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Research Corner:

• Nutrition for Your Noggin – Research Shows That High Quality Diet Slows Brain Aging

Editor's Note:

This issue is designed to get everyone all revved up about the new year and making healthier habits. After all of the news about healthcare it is timely to help people be part of their own plan for better health. Happy New Year!

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-- Judy Doherty, MPS, PC
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This soup cooks in about 30 minutes and it is thick and chunky.

Red Lentil Soup

Ingredients:

- 1/2 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
- 1 cup chopped onion
- 3 minced garlic cloves
- 1 can tomato paste (6 ounces)
- 2 tsp ground cumin
- 1 tsp red pepper flakes
- 1 quart low-sodium chicken or vegetable broth
- 2 cups water
- 1 pound red lentils
- 1 cup cubed carrots
- juice of 1 lemon
- parsley for garnish 1 sprig

Directions:

- 1. Sauté the onion and garlic in the olive oil for about 3-5 minutes or until the onion starts to turn translucent.
- Add the tomato paste and seasonings. Stir. Then add the broth, lentils and carrots. Bring to a boil, then lower to a simmer and cover. Cook for 25 - 30 minutes or until the lentils are tender.
- Using a vertical blender, blend about half the soup so part of it is creamy and thick but the rest is chunky. You can also put half of it in a food processor or blender.
- 4. Bring back to the boil. Adjust the seasoning and add the lemon juice.
- 5. Serve hot in bowls garnished with fresh parsley.



Family Salad

Ingredients:

- 8 cups ready-to-serve kale or other greens
- 2 cups cooked farro or brown rice
- 1 sweet potato, microwaved to done (4 minutes), peeled, diced
- 2 avocados, peeled and diced
- 1/4 cup toasted pumpkin seeds
- 1 cup grated carrots
- 1 cup sliced fennel
- 1 cup sliced radishes
- 1 tomato, cut in wedges
- 1/2 cucumber sliced
- 4 hard-boiled eggs, peeled, cut in half
- fresh chives
- Oil and vinegar

Directions:

- 1. Prepare all the ingredients. Arrange on a large platter as shown with the lettuce on the bottom and the ingredients on the top.
- 2. Chill until ready to serve.
- 3. Let everyone gather their own salad and provide a variety of dressings.
- 4. Leftovers make a great lunch the next day.

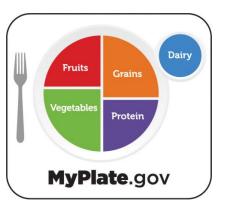
Chef's Tips:

- The work becomes very easy when you use a Japanese mandolin, available affordably online at Amazon or in most cooking stores.
- The idea is to use greens, veggies, roasted squash or sweet potato, a protein item like eggs, and whole grains. Feel free to use what you like or what is seasonal in your area.

Serves 4. Each serving: 181 calories, 4 g fat, 1 g saturated fat, 73 mg cholesterol., 0 g trans fat, 179 mg sodium, 6 g carbohydrate, 0 g fiber, 28 g protein.

12 Months of MyPlate New Year's Resolutions

Here are 12 MyPlate-inspired New Year's resolution ideas to guide you toward healthier eating patterns all year. Adopt one new one each month:



1. January - Fill Half Your Plate with Fruits and Vegetables: Aim to make half your meals colorful and nutritious by incorporating more fresh or frozen produce.

2. February - Choose Whole Grains: Swap refined grains for whole grains like brown rice, quinoa, or whole-grain pasta in at least one meal each day.

3. March- Focus on Lean Proteins: Incorporate lean proteins such as chicken, tofu, beans, or fish in meals and explore new protein options each month.

4. April - Make Dairy or Dairy Alternatives Low-Fat: Opt for low-fat or non-dairy calciumrich alternatives to improve your calcium intake.

5. May - Cut Down on Added Sugars: Limit sweets and processed foods high in added sugars; consider replacing sugary drinks with water or infused water.

6. June - Stay Hydrated: Drink plenty of water throughout the day to support metabolism and digestion.

7. July - Control Portion Sizes: Be mindful of portions to avoid overeating, especially with high-calorie foods. Practice measuring ice cream, cereal, pasta, etc. each time you dish up. Stick to a half cup or one cup serving instead of "filling up the bowl."

8. August - Plan Your Meals: Plan weekly meals that align with MyPlate's recommendations to ensure balanced nutrition and make a shopping list. Now you are ready to cook each night!

