

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Scientists Just Discovered That Eating Blueberries Will Make You Smarter and 'Significantly' Improve Your Memory

Research shows eating a handful of blueberries a day can make you smarter and a little healthier, too. [🔗](#)

EXPERT OPINION BY JEFF HADEN, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR
@JEFF_HADEN
SEP 5, 2024



Photo: Getty Images

A number of studies show the benefits of blueberries:

A study published in *Journal of the International Society of Sports Nutrition* found that blueberries can improve blood pressure, endothelial function (a cell layer that lines all blood vessels and regulates exchanges between the bloodstream and the surrounding tissues), and arterial stiffness.



A 2021 study published in *Nutrients* found that blueberries can improve glucose management and insulin levels.

A study published in *Antioxidants* found that blueberries can improve improve skin elasticity and reduce skin roughness. (The same study found you can increase skin moisturization, smoothness, radiance, and firmness by applying blueberry extract directly to your skin—but you may also smell like a blueberry.)

And then there's this. A study recently published in *Nutrients* found that participants who ate just half a cup of blueberries a day for 12 weeks experienced improvements in learning, memory, and executive function: decision-making, planning, focus, task management, etc.

Why? Blueberries are rich in antioxidants and other bioactive compounds (chemicals that promote good health). Specifically, blueberries are packed with anthocyanin, an antioxidant

that improves metabolic function, increases cell-level energy production, and decreases inflammation.

That's especially important if you're somewhat overweight.

Generally speaking, metabolic disturbance accelerates in middle age and is a prominent risk factor for dementia. Unfortunately, those who are overweight or otherwise insulin-resistant have an elevated risk for future dementia.

As the researchers write:

We observed improved performances for the blueberry group on measures of lexical access and memory interference, and blueberry-treated participants reported reduced memory encoding difficulty in daily life activities.

The cognitive findings indicated improved executive ability.

The demonstration of these benefits ... suggests that ongoing blueberry supplementation may contribute to protection against cognitive decline when implemented early.

Or in non-researcher-speak, half a cup of blueberries a day improved the average participant's language skills, improved their short-term memory, and enhanced their decision-making, planning, and organizational skills.

As an added bonus, participants also experienced lower fasting insulin levels, which means their ability to process carbohydrates efficiently (an important aspect of overall metabolic health) had also improved.

Sound too good to be true? Granted, blueberries aren't magic. Genetics also matter. Beyond that, considerable research shows diet, exercise, and a healthy lifestyle make the biggest impact

on improving – or at the very least maintaining – the effect of aging on cognition and memory:

A healthy diet can reduce age-related cognitive decline and the risk of developing various neurodegenerative diseases. Exercise can slow or even reverse the physical decay of your brain. Research shows exercise can increase the size of your hippocampus even in your 60's and 70's, helping to mitigate the impact of age-related memory loss.

As for lifestyle, insufficient sleep is associated with accelerated brain atrophy and impaired brain functional connectivity. Alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs directly impact the brain, causing it to age more rapidly, atrophy, and lose functioning ability.

So, yeah: If your diet sucks, you never exercise, and you smoke, drink, and don't get enough sleep, blueberries are just a drop in the learning, memory, and executive function bucket.

But they can help.

Plus, adding one positive habit to your lifestyle may help you more easily add additional positive habits to your lifestyle. Psychologists call it the spillover effect: the way making one positive choice, no matter how small, inspires you to make other positive choices. The

way focusing on improving one thing, no matter how small, will naturally and even effortlessly lead to making improvements in other areas.

So don't just think of eating half a cup of blueberries as an isolated way to improve cognitive function; also think of eating half a cup of blueberries a day as the potential starting point for other positive habits.

Because, in all likelihood, it will be.

If only because you'll be smart enough to determine other ways to make your life better.

RELATED STORIES

[The Hard Truth About Workplace Tragedies: Why Wells Fargo's Loss Doesn't Require a New Policy](#)

[The Company That Helped Put Tim Walz 'On the Map' Offers a Master Class in Building an Enduring Business](#)

[Less Labor: With Costs Still High and Funds Tight, Founders Are Keeping Hiring in Check](#)

Like this column? Sign up to [subscribe to email alerts](#) and you'll never miss a post.

The opinions expressed here by Inc.com columnists are their own, not those of Inc.com.

Modern CEO
from the publisher of *Fast Company* and *Inc.*

Email *

Sign Up

This site is protected by reCAPTCHA and the Google Privacy Policy and Terms of Service apply.