

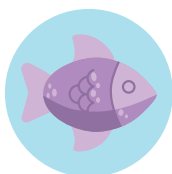
BRAIN HEALTH FOOD GUIDE

A Culturally Adapted Guide for South Asian Communities

Eating well for your brain health means:



- Including a **variety** of healthy foods in moderation
- Focusing on overall **pattern** of healthy eating, not one specific “superfood”
- Eating until you’re **comfortably full** and not stuffed
- Enjoying lots of **fruits and vegetables** including berries and leafy greens (lettuce, kale, and spinach, methi, collard greens, etc). Frozen fruits and vegetables are an equally good option
- Including foods with **healthy fats** such as olive oil or **canola oil** daily



- Choosing **fish, lean chicken, beans,** and **nuts** several times a week
- **Limiting** red and processed meats
- **Limiting** foods high in added sugar and salt such as cakes, cookies, ice cream, fried foods chips, frozen dinners, and canned soups



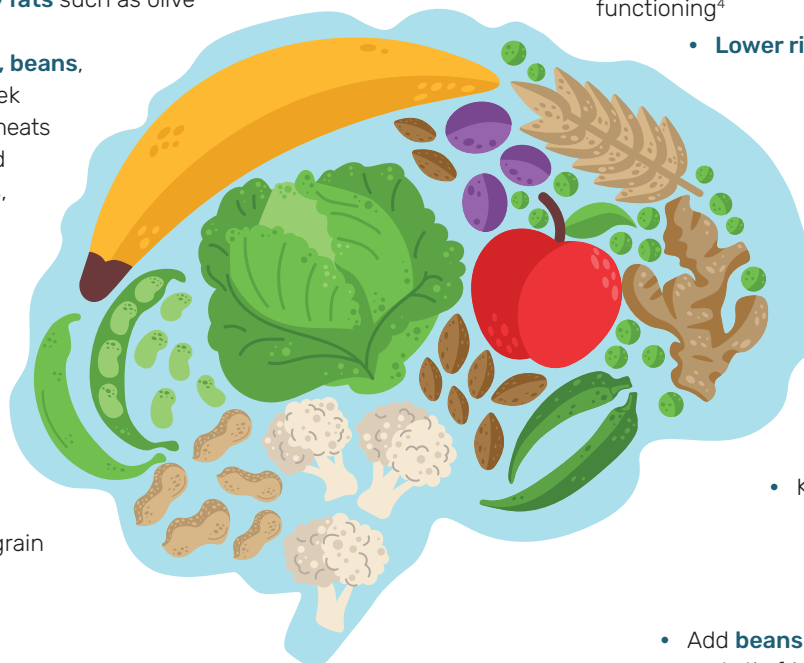
- Choosing dairy products such as milk, yogurt (dahi) that are **low in fat**. For example, choose 1% skim milk instead of whole milk



- Choosing **whole grains** over refined grains. For example, choose whole grain breads and flour instead of white bread



For more resources and recipes, to find a registered dietitian, and to share your feedback, scan the QR code



An Evidence-Based Approach to Healthy Eating for the Aging Brain

Simple diet changes have a powerful effect on brain health

What’s good for the body is also good for the brain.

The Brain Health Food Guide is similar to the eating plans that are recommended to treat other conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, high cholesterol, and high blood pressure.



Studies show that eating a healthy diet is associated with:

- **Better memory abilities**^{1,2}, thinking speed^{1,3}, and improvements in overall brain functioning⁴
- **Lower risk of Alzheimer’s disease** and other dementias⁵

Tips & Tricks

The Brain Health Food Guide includes a variety of healthy foods that supply your brain with the nutrients it needs to function best.

- **Choose colour.** Eat a colourful assortment of fruits and vegetables at each meal
- **Grill, steam, sauté or pan fry** foods instead of deep frying. For example: use of instantpot or pressure cooker



- Keep your kitchen stocked with:
 - Dried or canned **beans** such as **chickpea** and **kidney beans**
 - Frozen or canned **fish**
 - Frozen **vegetables** and **fruits**



- Add **beans** or **lentils** to soups, curries, salads, and stir-fries
- **Snack smart.** Choose nuts, fresh fruits, chopped vegetables, and low-fat yogurt
- **Keep hydrated.** Drink water or other unsweetened drinks including lassi (buttermilk), chai or other types of tea

The Brain Health Food Guide was developed by **Dr. Matthew Parrott** in collaboration with members of the Canadian Consortium on Neurodegeneration in Aging: Team 5 (Nutrition, Exercise and Lifestyle in Alzheimer’s Disease Prevention). This guide has been adapted for South Asian communities through the Alzheimer Society of Alberta and Northwest Territories (ASANT) Cultural Communities Project and CCNA, working in collaboration with members of the South Asian community.

