish                                 | Pacific chub<br>mackerel          | Smelt  | Grouper   | Snapper                              |  |  |
| Catfish                                    | Sole                              | Squid  | Spanish mackerel                                  | Striped bass<br>(ocean)              |  |  |
| Clam                                       | Tilapia                           | Trout, freshwater                            | Halibut   | Tilefish (Atlantic<br>Ocean)         |  |  |
| Cod  | Perch,<br>freshwater<br>and ocean |  | Mahi mahi/<br>dolphinfish                         |                                      |  |  |
| Crab                                       | Pickrel                           |  |   |                                      |  |  |
| Crawfish                                   | Plaice                            | Tuna, canned<br>light (includes<br>skipjack) | <b>Choices to Avoid</b><br>HIGHEST MERCURY LEVELS |                                      |  |  |
| Flounder                                   | Pollock                           | Whitefish                                    | King mackerel                                     | Shark                                | Tilefish<br>(Gulf of Mexico)                                 |  |
| Haddock                                    | Salmon                            | Whiting                                      | Marlin  | Swordfish                            | Tuna, bigeye   |  |
| Hake                                       | Sardine                           |  | Orange roughy                                     |                                      |  |  |

\* Some fish caught by family and friends, such as larger carp, catfish, trout and perch, are more likely to have fish advisories due to mercury or other contaminants. State advisories will tell you how often you can safely eat those fish.

www.FDA.gov/fishadvice    www.EPA.gov/fishadvice    EPA United States Environmental Protection Agency    FDA U.S. FOOD & DRUG ADMINISTRATION

View the [U.S. Food and Drug Administration guide to](#) help you know the best fish to eat, updated July, 2019.

So, if your mother ever told you that fish was good for you, she already knew this. It just took the scientific community 50 years to catch up to her and prove it. Mother's know best.

**About the Brain Health Initiative ([www.brainhealthinitiative.org](http://www.brainhealthinitiative.org))**

The Brain Health Initiative (BHI) is a cutting-edge, new approach to protecting brain health and fighting brain illness across the lifespan. The BHI works collaboratively with Massachusetts General Hospital, a Harvard Medical School Teaching Hospital, and the Academy for Brain Health and Performance to build brain healthy communities through education, research, innovation and action, with a specific focus on *brain health promotion, prevention, early detection, evidence-based intervention, and performance optimization*. The BHI is creating a culture that promotes brain health protective factors and decreases risk factors, thereby improving brain health and optimizing brain performance outcomes for the Florida Suncoast region and beyond. Join the brain health movement, because brain health matters, and lifestyle makes a difference. **To view all Brain Health Boosts [click here](#).**