

MEMORY PRESERVATION NUTRITION®

BRAIN HEALTHY FOODS - TEN TIPS FOR THE HOLIDAYS from the Evidenced-Based Memory Preservation Nutrition® Program © 2011 Nancy B. Emerson Lombardo, Ph.D.

At Holiday time we are sharing food with the people we care about the most - family and friends, as well as work colleagues and clients. So why not make our holiday foods healthy as well as delicious.

For brain healthier meals,

- Add nutritious ingredients such as foods full of anti-oxidants, that are anti-inflammatory, that help us lower rather than raise, our blood pressure, blood sugar and cholesterol levels.
- The easiest way to do this is add more vegetables, spices, herbs and other plant foods and use fewer animal foods as well as less sugar.
- Limit the amount of sugar, salt and saturated/trans fats you are serving yourself and your family and friends.
- Let your family and friends know you love them enough to go the extra mile, maybe trying out something new and equally delicious to what they are used to.
- Take favorite family recipes and make them a little or lot more brain and body healthy.

Here are some specific ideas:

1) **Make Your Sweets Nutritious**

The general principal is: take in no sugar without some redeeming healthy ingredients such as whole grains, nuts, seeds, fruits, vegetables and spices, herbs. Another general principle is to make choices that would be safe for a person who is diabetic. We all need to eat as if we are diabetic or trying to avoid getting diabetes and that will help us achieve a brain healthy nutrition program. (For lots of ideas for brain healthy sweets see **SWEET TREATS** section below, page 7-9.)



2) **Serve Brain Healthy Appetizers**

Limit the amount of appetizers you serve that are loaded with salt or saturated fats, and processed foods, and ingredients such as trans fats, high fructose corn syrup, and other sugars.

- Avoid ANYTHING that has the words "partially hydrogenated" on the list of ingredients even if the Nutrition facts declare no or 0% trans fats. FOR MORE THINGS TO AVOID, SEE **APPETIZERS** on page 3.

NOW FOR SOME POSITIVES...A Dozen Healthy Appetizers:

- Look for whole wheat or whole grain crackers...Trader Joes and Whole Foods both have some. Annie's is another good brand...the little whole wheat bunny crackers are popular with all ages. You have to read the label.
- Include vegetables, such as cut up vegetables dipped in healthy dip. These are



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called vegetable crudités. You can even create festive designs.

- Think about naturally healthy dips such as hummus or guacamole instead of those made with sour cream. Use yogurt in your dips.

For all 12 ideas see Appetizers section on page 3 below.



3) Brainy Beverages: Skip the soda. Skip any sugar-added beverage (read the label of the juices you buy! Anything that says fruit cocktail or that doesn't say "100% fruit juice" has added sugar.)

- Make sure everyone has a glass or bottle of water in addition to whatever else you are offering.
- Offer iced tea if you have tea lovers in your group. It can be made with a strong flavored GREEN tea (especially brain healthy though black tea is good too).

For more ideas see "Brainy Beverages" below, page 6.

4) Make Your Smoothies "Green". Take your favorite fruit based smoothie and make it healthier by adding some greens to your mixture before blending. Romaine lettuce, sweet flavored purple or flowering kale (or any kind of kale) and parsley are especially delicious. (For more Smoothie ideas see Brainy Beverages, page 6.)

Entrees and Sides to Preserve Brain Power

5) Serve Brain And Heart Healthy Soups. For flavor use herbs and spices and extra vegetables, instead of salt or fat.

6) Include a Fresh Green Salad

7) Serve a Cooked Green Leafy Vegetable along with whatever other vegetables you traditionally serve. Leafy green vegetables are stars among vegetables for brain health.

8) Make Your "Carb" Dishes Beige Instead Of White

9) In Your Sweet Potato or Yam Dishes, Use Non-Sugar Natural Sweeteners

10) Use Lots More Herbs And Spices In Everything You Cook (while using less salt and sugar) to add more nutrition and more flavor. (See August 2011 Newsletter articles on Cinnamon and other herbs and spices.)



For all the details about Entrees and Sides to preserve brain power, see pages 4 and 5 below.

If some of the listed ingredients leave you curious as to WHY the Memory Preservation Nutrition® program recommends them, go to our website answer section.