9. September - Snack Smarter: Choose nutrient-dense snacks like fruits, vegetables with hummus, or nuts instead of chips or sweets. Prep at least 3 so you have smarter snacks each week.

10. October - Reduce Sodium Intake: Experiment with herbs, spices, and other natural seasonings instead of salt when preparing meals. Read food labels to choose the lowest sodium options for ingredients. Look for "no-added-salt" or "low in sodium" on the label. This especially applies to any processed/packaged foods that come in boxes, cans, and freezer packaging.

11. November - Eat Seafood Twice a Week: Make it a goal to add seafood to your weekly meal plan, as it is a good source of omega-3 fatty acids and lean protein.

12. December - Cook at Home More Often: Commit to preparing more meals at home, giving you greater control over ingredients, portion sizes, and food choices. Try cooking a new MyPlate-inspired recipe each week!

Each of these resolutions helps align your eating habits with MyPlate guidelines, supporting a balanced and nutritious diet for the new year!

Win the Battle Over Your Sweet Tooth

Reducing sugar intake can improve overall health and reduce the risk of issues like obesity, diabetes, and tooth decay. Yet it is easier said than done! Sugar is added to many processed foods, meals eaten away from home, beverages, and many favorite desserts and snack foods. Here are some practical tips to help you cut down:



1. Size down

If you are purchasing desserts, consider smaller quantities, like one slice of cake or a small pint of ice cream per person, instead of large sizes often sold in grocery bakeries.

2. Make unsweetened yogurt and fresh fruit parfaits for dessert

Invent a fun yogurt and fresh fruit snack instead of packaged desserts and treats.

3. Swap it out

Opt for whole fruits instead of sugary snacks or desserts. They provide natural sweetness along with fiber and nutrients.

4. Drink smarter

Swap sodas, energy drinks, and sweetened teas for water, herbal teas, or sparkling water with a splash of fruit juice. Instead of adding sugar and syrup to your coffee, consider adding a spice like cinnamon so you have a flavor without all of the sugar. Gradually shift from drinking fruit juice to eating whole fruits.

5. Play hide-n-seek

Common foods like ketchup, salad dressings, flavored yogurts, and breakfast cereals often contain added sugars. Look for unsweetened or low-sugar versions. Check the nutritional information on packaged foods to identify added sugars (e.g., sucrose, high-fructose corn syrup, maltose, dextrose).

Use natural nut butter without added sugars instead of sweetened varieties.

6. Desserts are occasional treats

Reserve sugary desserts for special occasions rather than everyday consumption. Consider healthier dessert options, like yogurt with fresh fruit or dark chocolate.

7. Meal planning

Regular, balanced meals can help reduce sugar cravings. Include proteins, healthy fats, and whole grains to stabilize your blood sugar levels.

8. Crave strategies

Drink water when you crave sugar—thirst can sometimes be mistaken for a sugar craving. Distract yourself with a walk, reading, or another activity to let the craving pass.

9. Write it down

Track your intake to stay motivated.

Set realistic goals and reward yourself for progress (not with sugary treats). Keep track of how many sweets you consume in a day. It might surprise you.

Is This Recipe Healthy?

Evaluating whether a recipe is healthy can be done by looking at a few key aspects:

1. Are the key ingredients whole or processed?:

- **Based On Whole Foods**: Recipes based on whole foods (vegetables, fruits, whole grains, lean proteins, and healthy fats) are generally nutritious and high in fiber.
- Avoid Processed: Avoid recipes that are based on highly processed ingredients like oils, fats, salt, sugar, white flour and processed meats. Examples are biscuit or baking mixes, pudding, ice cream, canned soups, processed meats, sausage, cereals, cookies, crackers, etc.

2. Evaluate Macronutrients:

- **Proteins**: A healthy recipe often includes a source of heart-healthy protein, like lean meats, fish, beans, lentils, tofu, or eggs.
- **Healthy Fats**: Healthy fats (from olive oil, avocado, nuts, seeds, etc.) are preferable to bacon fat, butter, shortening, cheese, and margarine.
- Whole Grains: Opt for whole grains (brown rice, quinoa, oats) over refined grains (white rice, white flour), which help maintain steady energy levels and support digestive health.
- **Fiber-Rich Plant Foods**: Fiber helps with satiety, digestion, and blood sugar control. Aim for recipes with high-fiber ingredients like vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and legumes.

