

# Good Food

## What to Eat to Stay Sharp

BY KELSEY KLOSS

**S**chool is starting, but students aren't the only ones who need to pay attention. Lack of sleep, news alerts, the latest celebrity silliness—the list of things that can do a number on your ability to focus is endless. But it's easy to boost your mental power and clear away brain fog by including foods in your diet that affect cognition in a positive way, such as increasing blood flow to the brain or reducing focus-hampering inflammation. Check out this cheat sheet for eats that will help redirect your attention where it belongs.

### APPLES

Feeling spacey and peckish? Reach for a crunchy snack. Findings suggest that repetitive chewing can increase alertness and memory, possibly by raising heart rate and activating parts of the brain involved in cognitive tasks. Though most studies

involved gum, experts suspect that foods that require some time to eat, like fiber-filled apples, could also do the trick. “For even longer-lasting focus, pair an apple with nut butter,” says Frances Largeman-Roth, a registered dietitian nutritionist based in New York City and author of *Eating in Color*. “The combination of carbohydrates and healthy fats provides you with sustained energy that promotes concentration.”

**TRY THIS:** Dunk crisp apple slices into 2 Tbsp crunchy almond butter mixed with 1 tsp honey. Be sure to leave the peel on to prolong chewing time.

### BEETS

Think of beets as a spa treatment for your brain: They're rich in nitrates, compounds that play a role in helping blood vessels relax and expand, allowing ample oxygen-rich blood to reach your head. “Increasing that blood flow may improve brain functions like concentration,” says Eva Selhub, M.D., adjunct scientist in the neuroscience laboratory at the Jean Mayer USDA Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging at Tufts University.

**TRY THIS:** Spread ¼ cup cottage cheese on 1 toasted slice of whole-wheat bread and top with arugula,



a sliced roasted beet, a drizzle of olive oil, and a squeeze of lemon juice.

## WALNUTS

Just  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of walnuts delivers more than twice your recommended daily intake of alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), a plant-based omega-3 fatty acid. Research shows that omega-3s may reduce inflammation and improve brain function, which could help you feel more on point. In fact, adults with higher levels of ALA and other plant-based omega-3s in their blood have been found to perform better on cognitive tests. Plus, these satiating healthy fats will keep distracting hunger at bay.

**TRY THIS:** Cook 1 cup millet; mix with  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup chopped toasted walnuts, chopped cilantro, salt, and black pepper.

## WILD BLUEBERRIES

These bite-size fruits really do sharpen your mind—by providing potent antioxidants that help facilitate brain connections and increase blood flow. But be sure to go wild: “Most of the antioxidants in blueberries are found in the skin,” says Largeman-Roth. “Because of their small size, wild blueberries provide more nutritious skin per serving than conventional supermarket blueberries.” Also, the berries’ fiber regulates blood sugar levels and prevents an energy crash, allowing you to enjoy extended focus and avoid sluggishness.

**TRY THIS:** Blend 1 cup frozen wild blueberries, 1 chopped frozen banana, 1 cup low-fat milk, 1 Tbsp cocoa powder, 1 Tbsp almond butter, and 1 tsp honey for a smoothie that tastes like a decadent chocolate milkshake.