

Nutrition for exams.

Top foods to support the brain:

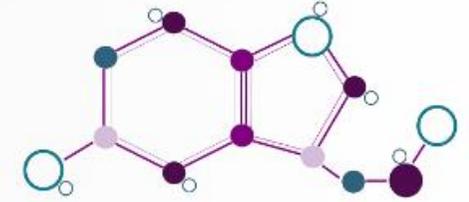
- Eggs are an excellent source of protein which the brain needs to make chemical messengers which help with alertness and concentration.
- Berries are bursting with anti-oxidants called flavonoids, which protect brain cells from oxidative damage. They also help to improve memory, learning, and decision-making.
- Healthy fats found in oily fish such as mackerel, sardines or salmon and plant sources such as chia seeds and walnuts are excellent sources of omega 3 which help with concentration and memory. Walnuts contain a brain messenger called serotonin which helps with mood and ability to learn and remember.
- Nuts such as cashew nuts, walnuts, pistachios and almonds all contain brain boosting nutrients such as proteins, fats, fibre and vitamin B for energy, nerves and memory.
- Avocados are an excellent source of vitamins B, C, E and K, which your brain need. Avocados are high in *tyrosine*, an amino acid that's a precursor to dopamine, the brain chemical that keeps you motivated and focused.
- Dark chocolate from 56% to 70% cocoa stimulates blood flow to the brain to aid memory, attention span and problem-solving.
- Water: Aim for 1.5l to 2 litres water a day. Students who drink water during their exams score up to 10% higher than those who don't". Being hydrated when studying and during exams can help improve concentration and focus.

Worst offenders for the brain:

- Coffee, energy, fizzy drinks contain caffeine increase blood sugar levels causing us to feel great for a short period of time but this feeling soon disappears and leaves us with brain fog, being tired, no energy and poor concentration.
- Reduce Sugary foods: These are loaded with sugar and are linked with brain fog, energy highs and lows and shortened attention span.
- Replace Processed/ ready -made fast foods with home cooked meals. Processed meals are high in trans- fats, salt, additives which can spike blood sugars and affect concentration.

Keep it simple:

- Breakfast is a key for concentration and for slow release of energy needed to tackle exams.
- All meals make sure to include some protein and fat with every carbohydrate meal to stabilise blood sugar levels and to prevent crashes in energy. Protein provides amino acids that create dopamine and norepinephrine *brain chemicals* which make you feel more alert, attentive, and energetic.
- Choose fibre foods such as brown bread, brown pasta, brown rice, porridge for slow release of energy.



Some meal ideas include:

- A bagel with reduced fat spread, peanut butter or cheese.
- Overnight porridge oats soaked with almond milk, berries, nuts and seeds of choice,
- Scrambled eggs, grilled rasher and brown toast,
- Porridge with berries and Greek yoghurt and linseeds,
- Pancakes with berries, greek yogurt and honey. Savoury pancakes with buckwheat flour, red pesto, chicken, spinach and cheese.
- Smoothies for something quick and easy. Chocolate and blueberry smoothie from <https://www.blueberrycouncil.org/blueberry-recipe/chocolate-blueberry-smoothie/>

Healthy snacks include:

- Philadelphia cream cheese on a cracker be it an oat cake or plain cracker.
- Apple slices with nut butter, or with cream cheese or hummus.
- Popcorn or Oatmeal cookies.
- Natural yoghurt and berries and walnuts,
- Home -made energy balls. <http://www.donaldskehan.com/recipes/energy-balls>

Lunch/ Dinners:

- Vegetable soup and brown bread,
- Beans on brown bread toast,
- Chicken / tuna salad wrap and pure fruit smoothie
- Baked beans on whole-grain toast
- Baked potato topped with tinned tuna, baked beans or grated cheese
- Chicken or beef stir fry with noodles
- Egg omelette with cheese and baked potato
- Pasta with tinned tuna topped with cheese
- Chicken Curry and Brown Rice

Lifestyle:

- Water: Keep a glass of fluid (fruit juice, herbal teas, water) within easy reach while studying and take a bottle of water into the exam (if you can).
- To help relieve stress and clear the mind, break up study with short bursts of exercise such as going for a walk, run, cycle, circuit class at the gym or a light training session at the GAA club.