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BRAIN HEALTHY APPETIZERS

First, More on What to AVOID

- More on Transfats: The manufacturer can say they have none or 0% Trans Fats in big letters, even though trans fats are included if it is less than ½ gram per serving and the manufacturer gets to decide the serving size.
- Thus you will want to avoid any purchased product that comes wrapped in pastry dough as you are really serving a lot of fat, more white flour, salt and often-times trans fats.
- Avoid adding bacon or any processed/cured meats to your appetizer recipes. Recent research suggests the red colored cured meats such as bacon, ham, most hot dogs, many sausages, salami, and yes pastrami and my favorite prosciutto, are very unhealthy for us and so should be eaten sparingly, e.g. no more than once/week. So if you do have an appetizer with one of these, such as the traditional fresh cantaloupe melon with prosciutto or scallops with bacon, limit the number to just one of these types. But also consider plain scallops with herbs served with a toothpick...and no bacon!

Now for the Brain Healthy Dozen Appetizers

1. Look for whole wheat or whole grain crackers...Trader Joes and Whole Foods both have some. Annie's is another good brand...the little whole wheat bunny crackers are popular with all ages. You have to read the label. If you use pita, look for whole wheat pita bread or chips, or made your own chips from whole wheat pita bread.
2. Include vegetables, such as cut up vegetables dipped in healthy dip. These are called vegetable crudité's.
3. Think about naturally healthy dips such as hummus or guacamole instead of those made with sour cream. Use yogurt in your dips. Chickpeas, artichokes and avocados are wonderful brain foods to consider for appetizer recipes.
4. Tabouleh is another healthy appetizer you may buy or make from scratch. We have a **delicious recipe** that is made with quinoa, an ancient grain now popular in the US because it is delicious, gluten free, and a complete protein...with the bonus it cooks in 10-15 minutes!
5. Stuffed mushrooms can be healthy especially if you use whole wheat bread crumbs and no salt (or use kelp powder instead of salt, or cut the amount of salt to a fraction. If you use sea salt, you'll get more flavor with less salt.
6. Cherry tomatoes are always popular. You can also create skewers alternating cherry tomatoes with small mozzarella balls and basil. Very festive looking.



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7. Olives of any kind, or in a variety of styles and flavors, is always a good choice. Yes, they are salty, but so nutritious.
8. If you choose to serve small pizza slices, bruschettas or crostinis, use whole wheat dough or bread, and limit the salt on the toppings. Use all vegetable toppings. Low-fat cheeses such as mozzarella and provolone. Heart healthy cheeses such as provolone and parmesan.
9. Shrimp in any form is a good choice, hot or cold. Also scallops. Do include some seafood among your appetizer choices.
10. Of your meats, you can serve Asian style chicken or beef satay, bite sized pieces marinated, skewered on a stick, and grilled.
11. Nuts of all kinds are brain food! Great for body health too!
12. Assume that some of your guests will be vegan or gluten or lactose intolerant. So be sure to have some options that have no dairy, meat, gluten or even fish/seafood in them.



BRAIN HEALTHY ENTREES AND SIDES

Serve Brain and Heart Healthy Soups.

- For flavor use herbs and spices and extra vegetables, instead of salt or fat.
- Include chopped up green leafy veggies in your soups, stews and stir fries. Consider adding chopped fresh herbs such as parsley, cilantro (if you like it) and dill, and any other of your favorite green herbs. You may still have a few growing in your garden. Of course you use smaller amounts of the more intensely flavored ones such as oregano, mine, sage, rosemary and thyme.



Include a Fresh Green Salad. Avoid iceberg, use mixture of lettuces, radicchio, chopped up vegetables such as sweet red/orange or yellow bell peppers, escarole, tomatoes, cucumbers, zucchini. You can also add chopped fresh herbs for taste treats and surprises, including all the ones I mentioned for the soups. Also consider adding some avocado strips. Avocados are brain foods! Use extra virgin olive oil in your dressings. Avoid the prepared ones labeled "no or low fat" as they usually have extra salt and sugar to make up for the lack of oils. No reason to go for low fat...the key is that the oils are healthy ones such as olive oil. You may also add small slices of apple or pear, or various small nuts, or berries for extra special fun salads.



Serve A Cooked Green Leafy Vegetable along with whatever other vegetables you traditionally serve. Leafy green vegetables are stars among vegetables for brain health.

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Make Your "Carb" Dishes Beige Instead Of White. The reason is that white processed breads, baked goods, grains, flours, pastas and starches are quickly converted in the body to the equivalent of refined sugar and trigger the insulin reaction..they are considered "high glycemic index" foods. Here are some suggestions:

- Brown or wild rice, instead of white,
- Leave the skins on your white potatoes,
- Whole grain pastas, and
- Consider sweet potatoes instead of, or in addition to, white potatoes.
- One way to enhance the healthfulness of mashed potatoes is to make them "Irish" and blend in just before serving, diced spring onions or scallions. You can also add fresh chopped parsley. Use pepper instead of salt for flavoring.
- Here's another delicious way to make your mashed potatoes healthier (and for this you can even peel the potatoes if you really want to have an all white looking dish): For half the volume of your mashed dish, use cauliflower. Cut a head of cauliflower into florets and small pieces of stems; cover with water in a cooking pot on top of the stove. Cook until soft. Using a potato masher or food processor, mash the cooked cauliflower together with 2 or more cloves of garlic pressed to paste with garlic press, using just enough of the cooking liquid to achieve the consistency you like. Add up to 6 cloves of garlic per head of cauliflower if you love garlic. Then blend with the mashed potatoes, adding a little olive oil or butter, pepper for flavor. Or you can use 100% cauliflower and skip the potatoes. This idea comes to us compliments of Ryan Snow.

