



When you're juggling work with study, it's crucial to keep your mind sharp and memory agile. To boost your brainpower and improve your revision effectiveness, look no further than Tina Nielsen's round-up of the six best brain foods

KALE

This curly green vegetable is not only one of the trendiest foods of 2014, it is packed with brain-boosting nutrients. One of these is manganese, a trace mineral that helps synthesise fatty acids, which are crucial for a healthy brain. Kale's high content of L-tyrosine also keeps your memory sharp and boosts your ability to solve problems. Better yet, it is rich in vitamin K, which supports the brain and nervous system. And it is excellent source of carotenoids, that are linked to your levels of optimism.

Serving suggestion: For the ultimate breakfast smoothie, blitz a handful of kale, some blueberries, a small banana, and a splash of almond milk in a blender.

DARK CHOCOLATE

It is hard to distinguish between myth and fact here. We'd like chocolate to be good for us, but is it simply wishful thinking? Not according to researchers at the University of Nottingham. Their studies found that women who drank one cup of flavanol-rich cocoa a day for five days experienced increased blood flow to key parts of the brain. This, in turn, meant that the brain received more oxygen and nutrients. For a few hours afterwards, the women also experienced improved alertness and performance on certain tasks. But with the science behind these benefits still a bit sketchy, it could simply be that the boost in alertness is related to the pleasure we get from eating chocolate. Either way, always remember to eat it in moderation.

Serving suggestion: A small bar of Green & Black's 70% cocoa chocolate and a handful of raspberries and goji berries. Need we say more?

Did you know... that your brain is made up of 60% fat? Or that it needs certain types of fats to function properly and keep it flexible? So make sure your diet is well balanced and includes some high-quality fats, including omega-3.

WALNUTS

These brain-shaped nuts are tipped to be the ultimate brain food. The reason? They are incredibly rich in omega-3 fatty acids, which help the brain function. If exam stress and other worries are keeping you awake at night, walnuts can help as they are known to triple melatonin levels, which gives relief from insomnia. A study carried out at Purdue University in the US found that children with a lower level of omega-3 fatty acids were more exposed to risk of hyperactivity, learning disorders and behavioural problems. So walnuts are one route to a more focused, calmer mind.

Serving suggestion: Walnuts make a great addition to most salads. Toss a handful into a bowl, add two heads of chicory (quartered), a quarter of a red onion (finely sliced) and a chopped apple. Drizzle with a mustard-based salad dressing and crumble a little feta cheese on top to serve.

SAGE

For a better memory, serve up sage – or so the old saying goes. And there is some truth in it, as sage is believed to improve your memory. This is because sage is packed with antioxidants. When you're stressed your body produces fewer of them, which in turn affects the way your brain works. Researchers from the Medicinal Plant Research Centre, based at the universities of Newcastle and Northumbria, found that sage also helps boost your memory. During a word recall test on 44 healthy adults, those who had eaten sage oil beforehand scored better across the board, recalling between 8% and 10% more words than those who hadn't.

Serving suggestion: Need a quick-fix revision boost? Switch your usual builder's brew for brain-sharpening sage tea. Bring a pan of water to the boil and add a teaspoon of dried sage or a tablespoon of fresh sage. Brew for three minutes, then strain.

Did you know... that regular exercise keeps the brain limber? Even short 30-minute cardio sessions pump extra blood to your brain, delivering the oxygen and relevant nutrients required for it to perform at maximum efficiency. Cardio also floods the brain with chemicals that enhance functions such as memory, problem-solving and decision-making.

PUMPKIN SEEDS

Munching on roasted pumpkin seeds during a lengthy exam could give you a much-needed boost when you start flagging. That's because pumpkin seeds are one of a few true "super foods", in other words foods that have a significantly-high nutritional value. Like kale, pumpkin seeds have a high content of manganese and are also packed with magnesium and phosphorus. These super seeds are also rich in omega-3 and omega-6, known for improving mental health, aiding memory and supporting healthy brain development. On top of all that, pumpkin seeds are a rich source of zinc (which has various benefits including boosting your immune levels), and are also known to have anti-depressant type properties and contain tryptophan, a precursor to serotonin, which helps you get a good night's sleep.

Serving suggestion: Not sure what to do with leftover pumpkin seeds? Simply rinse off the pumpkin flesh, let the seeds simmer in a pan of boiling salted water for 10 minutes, drain them and spread them over a roasting tin. Drizzle with a little olive oil and roast at 400F/200C for 15 minutes.

OILY FISH

There is robust science behind the claims that oily fish is good for your brain in the long term. As is the case with many other brain foods, it is all to do with the omega-3 fatty acids that are a large component of brain cells. They keep the lining of brain cells flexible so memory messages can pass easily between them. A US study of 1,111 women found that high levels of omega-3 could actually result in a larger brain over time. This effect on brain volume, according to the researchers, is the equivalent of delaying the normal loss of brain cells that comes with ageing by one to two years. Excellent sources of omega-3 include salmon, sardines, trout, tuna, herring, mackerel and anchovies.

Serving suggestion: For a tasty sardine escabeche (it's easier to make than it sounds), fry two sardines in olive oil for two minutes on each side. Serve them on a bed of sautéed onions and carrots, mixed with fresh coriander and a little white wine vinegar.

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ARE CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS WELL BALANCED?

The results of CABA's annual Wellbeing Survey are in. Lucy Whitehall, wellbeing manager, says what they mean for ACA students

"Wellbeing" is one of the hot topics of the moment and something that is being discussed more and more in accountancy. Which is why, earlier this year, CABA launched its second annual *Wellbeing Survey*, looking at the mental and physical health of chartered accountants. Almost 1,000 accountants were questioned and results are broken down into six categories; emotional, financial, physical, friends and family, community and career. They show that now, more than ever, those entering the profession need to learn to look after their personal wellbeing if they are to thrive. Here are some of the most interesting results.

Watch out for weighty problems

Weight concerns and a lack of exercise are the main health concerns of accountants. As someone just setting out in your career, now could be a good time to get into the habit of eating healthily and staying active. CABA can provide advice about making improvements in this area.

Learn to cope with stress

Stress is a common theme among accountants – 32% feel stressed in their day-to-day life and 15% have taken time off work because of it. However, stress is something that can be managed and CABA offers highly-effective courses and advice that help to build resilience.

Feel secure

Good news! The financial security of accountants has increased in the past year; 24% now feel "extremely secure" against 18% a year earlier. Signs are strong that those entering accountancy can look forward to a secure future.

Use your personal support network

You've probably got family and friends who you can call in times of need and the survey shows that 92% of accountants feel that their personal support networks are very important to them. However, if you need further support, chartered accountants and their immediate family can turn to CABA throughout their training, career and retirement.

For more on CABA's Wellbeing Survey, visit caba.org.uk/wsresults