Team 5 Member Organizations: Baycrest Health Sciences, Concordia University, Institut universitaire de gériatrie de Montréal, Centre de recherche du Centre hospitalier de l’Université de Montréal, McGill University, Rotman Research Institute, Montreal Heart Institute, Toronto Metropolitan University, Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, Toronto Rehab/UHN Cardiovascular Rehabilitation Program, Université de Montréal, Université de Sherbrooke, University Health Network, Toronto, University of British Columbia, University of Ottawa, University of Toronto, Waterloo University

Supporting evidence: ¹Shannon, OM, Stephan, BCM, Granic, A, et al. Mediterranean diet adherence and cognitive function in older UK adults: The European Prospective Investigation into Cancer and Nutrition-Norfolk (EPIC-Norfolk) Study. *Am J Clin Nutr*. 2019;110:93943. ²Valls-Pedret C, Sala-Vila A, Serra-Mir, et al. Mediterranean diet and age-related cognitive decline: a randomized trial. *JAMA Internal Medicine*. 2015;175(7):1094-1103. ³Smith PJ, Blumenthal, JA, Babyak MA, et al. Effects of the dietary approaches to stop hypertension diet, exercise, and caloric restriction on neurocognition in overweight adults with high blood pressure. *Hypertension*. 2010;55:1331-1338. ⁴Martinez-Lapiscina, EH, Clavero, P, Toledo, E, et al. Mediterranean diet improves cognition: the PREDIMED-NAVARRA randomized trial. *J Neurol Neurosurg Psychiatry*. 2013;84:1318-1325. ⁵Wu, L, Sun, D. Adherence to Mediterranean diet and risk of developing cognitive disorders: An updated systematic review and meta-analysis of prospective cohort studies. *Scientific Reports*. 2017;7:41317.

FOODS TO INCLUDE	SERVINGS	SERVING SIZE
Vegetables Total	5 or more times a day	
Cruciferous Vegetables (such as broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, kale, cabbage, bok choy)	3 times a week	1/2 cup = 1/2 fist 
Consider Including: Raw Leafy Greens (such as lettuce, spinach, mixed greens, kale, cabbage)	1 time a day	1 cup = 1 fist 
Fruit Total	4 or more times a day	
Consider Including: Berries (fresh or frozen)	3 times a week	1 medium fruit or 1/2 cup = 1/2 fist 
Unsalted Nuts or All-natural Nut Butters Total (such as almond butter, peanut butter)	1 time a day	
Consider Including: Walnuts	4 or more times a week	1/4 cup nuts = 1 cupped hand or 2 tbsp nut butter 
Beans or Legumes Total (such as tofu, chickpeas, kidney beans, lentils, navy beans)	2 or more times a week	1/2 cup = 1/2 fist 
Fish or Seafood Total (not battered or fried)	3 times a week	
Consider Including: Fatty Fish (such as salmon, trout, sardines)	1 or more times a week	3-4oz = 1 palm 



Choose whole grains (such as oats, brown rice, 100% whole wheat or whole grain breads, quinoa, bulgur, barley, whole grain pasta) instead of refined grains (such as white rice, white pasta, white bread)

Use low-fat milk (skim or 1%), yogurt (0-2%), and paneer or cheese (about 22%). Use extra-virgin olive oil as your main culinary oil for cooking, salad dressings, and added to bread and foods