3. Limit Added Sugars and Salt:

- Check for added sugars and salt, which can increase the calorie content and affect health if consumed in excess.
- Salt is added to many sauces, soups, broths, frozen foods, canned goods, and condiments so read the labels on these and choose items with no added salt or that are low in sodium.
- Natural sweeteners like fruit can be better choices, and herbs/spices often enhance flavor without added salt.

4. Consider The Cooking Method:

• Healthier recipes often use cooking methods like baking, air-frying, boiling, steaming, grilling, or roasting rather than deep-frying or pan-frying in large amounts of oil.

5. Look at Nutritional Information (if available):

A balanced recipe often has a reasonable calorie range per serving, low saturated fat, limited added sugars, and moderate sodium. Protein, fiber, vitamins, and minerals (like calcium and iron) can enhance the recipe's health benefits.

If a recipe has whole, unprocessed ingredients and balanced macronutrients, and it uses healthy cooking methods, it's likely to be a nutritious choice!

It is usually easy to adapt most recipes to be healthier by reducing the fat, using whole grains, adding more vegetables, and substituting no-added-salt ingredients.





10 Strategies to Balance Screen Time

Cell phones can interrupt daily life in numerous ways, from disrupting conversations and work meetings to interfering with focus during tasks. Constant notifications, calls, and messages can lead to reduced productivity, fragmented attention, and even stress. In social settings, frequent cell phone interruptions may weaken interpersonal connections and hinder meaningful interactions. Managing interruptions by setting boundaries, silencing unnecessary notifications, and practicing mindful usage can help maintain focus and preserve valuable moments of connection.

Here are ten strategies to balance use at home, school, and work:

1.Set Time Limits: Use apps or built-in phone features to set daily screen time limits for non-essential activities.

2.Create Tech-Free Zones: Designate areas like the dining table, meeting room, or classroom as no-phone zones to encourage offline interaction.

3.Use Do Not Disturb Mode: Limit notifications during focused activities or before bed to reduce distractions.

4.Schedule Screen-Free Hours: Allocate specific times, such as during meetings, meals, class, or before bedtime, to unplug from screens.

5.Prioritize Real-Life Activities: Engage in hobbies, exercise, or spend time outdoors to reduce reliance on your phone.

6.Turn Off Unnecessary Notifications: Disable alerts for apps that don't need immediate attention to reduce phone checking.

7.Set Goals for Screen Use: Use your phone intentionally for productive tasks, like learning or connecting with loved ones.

8.Monitor Screen Time: Regularly review your phone's usage report to identify patterns and make adjustments.

9.Use One Device at a Time: Avoid multitasking with multiple screens, like watching TV while scrolling on your phone.

10.Lead by Example: If balancing screen time for your family, model healthy phone habits for children and others.

These practices can help foster a healthier relationship with your phone and improve overall well-being.

Less added sugar? Less aging!

You can use all the anti-aging creams you'd like, but a younger biological age may come from the inside out. New research out of UC San Francisco discovered a connection between a nutrient-dense diet low in added sugar and younger biological age at the cellular level. The research was published July 29 in JAMA Network Open.



Researchers examined how three different evaluations of healthy eating impacted an "**epigenetic clock**" -- a biochemical test that can estimate health and lifespan. They discovered that the better people ate, the younger their cells appeared. However, despite eating a healthy diet, an increase in epigenetic age was seen with each gram of added sugar they consumed.

Dorothy Chiu, PhD, a postdoctoral scholar at the UCSF Osher Center for Integrative Health and first author of the study noted, "The diets we examined align with existing recommendations for preventing disease and promoting health, and they highlight the potency of antioxidant and anti-inflammatory nutrients in particular. **From a lifestyle medicine standpoint, it is empowering to see how heeding these recommendations may promote a younger cellular age relative to chronological age.**"

Chiu's study **is initial research to connect the dots between added sugar and epigenetic aging**, and the first to evaluate the association in a heterogeneous group of both black and white women in midlife. Other research in this area included older white subjects.

The research helps support the concept of why sugar is so bad for health, notes study co-senior author Elissa Epel, PhD, a UCSF professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences.

Epel said, "We knew that high levels of added sugars are linked to worsened metabolic health and early disease, possibly more than any other dietary factor. Now we know that accelerated epigenetic aging is underlying this relationship, and this is likely one of many ways that excessive sugar intake limits healthy longevity."