In Your Sweet Potato Or Yam Dishes, Use The Non-Sugar Natural Sweeteners mentioned earlier for desserts. Skip the marshmallows.

- **Recipe idea:** Make your own *cranberry or holiday sauce* without adding any sugar or even honey. To sweeten the dish, add to the usual pound of cranberries a diced pear and/or apple, orange or apple juice instead of water, a teaspoon of cinnamon (which tastes sweet on the tongue and enhances all the other flavors) and then a little pinch of stevia or teaspoon of Truvia® or



Purevia® or erithritol.

Also add chopped walnuts or pecans if you want a little gentle "crunch" in your cranberry dish. (Check

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out my website for [my own recipe](#) - you can create your own variation)

Use Lots More Herbs And Spices In Everything You Cook (while using less salt and sugar) to add more nutrition and more flavor. Cinnamon used in small quantities in stews, soups and other dishes will act as flavor enhancer to bring out the other flavors. Use a small amount so you don't actually taste the cinnamon.

BRAIN HEALTHY BEVERAGES FOR THE HOLIDAYS

- Skip the soda. All soda or man-made sparkling waters will leach calcium from bones and teeth. And most sodas have a huge amount of added sugar...or artificial sweeteners.
- Skip any sugar-added beverage (read the label of the juices you buy! Anything that says fruit cocktail or that doesn't say "100% fruit juice" has added sugar.)
- Make sure everyone has a glass or bottle of water in addition to whatever else you are offering.
- Offer iced tea if you have tea lovers in your group. It can be made with a strong flavored GREEN tea (especially brain healthy though black tea is good too).
- Limit your alcohol. A small glass of red or white wine (red is best, especially Pinot Noir) with the meal might even be brain healthy for some people. However excessive alcohol is toxic to the brain and some people cannot tolerate any. Some research reports suggests people carrying the APOE4 allele, a risk factor gene for Alzheimer's disease, should avoid all alcohol. Remember, too, that your body converts alcohol to a form of sugar.
- After the meal: offer hot green tea, ginger tea, coffee and serve cinnamon as a choice as it is delicious in the tea and coffee and can be used instead of any sweetener or even cream.
- For December holidays, consider making your own eggnog from scratch so you can use the natural non-sugar sweeteners and add lots of nutmeg and cinnamon, and real vanilla. Use Omega-3 eggs and low fat milk...or for vegans or those lactose intolerant, consider delicious, brain healthy almond milk instead of cows milk.

Offer Green Smoothies anytime

- Take your favorite fruit based smoothie and make it healthier by adding some greens to your mixture before blending. Romaine lettuce, sweet flavored purple or flowering kale (or any kind of kale) and parsley are especially delicious.



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- You can try spinach, cabbage and other greens you happen to have on hand. Definitely add some cinnamon....and for a "punch" add some fresh or ground ginger as well. For extra nutrition throw in a tablespoon or two of ground flaxseed, ground chia seed or rice bran, wheat germ.
- If you add raspberries, your green smoothies can be pink!
- Consider adding some Greek yogurt if you want some dairy. If you are making a "savory" smoothie then add some kelp powder or red dulse flakes.

SWEET TREATS - DESSERTS!

Making Your Sweets Nutritious to Power Up Your Brain

The general principal is: take in no sugar without some redeeming healthy ingredients such as whole grains, nuts, seeds, fruits, vegetables and spices, herbs. Another general principle is to make choices that would be safe for a person who is diabetic. We all need to eat as if we are diabetic or trying to avoid getting diabetes and that will help us achieve a brain healthy nutrition program.

Why is limiting sugar related to brain health? Sugar, in all forms, is inflammatory, and inflammation increases risk of brain and heart problems in addition to diabetes, joint pain and some cancers. In addition, excess sugar leading to pre-diabetes and diabetes shrinks the brain's hippocampus, the seat of our short term and spatial memory, generally inflames the brain, increases the amount of the A-beta problem protein in the brain, and increases the amount of bad cholesterol that our own bodies make.

