

Brain Fuel for Finals Week

Finals week, a stressful time in every college student's life and the inevitable end to a long semester. There's no doubt the countless hours of studying and exam preparation can take a heavy toll on one's mind and body. To help you retain information, maintain energy levels, and manage stress, it's important to fuel your brain by eating healthy, well-balanced, and nutrient-dense foods during all meals and snacks. To achieve this, focus on consuming a combination of **carbohydrates**, **lean protein**, and **healthy fats**.



Nutrition Tips:

1. **Don't skip breakfast!** Make sure to eat 3 well-balanced meals a day, along with 2-3 healthy snacks in-between meals, especially when the cravings start to hit while you're studying.
2. **Eat the rainbow!** Make sure your plate is bright and colorful. Fill 1/2 of your plate with fruits and vegetables, 1/4 of your plate with whole grains, and 1/4 of your plate with lean protein! Add low-fat dairy or soy on the side.
3. **Limit refined sugars, junk food, and caffeine!** These foods and beverages are full of empty calories that provide a quick satiating fix, followed by a sudden crash leaving you feeling "hangry" and tired not long after. Be mindful of your coffee consumption!
4. **Hydrate! Hydrate! Hydrate!** Drinking water throughout the day helps to prevent dehydration, one of the top causes of fatigue. Don't be afraid to add in 1 small bottle of a low-calorie, reduced sugar electrolyte drink during the day. Electrolytes help conduct nerve signals, regulate fluid balance, and are critical for overall brain health.
5. **Eat before your exam!** Don't walk into your exam on an empty stomach. Depending on what time your exam is, eat a small snack 20-30 minutes before you begin. The snack should consist of easy to digest carbohydrates, along with some healthy fats and protein for sustained energy.

7 Types of Foods that Improve Mental Function:

1. **Whole Grains** – barley, oats, brown rice, quinoa, and whole wheat pasta are all loaded with fiber (to keep you feeling full longer), vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, some protein, and a small amount of fat. Your brain uses carbohydrates, which are broken down into **glucose**, as fuel, and whole grains are an excellent source of this type of nutrient.
2. Fish, dark leafy green vegetables (broccoli, spinach, etc.), walnuts, flaxseed, and canola oil – all contain high levels of **Omega-3 Fatty Acids**, which help to optimize brain function, reduce stress, and boost memory.
3. **Eggs** – often called "nature's vitamin" due to the wide range of nutrients they contain. Eggs are loaded with Vitamin B12, choline, and selenium, all of which play roles in enhancing memory, cognition, brain development, and overall neurological health.
4. **Berries** – packed with antioxidants and phytochemicals, these help to protect the brain from damaging free radicals, while also promoting mental acuity.
5. **Citrus Fruits** – oranges, grapefruit, lemons, and limes have plenty of Vitamin C and phytochemicals, with studies showing that citrus fruit intake has an anti-inflammatory effect and helps to boost overall mental performance and mood.

6. **Dark Chocolate** – the flavonoids present in dark chocolate improve cognitive function and can benefit memory in adults. Dark chocolate also provides a *small* jolt of caffeine and helps to increase blood flow to the brain. Better yet, it causes your body to release endorphins, making you feel more relaxed and happier.
7. **Nuts** – rich in dietary fiber, healthy fats, protein, vitamins, and minerals, especially zinc; almonds, pistachios, and walnuts help to boost your immune system, which can be compromised when stress levels are high.

Bonus - **Avocados** – mashed into guacamole, spread on toast, or enjoyed on their own, they are a healthy and convenient study snack. Packed with healthy fats, B-vitamins, and potassium, avocados help lower blood pressure and stress levels.

Self-Care:

1. **Take breaks throughout the day** - even if it's just for 5-10 minutes. Breathe deeply, meditate, or find something you enjoy that helps calm you down and takes your mind off the stress you're feeling.
2. **Move your body** – exercising for 20-30 minutes a day by walking, running, doing yoga, or anything else that gets you up and around can help to alleviate stress, release endorphins, and improve blood flow. Studies show that regular exercise can make changes to the brain that help improve memory and thinking skills.
3. **Sleep** – aiming for 7-9 hours a night is essential for giving your brain the appropriate rest it needs to function optimally. This allotted time helps to preserve your memory and immune function, as well as give your brain an opportunity to recharge so that it's fresh and ready to go the next day. Avoid all-nighters, this will do more harm than good.
4. **Do what works best for you** – every individual has their own unique study habits. To maximize your potential, stay consistent, form a routine, manage your time, eat well-balanced meals throughout the day, and practice self-care.

Look for these types of foods at our various dining locations on campus!

[Dine on Campus - Menus During Finals Weeks](#)

Good luck on finals!

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