Participants in the research reported eating on average about 61.5 grams of added sugar each day. The range for women was from 2.7 to 316 grams of added sugar each day. A chocolate bar has roughly 25 grams of added sugar, and a 12-ounce regular cola contains nearly 40 grams. The US Food and Drug Administration recommends no more than 50 grams of added sugar daily.

Use of Food Records

In this cross-sectional study, researchers evaluated food records from 342 Black and white female subjects with an average age of 39 years in Northern California. They then compared their diets with epigenetic clock measures, which were taken from saliva samples.

Women's diets were scored by the researchers to see how they compared to a Mediterranean-style diet high in anti-inflammatory and antioxidant foods and then to a diet associated with a lower risk for chronic disease.

Finally, the women's diets were scored against a measure they developed called the "Epigenetic Nutrient Index (ENI)," which is based on nutrients (not foods) that have been associated with anti-oxidative or anti-inflammatory processes and DNA maintenance and repair. Vitamins A, C, B12, and E, folate, selenium, magnesium, dietary fiber, and isoflavones were among those included.

Following the Mediterranean diet had the strongest link with lower epigenetic age, though any of the diets were significantly associated with lower epigenetic age. The researchers separately evaluated sugar consumption and found that eating foods with added sugar was linked with accelerated biological aging, even when consuming an otherwise healthy diet.

The Bottom Line: You Can Reverse the Clock

Senior author Barbara Laraia, PhD, RD, a UC Berkeley professor in the Food, Nutrition and Population Health program states, "Given that epigenetic patterns appear to be reversible, it may be that eliminating 10 grams of added sugar per day is akin to turning back the biological clock by 2.4 months, if sustained over time. Focusing on foods that are high in key nutrients and low in added sugars may be a new way to help motivate people to eat well for longevity."

Lower Your Biological Age With A Better Eating Plan



Below are tips to de-sugar your diet:

1. Get visual. Note that every 4 grams of added sugar listed on a food label equals one teaspoon.

2. Start your morning with a low-sugar breakfast. Skip the granola and look for cereal under 5 grams of sugar per serving. Rolled oats, shredded wheat, or bran flakes are low-sugar choices.

3. Go for plain Greek yogurt over the type with "fruit" on the bottom or add-ins like granola or mini chocolate pieces. Add frozen fruit and chopped nuts instead.

4. Swap flavored seltzer water for sugary sweet soda. You'll drop 10 grams of sugar from your diet instantly. While you're at it, skip the sweetened sports drinks, too.

5. Skip the sugary snacks between meals, like granola bars, cookies, and candy. Opt for mixed nuts, string cheese, or Greek yogurt and fruit.

6. Add milk to coffee instead of sugar or sugar substitutes.

7. Choose fresh or dried fruit after meals instead of heavy desserts.

8. Don't shop when you're hungry. Sweet treats tend to be placed at the store entrance and are more tempting when you're hungry.

9. Include a variety of fruits and vegetables at every meal to increase nutrient intake.

10. Don't forget that honey, jelly, jam, and maple syrup also count as added sugar in your diet.

By Lisa Andrews, MEd, RD, LD

Nutrition for your noggin- key nutrients may slow brain aging

Most of us know at least one family member or friend who has developed dementia over their lifetime. With no cure and limited testing ability to detect it early, prevention of this devastating disease is crucial.

Researchers have been studying risk factors for accelerated brain aging but little was known about the prevention of cognitive decline. A new study published in Nature Publishing Group Aging, from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Center for Brain, Biology and Behavior and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign identifies certain nutrients that may aid in healthier brain aging.

Led by Aron Barbey, director of the Center for Brain, Biology and Behavior, with Jisheng Wu, a doctoral student at Nebraska, and Christopher Zwilling, research scientist at UIUC, led the multimodal study, which included state-of-the-art developments in neuroscience and nutritional science. It discovered a specific nutrient profile in subjects who performed better in cognitive tests.

The study included 100 healthy subjects aged 65 to 75 without cognitive decline who filled out a questionnaire with demographic information, body measurements, and physical activity. Blood samples were collected following a fasting period to evaluate the nutrient biomarkers. Subjects also had cognitive assessments and MRI scans. The testing showed two types of brain aging among the subjects -- accelerated and slower-than-expected. Individuals with slower brain aging had a specific nutrient profile.

