

# AUSTRALIAN Ageing Agenda MENU →

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by February 22, 2019

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## Diet improves brain function over time



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## Stories added to your shortlist:

There are no known ways to prevent or cure dementia, but researchers are learning more about what might help stave it off, including diet.

What is known is that environmental factors such as obesity, high blood pressure and lack of exercise increase the likelihood of Alzheimer's disease, the most common form of dementia.

Such factors are all influenced by diet, indicating that sort food people consume plays a role.

Exactly which foods are beneficial is contentious and the research is full of conflicting evidence. However, a new collaboration between Australian researchers attempts to bring some clarity to the question.

### Positive link between healthy diets and better brain function

Experts from the UNSW Sydney's Centre for Healthy Brain Ageing (CHeBA), the Dementia Centre for Research Collaboration (DCRC) and the Nutrition and Dietetics Group at the University of Sydney have brought together evidence and published a [review < https://content.iospress.com/articles/journal-of-alzheimers-disease/jad180468 >](https://content.iospress.com/articles/journal-of-alzheimers-disease/jad180468) in the Journal of Alzheimer's Disease that confirms a positive link between healthy dietary patterns and better brain function in healthy adults.

Professor Henry Brodaty

Co-author and co-director of the CHeBA, Professor Henry Brodaty, says there's no magic nutrient or supplement that promotes brain health and acknowledges the existing body of research seems inconsistent.

However a key seems to be the pattern of what people eat over time, and interactions between beneficial bioactive nutrients.

"What seems clear is that people following a healthy diet over time will have less cognitive decline than people eating processed food, though of course there are confounding factors," he says.

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### Stories added to your shortlist:

Overall the findings of the review support positive links between brain health and diets that are plant based, rich in poly- and mono-unsaturated fatty acids and a reduced amount of processed food.

Prof Brodaty singles out the Mediterranean diet, one that has been linked with brain health for years.

“It’s not necessarily that you have to go and live in Italy to eat this diet,” he says. “It’s really a pattern of food that includes a high number of vegetables, nuts, seeds, legumes and fruit with healthy oils (particularly extra virgin olive oil), with moderate amounts of fish, poultry and dairy, and only small amounts of red meat.”

And source your nutrients through food rather than supplements wherever possible, he adds, which is always more beneficial.

Obesity and Type 2 diabetes are both risk factors for dementia, raising concerns this could contribute to increasing rates of dementia in the future.

But adopting new dietary patterns could add a few more years of healthy brain function.

“Eating well has all kind of benefits, as does physical exercise – less diabetes, less hypertension, less heart disease, better bones, better muscles – you don’t have so many falls or fractures, better mood and better cognition.

“You don’t have to be at risk of dementia to adopt this lifestyle,” he says.

**Read more here:**

[Another reason not to hate Brussels sprouts < https://australianageingagenda.com.au/2018/09/19/falls-prevention-another-reason-not-to-hate-brussels-sprouts/>](https://australianageingagenda.com.au/2018/09/19/falls-prevention-another-reason-not-to-hate-brussels-sprouts/)

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