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Health Options
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Monday, January 20, 1999

# Feed your brain for best performance

What part of your body makes you uniquely you? Many people would say it's their mind. And as we get older, we become more aware of how well our mind is functioning or not functioning. We start to notice that it takes longer to remember names. We find ourselves saying things like "I used to know that!" or "Just wait a minute it will come to me!"

We should remember that our minds share similarities with computers, especially the capacity to store large amounts of information. This is also referred to as "seek time". And it's probably the same for our brains. The more information we add, the longer the seek time.

This is the first part of three part series relating to good nutrition for a healthy mind and an active memory. The brain is truly an awesome organ – highly organized and physically complex. Along with its physical complexity, the brain is at least equally chemically complex. Its proper function is dependent on the proper control and speed of a myriad of chemical reactions.

When one or more of these chemical reactions slow down or speed up, changes in mental functions can be noticeably affected. Many factors can potentially affect the brain's chemical reactions. One of these factors is the supply of nutrients and other chemicals take up by the brain from the blood supply.

We tend to take normal brain function for granted until things go wrong. Fortunately, the brain adapts well to changes in nutritional conditions. However, it has its limits.

First of all, the brain needs a steady supply of energy for normal function. Its major fuel is glucose, a sugar molecule derived primarily from high carbohydrate foods like grains, legumes, fruits, and vegetables. If blood glucose runs low, mental tasks can become more difficult. For example, research has demonstrated that when children go to school without breakfast, they are more likely to do worse on mental tests and have more behavior problems.

It is thought that this is related to lower than normal blood glucose (sugar) levels. Glucose is so important for brain function, that if there is no carbohydrate in the diet, the body will draw first on liver glucose stores and then breakdown muscle tissue itself.

Long-term very low muscle mass. The likely result is bad moods and weight regain with an enlarged waistline.

An adequate supply of oxygen also is needed for energy production in virtually all cells of the body, including the brain. Oxygen is carried via our circulation and therefore anything that slows down or prevents oxygen from getting to the brain will decrease the functioning of the brain. Therefore keeping the diet moderate in fat will prevent red blood cells from aggregating and slowing circulation.

Depression, no matter what the cause, can result in memory problems. However, there are a number of vitamin and mineral deficiencies that can cause depression. And this may be a good reason to take a "baseline" vitamin/mineral supplement which contains around 100% or the RDA for each nutrient. This may be especially important if you are not getting an adequate amount of fruits and vegetables in the diet.

Our next column will discuss how taking a vitamin B 12 supplement may not be enough to prevent loss of short term memory or ward off the "symptoms" associated with senility and of Alzheimers disease.

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