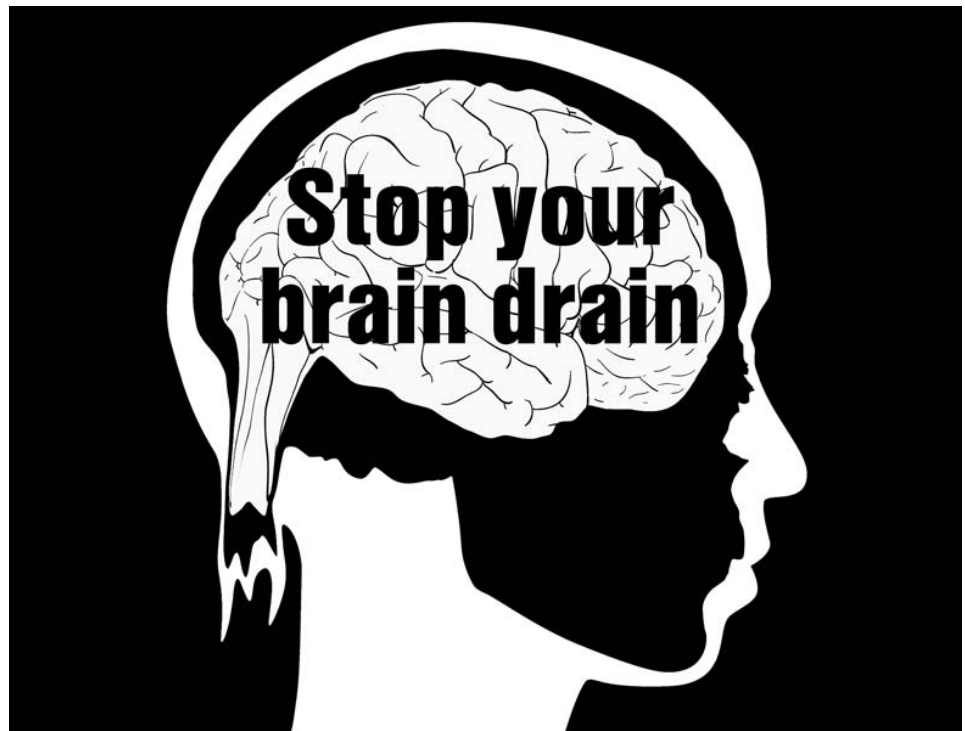


# HEALTH PROMOTION

## HEALTH PROMOTION PROGRAM MANDATE & DISCLAIMER

In accordance with our mandate to provide support activities and facilities for members for the purpose of self-help and self-care, the Positive Living Society BC operates a Health Promotion Program to make available to members up-to-date research and information on treatments, therapies, tests, clinical trials, and medical models associated with AIDS and HIV-related conditions. The intent of this project is to make available to members information they can access as they choose to become knowledgeable partners with their physicians and medical care team in making decisions to promote their health.

The Health Promotion Program endeavours to provide all research and information to members without judgment or prejudice. The program does not recommend, advocate, or endorse the use of any particular treatment or therapy provided as information. The Board, staff, and volunteers of the Positive Living Society BC do not accept the risk of, or the responsibility for, damages, costs, or consequences of any kind which may arise or result from the use of information disseminated through this program. Persons using the information provided do so by their own decisions and hold the Society's Board, staff, and volunteers harmless. Accepting information from this program is deemed to be accepting the terms of this disclaimer.



## **Here are some key foods and nutrients that can help boost brain function**

by Bijal Thoda

**B**rain health is a complex system of structure and function that determines not only cognition, behaviour, and functioning of other body systems, but also memory, mood, emotions, and life itself. No wonder brain health is vital to optimal living.

### **The top brain-boosting nutrients**

Though there's a lot of grey area pertaining to brain and its nutrition, there's broad consensus on the top brain-boosting nutrients:

**Omega-3s.** Essential fatty acids, or "good fats," are crucial for brain development and function. A fatty layer coats brain cells and is crucial to the way the brain works

and transmits signals to various organs. This translates into improved coordination, memory, concentration, and even serves as a natural antidepressant.

