

# Worst Foods for Brain Health



ALZHEIMER'S  
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# 7 Brain Damaging Foods to Avoid

With the overwhelming number of food options available in grocery stores today, it can be difficult to choose foods that properly fuel your brain and keep it healthy. We all know it's tempting to only buy foods that taste good. Unfortunately, many of these have been stripped of nutrition. Regularly consuming these unhealthy products may damage your brain and put you at risk for a host of cognitive disorders. If you are experiencing brain fog, having trouble focusing, or dealing with memory issues, it may be time to change your diet. To make this as simple as possible, here's a short list of foods to avoid on your next grocery run.

Why should you try cut back on these foods? They have been linked to:

- Cognitive decline
- Memory disorders
- Brain fog
- Increased risk for type-2 diabetes
- Weight gain
- Increased risk for anxiety and depression
- Many other chronic health issues

If you want to learn more about the worst foods for your brain, and how to make nutritional choices that improve brain health and help prevent cognitive decline, tune in to [Alzheimer's – The Science of Prevention](#).



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## PROCESSED FOODS

It's no surprise that highly processed foods like chips and ice cream may have damaging effects on the brain. But why are these foods so bad for your cognition and overall health? These food-like products tend to be extremely high in calories and low in nutritional value, which can lead to weight gain.<sup>1</sup> This is relevant to brain health because increased body fat, especially in the midsection, is closely correlated with increased risk for developing Alzheimer's.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, the high sugar and fat content in processed foods may increase your risk for type-2 diabetes, another leading risk factor for Alzheimer's disease.<sup>3</sup> On the flip-side, research has shown a decline in Alzheimer's risk for those who do not include processed foods in their diet while those maintaining an ultra-processed diet may have an increased risk for dozens of chronic diseases, including Alzheimer's.<sup>4</sup>

Examples of processed foods:

- Most breakfast cereals
- Ice Cream
- Chips
- Fruit Juices

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## FOODS WITH ADDED SUGAR

Candy, cakes, pies, and soda contain tons of added sugar. A diet high in added sugar has been shown to reduce the amount of brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), hindering your ability to create new memories and learn new things.<sup>5</sup> These added sugars also trigger your brain's reward response. Over time, this may fuel the same pathways that drive addiction, promoting a dangerous cycle of craving junk food.<sup>6</sup> High sugar foods provide quick energy without nutritional value, which could lead to slower cognitive function and attention deficits.<sup>7</sup> Over the past few years research has begun to draw a direct connection between the consumption of added sugars and increased inflammation in the brain.<sup>8</sup> This brain inflammation, when combined with the cellular stress that occurs in response to a high sugar diet, may set the stage for the progression of Alzheimer's disease.<sup>9</sup>

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## UNHEALTHY FATS

Many studies have shown that trans fats and vegetable oils such as canola oil can create inflammation. This is thought to lead to poor brain function and memory loss.<sup>10</sup> Specifically, trans-fat intake has been associated with an increased risk for developing Alzheimer's disease.<sup>11</sup> The high levels of omega-6 fatty acids found in vegetable oils have also been shown to promote inflammation, which may lead to substantial brain dysfunction over time.<sup>12</sup> In terms of mental health, the brain damage linked to consumption of this type of oil has been significantly associated with depression and other mental health issues.<sup>13</sup> To protect your brain, avoid trans fats and try switching out vegetable oils for healthier options like as olive, avocado and coconut oils.



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## ALCOHOL

Many of us may enjoy a glass of wine or two with a meal. But how is this impacting our brains? While there is some research supporting the benefits of moderate alcohol intake, chronic overconsumption of alcohol can be incredibly damaging. Studies have shown that alcohol abuse can lead to adverse cognitive effects including brain shrinkage and alterations in neurotransmitter pathways.<sup>14</sup> In addition, though alcohol can seem like an easy way to fall asleep, it may severely disrupt our slumber by delaying and reducing time spent in REM sleep.<sup>15</sup> This is particularly concerning, since sleep deprivation is linked to an increased risk for Alzheimer's and other brain disorders.<sup>16</sup>



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## REFINED CARBS

Refined carbs such as flour, pizza dough and bread may wreak havoc on our cognitive function by elevating inflammation and free radicals in the brain.<sup>18</sup> Since these foods are heavily processed, they are low in fiber. This means they are broken down by the body very quickly, leading to blood sugar spikes that may increase risk for diabetes.<sup>18</sup> As a whole, refined carbs lack nutritional value and may contribute to rapid weight gain. Each time you eat them, you're basically getting a massive carbohydrate load. Over time, too many refined carbs may increase the risk for Alzheimer's and other brain disorders.<sup>19</sup> Avoiding simple carbs may even help to prevent mental health conditions like depression and anxiety.<sup>20</sup>

Examples of refined carbs:

- White bread
- White flour
- Pizza dough
- Pasta
- Pastries
- White rice



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## SUGAR SUBSTITUTES

In recent years, aspartame has received plenty of negative press. Marketed as a safe, low-calorie alternative for sugar, this chemical may trigger the brain's reward response system. This has been demonstrated in at least one animal study.<sup>21</sup> Aspartame is mainly made of phenylalanine, a chemical which, in unhealthy quantities, may disrupt healthy brain function.<sup>22</sup> According to a recent study, those who consumed high levels of aspartame as opposed to cane sugar had increased rates of depression and performed worse on mental tests.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, artificially sweetened beverages have been correlated with an increased risk of stroke and dementia.<sup>24</sup>