FOODS TO LIMIT	SERVINGS	SERVING SIZE
Any Meat and Poultry Total No more than 1 meal per day should include meat or poultry	1 or less per day	
Consider Limiting: Red and Processed Meats (such as beef, pork, lamb, goat (mutton), sausages, hot dogs, jerky, cold cuts, pepperoni)	Less than 1 per week	3-4oz = 1 palm 
Butter, Cream, or High Fat Dairy Spreads (such as sour cream, cream cheese)	Less than 1 per week	1 tsp butter or 1 tbsp cream 
White Breads (such as all purpose flour (maida), naan, bread, rolls, bagels, pita, tortilla)	1 or less per week	1 slice bread or 1/2 bagel 
Pre-packaged Foods and Meals (such as canned soup, instant noodles, frozen appetizers, and entrees)	3 or less servings per week in total for all these foods	Serving sizes according to the Nutrition Facts table on the food label
Potato Chips, Fries, Pretzels, or other Salty Snacks or Fried Food (pakodas, samosas)		
Store-bought Dairy Desserts (such as mithai (sweets), ice cream, frozen yogurt, pudding, custard)		
Baked Goods (especially store-bought ones such as cookies, muffins, scones, croissants, donuts, cakes, pies)		
Candy, Jaggery and Chocolate		
Pop, Sweetened Fruit Juice or any other Sugary Drink		

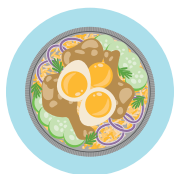


REMEMBER

Trying to change your diet may feel overwhelming. Think of small changes you can make.

CULTURE, CELEBRATION & BRAIN HEALTH

A Culturally Adapted Guide for South Asian Communities



In many families, food is tied to **tradition, hospitality, and connection**, with meals shared across generations and recipes passed down over time. Healthy eating does not mean losing tradition; it can mean making small changes, like using **less oil** or adding **more vegetables**. Cooking together can also be a positive way to respect elders' preferences while talking about health.

You Don't Have to Give Up Your Cultural Foods

Eating for brain health does not mean giving up the foods that connect culture, family, festivals, and traditions. Healthy eating is about overall **patterns** and **consistency**, and many South Asian meals already include many brain-healthy foods like lentils (daal), beans (chana, rajma), vegetables (sabzi), yogurt, herbs, and spices.

You do not have to give up your cultural foods to eat a brain-healthy diet.

Small changes can make traditional meals even more supportive of brain health:

- Choose **whole grains** when possible, for example, brown rice, whole wheat roti, bajra, millet, raagi
- Add **more vegetables** and **plant-based proteins** to meals such as spinach in daal, lentils, soy, beans, chana, or rajma
- **Grill, steam, or pan fry** instead of deep frying and enjoy sweets in moderation during special occasions



Cooking Oils: Ghee & Mustard Oil

Many South Asian kitchens use ghee or mustard oil, and these can still be a part of healthy cooking when used in moderation.



- Use **smaller amounts** of ghee and limit daily use of butter or high-fat dairy spreads
- Mustard oil in moderation and consider rotating with heart-healthy oils, such as **extra virgin olive oil**
- Focus on **reducing excess saturated fat**, such as from palm oil and coconut oil, while keeping flavour and tradition

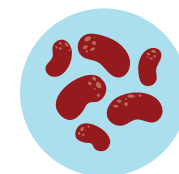


Fasting & Feasting

Many South Asian cultures include periods of **fasting** and **celebration**, such as Ramadan, Navratri, Ekadashi, and other observances.

During fasting periods:

- Focus on **high-fibre** and **complex carbohydrate foods** (lentils, whole grains, vegetables)
- Include **protein** (beans, yogurt, nuts, eggs, fish if appropriate)
- Stay **hydrated** during non-fasting hours, including consuming vegetables and fruits high in water content



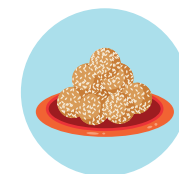
During feasts and celebrations:

- Enjoy cultural foods with family and community
- Practice **mindful portions** and balance richer foods with vegetables and legumes
- Enjoy festive foods in moderation

Sweets & Festive Foods

Desserts such as **gulab jamun, jalebi, sweet mathi, seviyan, rasgulla, rabri, or barfi** are meaningful parts of the celebration. Because these foods are high in added sugar and saturated fat, it is best to:

- Enjoy them occasionally rather than daily
- Choose **smaller portions**
- Balance them with **nutrient-rich meals**



Eating Together Across Generations

In many families meals are **shared across generations** and recipes are passed down over time and food is central to **hospitality** and **connection**.

- Make **gradual recipe adjustments** (less oil, more vegetables)
- Respect elders' preferences while introducing small changes
- Cook together and talk about health in a **positive way**

Healthy eating does not mean losing tradition, it means adapting traditions in ways that support health.

