Food and Fitness

Vegan Diets and Brain Atrophy

So you've heard that a vegan diet can shrink your brain! That's not good since brain atrophy is associated with Alzheimer's disease and impaired thinking.

Just what *is* a vegan diet, anyway!? Simply put, it's a "plant only" diet, with no animal products included at all.

Recent studies from the University of Oxford in England found that older persons with normal, but low levels of B_{12} had more brain shrinkage than those with higher levels of B_{12}. However, the researchers could not say that taking supplements of B_{12} would fix the problem. This is currently being studied and results will be out in 2009.

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Use What You Already Have!

Food prices are rising. So play the "use what you already have for dinner" game. See how long you can make it without going to the grocery store!

Clean out the produce bin at the bottom of the fridge and make a vegetable soup.

Take all the over-

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Happy Autumn!

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- *Special points of interest:*
- nutritionandaging.fiu.edu
- scrabble.com
- diabetes.org

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A1c or eAG for Persons with Diabetes

You know what your blood glucose is at the moment you test it with your meter. Your hemoglobin A1c (A1c) tells you what your blood glucose is doing around the clock when you are not testing it.

The American Diabetes Association has introduced a new way of expressing this "around the clock" glucose value and it's called the eAG or estimated average glucose. The results of the A1c-derived eAG, published in the journal Diabetes Care are slightly different from the previous A1c corresponding glucose values:

A1c	Previous value	eAG
6	135	126
7	170	154
8	205	183
9	240	212
10	275	240

Please discuss with your doctor which value you should be using!

Are You a Puzzle Freak?

This could be a good thing! Michael Marsiske, PhD, of the University of Florida says mental exercises performed by older persons can keep the mind functioning better for a longer period.

His study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association showed the benefits of training seniors in memory, speed of processing, and reasoning. Improvements that lasted more than 5 years resulted from only 10 sessions of training in the above areas.

Some call mental exercises "boot camp for the brain". Perhaps you enjoy crosswords, card games, or a good game of Scrabble®. Whatever your puzzle pleasure, doing it may have lasting mental benefits!

Herbs for Your Health—Basil

Basil is a highly fragrant and flavorful herb. The leaves are used as a seasoning in many types of foods. Not only does basil add flavor, but it also has health benefits! Basil is a good source of Vitamin A, iron, and calcium. It also provides up to 60% of the body's daily requirement of Vitamin K.

Basil has been revered since ancient times. The Greeks called it "royal" and for Italians, it was once a symbol of love. It is popular with modern food enthusiasts because of its use in pesto--- a paste of basil, pine nuts and cheese.

Although it is available in dried form, fresh basil has a distinctly different flavor and it's easy to grow your own. Just purchase a small plant for about one dollar, plant it in a sunny location, and it will grow up to three feet tall, providing fresh basil for several months.

Uses:

- Add to spaghetti sauce as a tasty garnish
- Dress up ordinary tomato soup with minced basil.
- Serve basil pesto (a blend of pine nuts, basil leaves and Parmesan cheese) on French bread rounds
- Make a Tomato Basil pizza. See Recipe Corner, page 4, for more!

Researched by Catherine Townsend

Vegan Diets and Brain Atrophy (continued from page 1)

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A vegan diet can be an extremely health-promoting eating style, but persons excluding animal foods from the diet are at risk for Vitamin B_{12} deficiency unless they supplement with B_{12}.

Vitamin B_{12} is found in foods of animal origin such as fish, poultry, meat, milk, and eggs. Vitamin B_{12} is needed for cell division, blood formation and a healthy central nervous system. People who follow a vegan eating style must use a B_{12} supplement or foods fortified with B_{12}.

The Dietary Reference Intake for adults older than age 50 is 2.4 micrograms daily. This can be met for those not following vegan diets with low fat milk, fish, and lean meats. As we get older, however, the body cannot extract as much B_{12} from these sources. A supplement may be necessary. Multivitamins for seniors usually contain more than enough.

Talk with your doctor about whether you should use a B_{12} supplement such as that contained in a general multivitamin for seniors.

Recipe Corner

Fresh Basil Pesto

from Catherine Townsend

2 cups fresh basil leaves, washed, dried, and packed in measuring cup
1/3 cup pine nuts, minced
2 medium garlic cloves, minced or pressed through garlic press
½ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese
2 Tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste

Combine basil with pine nuts; pulse a few times in food processor. (An extra sharp knife will also work!)

Add the garlic; pulse a few more times. Finally add cheese and olive oil slowly. Add a pinch of salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste.

Serve over pasta or on toasted French bread baguette rounds. This pesto sauce also makes an excellent seasoning base for homemade pizza. See recipe below.

Pizza "Light" with Fresh Basil Pesto

from Catherine Townsend

1— 8" Italian Pizza Crust (Boboli, for example)
1 Tbs. olive oil
2 Tbs. Basil Pesto (above)
1 large fresh tomato, sliced
3 Tbs. fresh Parmesan cheese, grated
3 large leaves fresh basil, loosely cut

Place crust on baking tray or pizza stone. Brush with olive oil. Layer all ingredients, top with basil. Bake at 450º for ten minutes. Allow to cool for five minutes before serving. Serves two.

Chicken Cacciatora

1 Tbs. extra virgin olive oil
4 skinless chicken breasts
1 med. red onion, chopped
3 garlic cloves, minced
8 oz. sliced white mushrooms
3 Tbs. flat leaf parsley, chopped
1 Tbs. chopped fresh rosemary, or 2 tsp. dried
15 oz can diced tomatoes
2 Tbs. tomato paste
1 Tbs. red wine vinegar
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Heat the oil in a skillet. Brown chicken on both sides, about 8 minutes. Remove and set aside. In the same pan, sauté the onion about 4 minutes. Add mushrooms and cook about 6 minutes. Add the parsley, rosemary, tomatoes, tomato paste, and vinegar, stirring.

Return chicken to pan and cook for 20 minutes. Serves 4. Serve over cooked pasta.

Happy Autumn!

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Use What You Already Have! (continued from page 1)

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ripe fruits, cut them up, and cook them with Splenda or sugar to make a great spread for morning toast.

Use the small bits of left-over sour cream, cream cheese, and bottled salad dressing to make a great flavorful dip!

Revive the old taco shells in the pantry with a few minutes in the toaster oven.

Mix the leftover jar of salsa on the fridge door with a can of black beans, add some dried spices and serve over cooked rice or over the revived taco shells.

Scrounge through the freezer and have a smorgasbord of as many leftovers as the family will eat at one time. Have one "freezer night" per week until it's all cleaned out!

Use your canned tomatoes and canned vegetables—make a sauce to serve over the pasta that's been there since 2007!