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## CURED MEATS

Most cured meats contain compounds called nitrates and nitrites. High levels of nitrates have been linked to increased deaths from conditions like Parkinson's, type-2 diabetes and Alzheimer's disease.<sup>25</sup> Nitrites found in jerky, salami, and hot dogs have also been linked to symptoms of bipolar disorder.<sup>26</sup> Other studies have linked these nitrosamines found in processed meats to the development of insulin resistance, leading to an increase in cognitive decline.<sup>27</sup> Nitrates in cured meats are often combined with unhealthy fats, added sugar, and sodium which all may contribute to an increased risk of neurocognitive deficits.<sup>28</sup>

Examples of cured meats:

- Jerky
- Pepperoni
- Bacon
- Salami
- Pastrami
- Hot dogs



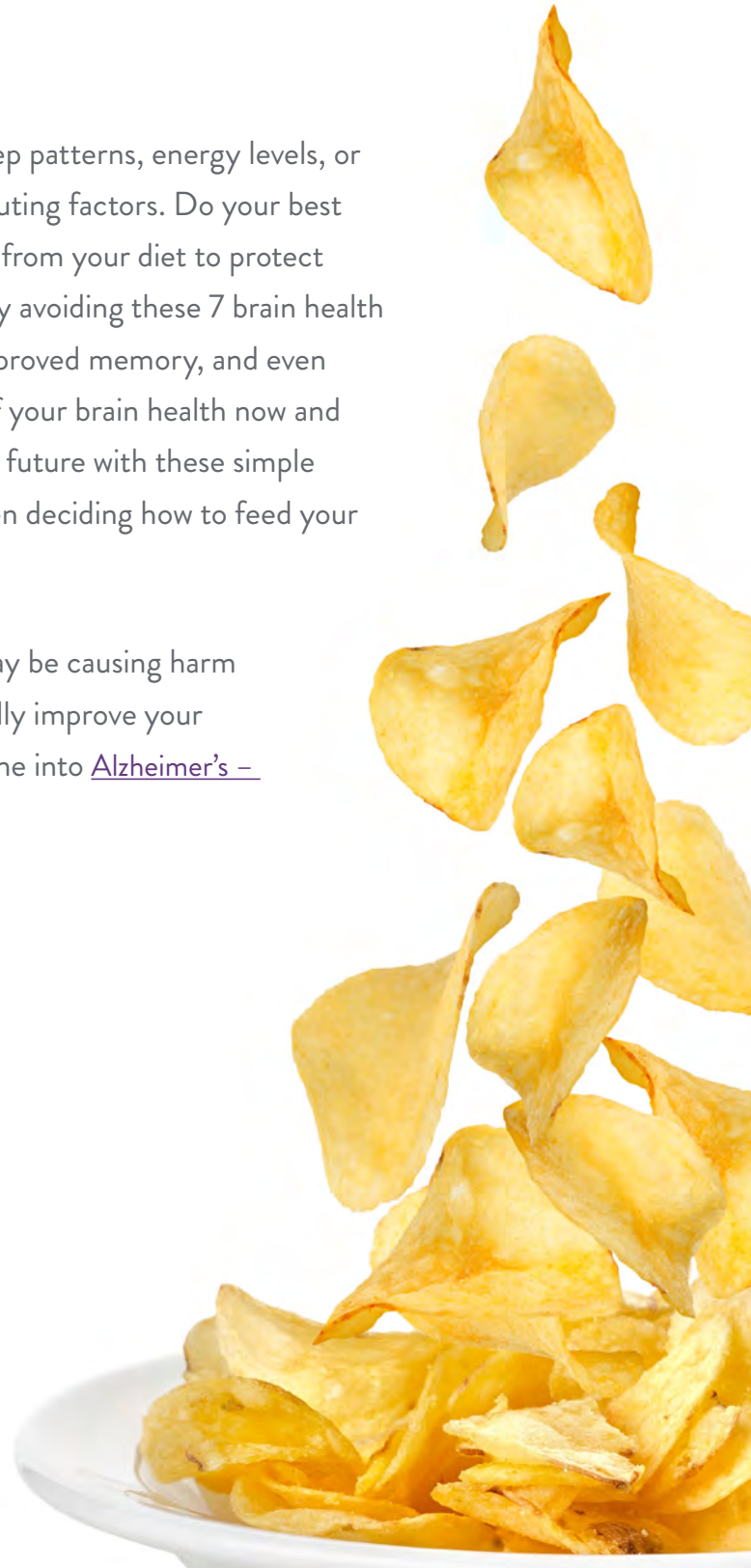
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## CONCLUSION

If you are noticing changes in your mood, sleep patterns, energy levels, or ability to focus, these 7 foods may be contributing factors. Do your best to reduce or remove these unhealthy options from your diet to protect your brain and help avoid cognitive decline. By avoiding these 7 brain health enemies, you may notice clearer thinking, improved memory, and even a boost in your mood. You can take control of your brain health now and protect yourself from cognitive decline in the future with these simple dietary adjustments. Knowledge is power when deciding how to feed your body and brain!

If you want to further explore which foods may be causing harm to your brain as well as which foods can actually improve your brain health and prevent cognitive decline, tune into [Alzheimer's – The Science of Prevention](#).



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