



Wasabi Boosts Cognitive Ability in Older People, Study Shows

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(Aksana Ban/Moment/Getty Images)

A new study shows that the traditional Japanese spice [wasabi](#) can improve some types of cognitive function in those aged over 60, offering a straightforward and rather tasty way of looking after our brains as we get older.

Key to the association is the wasabi ingredient 6-methylsulfinyl hexyl isothiocyanate (6-MSITC), a bioactive compound that has [previously been linked](#) to antioxidant and anti-inflammatory effects that slow down damage to cells and protect them.

While a small number of studies have shown 6-MSITC [having a beneficial effect](#) on cognition, this hasn't yet been tested with older adults – the people who are most at risk of cognitive decline and related problems like dementia.

"[Previous studies](#) suggested that antioxidants and anti-inflammatories have an important role in cognitive health in older adults." [write](#) the researchers in their



The team ran a trial involving 72 adults aged over 60 across the course of 12 weeks. The participants were split randomly and unknowingly into two groups: the first group took a wasabi tablet once a day, while the second group took a [placebo tablet](#).

At the end of the experiment, those who had ingested wasabi tablets showed significantly better performance in their [episodic memory](#) (recalling events from the past) and [working memory](#) (holding information temporarily) based on a series of cognitive tests.

However, no significant differences were found in other areas of cognitive performance, including reasoning, attention, and processing speed. The team thinks the wasabi, and 6-MSITC, might be particularly affecting [the hippocampus part of the brain](#), which is particularly important for memory function.

"These findings suggest that the 12 weeks' 6-MSITC intake selectively enhances working and episodic memory functions in healthy older adults," [write](#) the researchers.

The team now wants to look in more detail at what might be happening on the biological and molecular level. In this particular study, no antioxidant or [anti-inflammatory biomarkers](#) were measured, so it's only possible to hypothesize about the effect the wasabi is having and why it's having that effect.

Even with those limitations though, the study shows a clear link between the 6-MSITC-containing wasabi and better memory function. When it comes to maintaining healthy brains into old age, picking foods that are particularly good for us and avoiding [those that aren't](#) can be a simple, relatively easy-to-follow strategy.

"Older adults with lower cognitive performances feel difficulties in daily behaviors such as shopping, banking, and cooking," [write](#) the researchers.

"Therefore, it is important to improve cognitive functions in older adults."

The research has been published in [Nutrients](#).