**Antioxidants.** Reputed for fighting off the free radicals that damage our system through oxidation, causing degeneration and aging. Aging can manifest as chronic degenerative conditions like Alzheimer's disease, dementia, arthritis, diabetes, and atherosclerosis. Antioxidants such as plant pigments (bioflavonoids, curcumin, lignans, phenols, and indoles), vitamins, minerals, and enzymes (such as super oxide dismutase and glutathione), are some of the best-known anti-aging foods that keep the brain young and healthy.

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**Vitamins and minerals.** Vitamins A, C, D, E, and B-complex, and minerals like calcium, magnesium, zinc, iron, selenium, and manganese, all play distinct and crucial roles in protecting brain health. B-complex controls energy utilization, memory, and cognition. Vitamins A, E, and C are antioxidants and important for brain development. Calcium, magnesium, and vitamin D are integral to signaling in the brain and can speed up reflexes.

**Oxygen.** As with other systems, oxygen is essential to brain function. Iron plays an important role in adequate oxygen supply. Lack of oxygen for even short periods can cause inattentiveness, poor judgment, and memory loss; lack of oxygen for longer durations can be life threatening. Adequate blood flow is vital to ensure enough oxygen supply. Physical activity is an important factor that stimulates blood flow. Vitamins, minerals, thermogenic compounds, and therapies such as acupuncture, body-energy works, thai massage, and naturopathy can help stimulate blood flow. Top oxygen busters include stress and smoking.

**Complex carbohydrates and fibre.** Complex carbs and fibre supply the brain with much needed fuel—glucose—in a consistent and steady fashion. This is vital for the brain to be able to function for long periods of time without getting fogged or dizzy. Since the brain can't store its own fuel, sustained blood sugar levels mean an adequate stream of energy that can help remedy mental exhaustion and fatigue.

**Top brain-boosting foods**

The above brainy nutrients list is just half the story, especially since we fill our plates with food rather than nutrients. So then, what foods pack these nutrients?

**Nuts and seeds.** Walnuts, almonds, pumpkin seeds, sesame seeds, flax seeds, and sunflower seeds are great brain foods.

Don't go by their size—they're powerhouses of omega fatty acids, vitamin E, antioxidants, fibre, protein, and minerals like calcium, zinc, magnesium, and iron. A mixed handful a day is all you need for more focus, mental clarity, and cheerful mood.

**Fish.** With its omega-3 content and protein profile, wild salmon is at the top of the list of foods that protect your brain matter and improve your mood. It's also a source of vitamin D that can kick the depression out of your system.

**Whole grains.** Brown rice, barley, oats, whole wheat, quinoa, and millet contain the goodness of fibre, vitamin B-complex, and selenium that improve energy utilization and memory. So, go for whole grain breads, cereals, and pasta.

**Vegetables and fruits.** Vegetable and fruits—especially berries—tend to be very high in photochemicals, fibre, vitamins, and minerals, plus complex carbohydrates. They improve blood circulation (in particular avocados and leafy greens) and boost oxygenation, learning, memory, mood, and motor skills. Variety is the key, so have a bowl filled with a mix of at least three different brightly coloured vegetables at every meal and have at least two servings of fruit a day.

Finally, cocoa and turmeric have anti-aging properties; as well, cocoa helps lift your brain's endorphin production.

These foods are not only packed with nutrients but are accessible, easy to prepare, and delicious to eat.

So are you ready to stop the brain drain? ☺



*Bijal Thoda is a registered dietitian and Positive Living BC's treatment, health, and wellness coordinator.*

**There are many different ways to get involved!**

**Volunteer @ POSITIVE LIVING BC**

- 1) Volunteer weekly helping out with our many programs & services (Mon-Fri)
- 2) Volunteer at special events, AccoIAIDS Gala, Pride Parade, AIDS Walk for Life
- 3) Volunteer on projects, in meetings or with our *living*☺ magazine

To find out about all volunteer opportunities, contact Marc > 604.893.2298 or [marcs@positivelivingbc.org](mailto:marcs@positivelivingbc.org)