Biomarkers found to be beneficial included fatty acids (vaccenic, gondoic, alpha linolenic, elcosapentaenoic, eicosadienoic and lignoceric acids); antioxidants and carotenoids including cis-lutein, trans-lutein, and zeaxanthin; two forms of vitamin E and choline. This profile is associated with nutrients in the Mediterranean diet, which research has previously linked with healthy brain aging.

"We investigated specific nutrient biomarkers, such as fatty acid profiles, known in nutritional science to potentially offer health benefits. This aligns with the extensive body of research in the field demonstrating the positive health effects of the Mediterranean Diet, which emphasizes foods rich in these beneficial nutrients," Barbey, Mildred Francis Thompson Professor of Psychology, said. "The present study identifies particular nutrient biomarker patterns that are promising and have favorable associations with measures of cognitive performance and brain health.".

According to Barbey, past nutrition research on brain aging has typically depended on using food frequency questionnaires, which rely on subjects' recall. This is one of the first and biggest studies to use brain imaging, blood biomarkers, and cognitive assessments.

Barbey notes, "The unique aspect of our study lies in its comprehensive approach, integrating data on nutrition, cognitive function, and brain imaging. This allows us to build a more robust understanding of the relationship between these factors. We move beyond simply measuring cognitive performance with traditional neuropsychological tests. Instead, we simultaneously examine brain structure, function, and metabolism, demonstrating a direct link between these brain properties and cognitive abilities. Furthermore, we show that these brain properties are directly linked to diet and nutrition, as revealed by the patterns observed in nutrient biomarkers."

Barbey's team will continue to assess this nutrient profile and its relationship to aging in the brain. He notes it's possible that his finding will help to create therapies to promote brain health.

"An important next step involves conducting randomized controlled trials. In these trials, we will isolate specific nutrients with favorable associations with cognitive function and brain health, and administer them in the form of nutraceuticals," Barbey said. "This will allow us to definitively assess whether increasing the levels of these specific nutrient profiles reliably leads to improvements in cognitive test performance and measures of brain structure, function, and metabolism."

Barbey is in the process of co-editing a collection for the Journal of Nutrition, "Nutrition and the Brain -- Exploring Pathways to Optimal Brain Health Through Nutrition," which is seeking submissions for consideration. Articles will start publishing next year.

He notes, "There's immense scientific and medical interest in understanding the profound impact of nutrition on brain health. Recognizing this, the National Institutes of Health recently launched a ten-year strategic plan to significantly accelerate nutrition research. Our work directly aligns with this critical initiative, aiming to contribute valuable insights into how dietary patterns influence brain health and cognitive function." 1

To protect your noggin, consider the tips below to obtain key protective nutrients:

- Sip on green tea or coffee for powerful polyphenols and phytochemicals to protect your brain.
- Include eggs in your diet a few times per week for adequate choline.
- Add **spinach or chopped kale** to eggs (or other dishes) to obtain antioxidants and carotenoids, including cis-lutein, trans-lutein, and zeaxanthin.
- Use **avocado and extra-virgin olive oil** in salad dressing, marinades, or for cooking. These contain essential fatty acids as well as monounsaturated fat.
- Enjoy **blueberries** for anthocyanin, an antioxidant that has been found to reduce signs of brain aging. 2
- Choose whole grains like whole wheat pasta, brown rice, bulgur, farro, and quinoa. These aid in blood sugar management, which may aid in dementia prevention. More research is needed to show improvements in cognition. 3
- Eat more plant-based foods. Including more fruits, vegetables, beans, nuts, and seeds may aid in preventing dementia. 4
- Include **fatty fish** in your diet as well as ground flaxseeds or walnuts for omega-3 fatty acids. 5
- Limit alcohol, as heavy use has been associated with changes in brain structure and risk for dementia. Moderation is 1 drink per day for women and 2 drinks per day for men.
 6
- **Reduce ultra-processed foods**, including fast food, heavily processed snacks, and sugar-sweetened beverages, which have been linked with cognitive decline. 7

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Executive Editor Judy Doherty, PC II

Copy Editor Stephanie Ronco

Contributing Writers

James J. Kenney, PhD, FACN Jill Weisenberger, MS, RDN, CDE, FAND, CHWC Lisa Andrews, MS, RD Hollis Bass, MEd, RD Lynn Grieger RDN, CDE, CPT, CWC Beth Rosen, MS Cheryle Syracuse, MS

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