Sharpen Your Mind With Peanuts

New research shows peanuts improve cognitive function

*food for thought* VOLUME 21.2

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**IF** you’re looking for a snack to power your day and sharpen your mind, consider grabbing a handful of peanuts. Research from the University of South Australia shows that eating 2-3 oz of peanuts per day improves cognitive function and blood circulation in the brain.1 After just 12 weeks, participants improved their short-term memory, their ability to process and respond to new information, and their brain’s ability to connect and retrieve words. This study, published in the journal Nutritional Neuroscience, shows that when it comes to keeping your mind sharp, peanuts may hold the key.

Cognitive decline is a hallmark of both obesity and aging. The researchers of this study sought to determine if peanuts, which contain an abundance of health-promoting nutrients and bioactives, could prevent a decline in brain function in an overweight, aging population.

Sixty-one middle-aged volunteers, who were overweight but otherwise healthy, were recruited for this study. Participants consumed 2-3 oz of peanuts six days per week for 12 weeks. To determine the impact of peanuts on brain function, researchers assessed a series of cognitive abilities that typically decline with age. Results from measurements taken at the beginning of the study were compared to those obtained after the 12-week peanut intervention.

The simple act of adding peanuts to the participants’ diets led to improvements in several parameters of brain function. Short-term memory and verbal fluency, or the brain’s ability to connect and retrieve words, were improved with peanut consumption. In addition, peanuts improved participants’ processing speed, or the ability to process and respond to new information. These findings are significant because they were observed in healthy adults that showed no signs of cognitive impairment. This means that even healthy brains can benefit from peanuts!

Researchers think that these improvements in brain function are a result of improved blood flow and delivery of bioactive compounds to the brain. After 12 weeks, peanuts improved the participants’ small artery elasticity and cerebrovascular reactivity. Elasticity and reactivity reflect the blood vessels’ ability to adjust blood flow as needed, and are an essential component of normal, healthy blood circulation.

Overall, this study shows that peanuts improve cognitive function and blood flow in the brain. To protect your brain against age-related cognitive decline, try replacing your afternoon snack with a handful of peanuts, or add peanuts to a vegetable stir-fry.

**Peanuts promote blood flow in the brain, leading to:**

- **Improved short-term memory**
- **Increased verbal fluency:** Ability to connect and retrieve words
- **Improved processing speed:** Ability to take in and respond to new information
Peanuts: A Smart Choice!

Research from the University of South Australia is the first to show that adding peanuts to a typical diet can improve measures of cognitive function and circulation in the brain in as little as 12 weeks. However, several studies have also shown that long-term consumption of peanuts and some other nuts are great for promoting brain health.

Over time, this protective effect may reduce the risk of heart disease, and promote brain health.

**Peanut Pairings for Brain Health**

- **Peanuts:** Kale salad with peanuts
- **Peanut Butter:** Peanut butter chili with pinto beans. See recipe on back!
- **Peanut Powder:** Nonfat Greek yogurt swirled with peanut powder and strawberries

Artery Health: The Brain-Heart Connection

Eating a peanut butter sandwich does more than make you feel young at heart. Peanuts promote blood vessel health, which keeps your heart- and your brain-healthy.

Research from Pennsylvania State University shows that peanuts, specifically peanut protein and bioactives, keep your arteries open and flexible.¹ In a study performed on overweight and obese men, peanuts protected the men’s arteries from the damaging “stiffening” effects of a high fat chocolate shake.

Over time, this protective effect may reduce the risk of heart disease, and promote brain health.

Peanut protein and bioactives likely play a major role in keeping arteries healthy. Peanuts contain over 7 grams of plant protein per serving, more than any other nut, and more arginine than almost all other foods. This is important because arginine is used to make nitric oxide, a vasodilator that keeps blood vessels open and flexible. Peanuts are also a source of polyphenols such as resveratrol, flavonoids, and phenolic acids, which are associated with improved vascular and cognitive function.²³

Overall, these studies show that diets rich in peanuts help keep your brain young. Now that's food for thought!

Did you know?

Research shows peanuts can optimize circulatory function in the brain.

**Did you know?**

The protein and bioactive nutrients in peanuts promote vascular health, which keeps your heart and your brain healthy.
Eating Peanuts for Brain Health: The MIND Diet

The MIND diet is a hybrid of two well-known dietary patterns: the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) diet, and the Mediterranean diet. By blending key features of each of these diets, researchers crafted an eating pattern that is specifically designed to promote brain health.

Research shows that following the MIND diet - short for Mediterranean Intervention for Neurodegenerative Delay diet - reduces age-related cognitive decline,7 as well as the risk of Alzheimer’s disease.8 Research shows that those who follow the MIND diet moderately well reduce the risk of Alzheimer’s disease by 35%, while those who follow it rigorously reduce their risk by 53%.

U.S. News and World Report, with input from a panel of health experts, ranks the MIND diet as one of the top diets overall. See how peanuts and the MIND diet fit into your healthy lifestyle!

### what is the MIND DIET?

The MIND diet encourages consumption of peanuts and other nuts, leafy green vegetables, berries and whole grains, while limiting foods such as butter, cheese, fried foods, and sweets.

### DAILY

- PEANUTS, PEANUT BUTTER, OTHER NUTS
- WHOLE GRAINS
- DARK GREEN VEGETABLES
- RED WINE

### 3-4 TIMES A WEEK

- LEGUMES & BEANS

### 2 TIMES A WEEK

- POULTRY
- BERRIES
- FISH

LIMIT BUTTER AND MARGARINE TO LESS THAN ONCE PER DAY

KEEP CHEESE, FRIED FOOD AND FAST FOOD TO LESS THAN ONCE A WEEK
Peanut Butter Chili with Pinto Beans

This recipe features peanut butter, peanuts, and beans to pack 24 grams of plant protein per serving! This delicious, peanut-powered recipe is sure to please any crowd.

**PROCEDURE:**
1. Heat oil in a large soup pot over medium-low heat. Add onion and sauté until translucent, about 5 minutes.
2. Add bell pepper and cook for a few more minutes, or until softened. Stir in all spices from sweet paprika through turmeric and cook for 1 minute, or until fragrant. Stir in tomato paste until it is dissolved.
3. Add tomatoes, mashing them lightly with your fingers before throwing them into the pot. Add beans, sweet potato, peanut butter, stock, Worcestershire sauce, basil and cilantro, salt and pepper. Bring to a boil, then simmer for about 45 minutes, or until beans are soft and chili has thickened.

**References**