We are NOT suggesting we eliminate all of the sugar. There are some forms, for example those that are a natural part of fruit, or sweet vegetables, that come along with very important nutrients, which are themselves brain healthy. Also if you eat a brain healthier diet e.g. with more vegetables, spices and herbs, whole grains, beans, nuts and seeds, fish and fish oil, then you help your body process the sugar you do eat. Even with fruits, especially fruit juices, we need to limit the daily amount we eat, to about 5-6 servings a day, to assure we don't take in too much sugar.

Here are some ideas for delicious brain healthier sweet treats:

- Use fruits, dates, figs, dark chocolate or natural non-sugar substitutes to get most of your sweet flavors
 - Consider a fresh fruit cup or whole fruit as dessert.
 - Many Italian and some Asian households for example traditionally offer at the close of a meal, for dessert, a bowl of whole fruit, and a knife at each place setting for guests/family to cut up their own fruit. Very social time and also

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note it slows down the eating process.

- Unsweetened applesauce, apple juice and orange juice are all quite sweet and can be used instead of sugar in many recipes.
- **Banana Dessert RECIPE:** Here is a delicious easy dessert made from wholesome ingredients. Using half a banana per person, slice your bananas the long way (or alternatively, little circles), then create multiple plates of delicious coatings to dip your bananas in. One is pure cocoa powder or perhaps cocoa powder mixed with cinnamon. A second is coconut flakes. Roll the banana pieces first in the cocoa powder, then the coconut flakes, put on a dessert plate and serve!



- Explore the current natural non-sugar sweeteners now in your local grocery store and use the ones you like best
 - Stevia
 - Truvia® or Purevia®
 - Erythritol (maybe only in natural foods markets...it is one of the two components in Truvia® and Purevia®)

- For all your favorite recipes, experiment with substituting for the white flour, whole wheat pastry flour or "white whole wheat" flour. The regular whole wheat flour can be a little dense or heavy for your baked goods, but the whole wheat pastry flours are almost as light as the white. Some people do half and half, still better than 100% white. You can also add a tablespoon or two of ground flax seed, rice bran and or wheat germ to add extra nutrition to your recipe. Check my website for delicious [cookie and muffin recipes](#) using this principle.



- Try creating desserts with **vegetable ingredients**. Add cooked green leafy vegetables into some of your dessert recipes. Such as spinach into your brownies. Carrot, pumpkin, squash cake and cupcake recipes already exist; consider making

these brain healthy by using the natural non-sugar substitutes for all or ½ of the sugar, using whole wheat pastry flour for all or ½ of the flour, and maybe adding chopped nuts or seeds or some ground flax seed, wheat germ or rice bran.

- Experiment with using one of the natural non-sugar sweeteners such as stevia, Truvia®, Purevia® or erythritol for all or 1/2 of the sugar or honey in a recipe. Keep in mind these sweeteners have different properties than sugar so you need to take that into account. For instance, stevia is so sweet, 300 x sweeter than sugar, that your dish will have less volume.... 1/2 tsp pure stevia instead of 1 cup of sugar. This is no problem in a fruit based dish such as apple or peach crisp or cobbler. However with cookies you might want to add some bean or almond flour to make up the difference in volume. There is more detail on my website, baking with natural non sugar sweeteners

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- Keep in mind the delicious thought that **pure 100% cocoa powder is brain food**. If you use chocolate in recipes, be sure it is at least 70% cocoa powder as in dark chocolate labeled at least 70% cocoa.
- Despite the saturated fat, coconut and coconut milk is a healthy ingredient. Saturated fat in vegetables is safer than that in animals. For one thing, no cholesterol in any plant part.



More Recipes: One great sweet treat that can be used for breakfast, lunch, dessert or a healthy snack, is *yogurt parfait*. The basic ingredients are layers of Greek yogurt, berries, cinnamon and nuts such as slivered almonds or crumbled walnuts.

Optional extra ingredients include cocoa powder, raisins or other dried fruits, ground flax seed, wheat germ, coconut flakes, granola, or other spices such as nutmeg or a pumpkin pie spice mix, or one of the natural non-sugar sweeteners mentioned above. Use your imagination as many variations are delicious. Berries are especially brain healthy fruits, and anti-inflammatory.

Greek yogurt is preferred because it has twice the amount of protein as regular yogurt, has more pro-biotics so key to overall health, and is less tart so no added sweetener is needed.

There are a lot of no-bake healthy recipes using dates or figs for the sweetness, often adding coconut for more flavor. You just need a food processor to make little balls of healthy sweets that can be eaten any time of day.

- Check out my website for some sample **recipes**.