

How to Use Food to Boost Our Productivity

Claudio Teri*

Co-Founder, DrSocial.org, United Kingdom

***Corresponding Author:** Claudio Teri, Co-Founder, DrSocial.org, United Kingdom.

Received: November 20, 2014; **Published:** December 28, 2014

Abstract

The article outlines a number of vegetarian and non-vegetarian suggestions on how to use food to boost one's productivity during work or in our everyday life. Referring to the World Health Association, the modern diet lacks iron and other vitamins and nutrients, crucial for our health and productivity's benefits. The article explores the goodness that each of those vitamins and nutrients do to us, and gives an example of the types of food we can include in our menus to keep our focus to its maximum potential. Avoiding carbs at lunch and increasing the amount of antioxidants such as berries, are some of the well-known health-conscious choices, but there are other brain-stimulating foods that we can indulge with guilt-free.

Keywords: *Nutrition; Malnutrition; Productivity; Health; Food; Diet; Vegetarian; Vegan; Omega3-Acids; Vitamins; Protein; Work; Breakfast; Brain; Stimulant; Boost; Focus; Fruits; Benefits*

Food can not only help us maintain a well-being and a desired weight, but it also affects our brain, therefore our productivity at work and our everyday errands and mood swings too. The ingredients that enter our brains through our blood stream have the power to either make us focus better or lose focus.

When we're busy at work, food may not be the first thing in our "to do" list - but it should be. Skipping meals is a false economy that will quickly lead to decreased energy and productivity. Without a regular supply of certain type of foods throughout the day, our bodies would not get the vitamins, minerals, and protein that they need and lead to malnutrition [1].

Malnutrition is major public health problem throughout the developing world, particularly in southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa [2]. Diets in populations there are frequently deficient in macronutrients (protein, carbohydrates and fat, leading to protein-energy malnutrition), micronutrients (electrolytes, minerals and vitamins, leading to specific micronutrient deficiencies), or both. Let's review some of the essential ingredients we need before falling into an unhealthy phase.

Vitamin A is essential for the functioning of the eyes as well as the immune system and its deficiency, also known as VAD, is prevalent among the poor whose diets are based mainly on rice or other carbohydrate-rich, micronutrient-poor calorie sources. VAD compromises the immune systems of approximately 40 percent of children under five in the developing world, greatly increasing the severeness of common childhood infections, often leading to deadly outcomes.

Foods to include in your diet: sweet potato, carrots, dark leafy greens, butternut squash, tuna fish and dried apricots.

Iron is an essential part of hemoglobin, myoglobin and various enzymes. Iron deficiency leads to anemia and reduces the work capacity, bringing serious economic consequences and obstacles to national development. Overall, it is the most vulnerable, the poorest and the least educated who are disproportionately affected by iron deficiency, and it is they who stand to gain the most by its reduction, according to recent statistics reported by The World Health Organization (WHO) [3].

Foods to include in your diet: fish, tofu, brown rice, nuts and seeds, white and red meat.

Omega-3 fatty acids help improve heart health and brain function. Flaxseed meal and flaxseed oil are possible sources. Also, look for food products fortified with omega-3 from a plant source.

Foods to include in your diet: salmon, sardines, beef, tofu, flaxseeds, walnuts.

Iodine is needed for metabolizing food into energy, as well as normal thyroid function. Since iodine is found primarily in seafood, many vegetarians don't get enough of it. But good vegetarian sources of iodine include iodized salt and kelp.

Foods to include in your diet: dried seaweed, cod, shrimp, milk, boiled eggs.

Vitamin B12 is only found naturally in animal foods, but is added to fortified foods, such as soy milk and breakfast cereals. A supplement is recommended for vegetarians, especially since the body is less able to absorb B12 as we age.

Foods to include in your diet: shellfish, beef, crab, tofu, cheese, eggs.

Zinc is important for a properly functioning immune system plus cell growth and division, among other things. Although plentiful in beef, pork and lamb, you can also find it in soy products, peanuts and legumes, though bioavailability of zinc from plant sources is lower than from animal sources.

Foods to include in your diet: seafood, beef, lean pork, spinach, beans, nuts, cocoa.

Apart from Zinc, B12 and Iron deficiency, vegetarians and vegans must pay a special attention to the following nutrients

Vitamin A: The "direct" form is only found in animal products - meat, egg yolks, dairy (though much less so than meat) and fish. The vitamin A found in orange and green vegetables is beta carotene which the body must first convert to the usable form of Vitamin A. That conversion requires bile salts, which are produced by your liver when you consume fat (making fat essential on a vegan diet). You can obtain a version of Vitamin A in plants, but you'll need about 6 times as much beta carotene to equal the amount found in direct Vitamin A.

Protein: You can get some of the components of protein (the amino acids) from legumes, seeds and grains. Other options include: quinoa, nut butter, hemp, lentils and beans.

Potassium: Beans are among the very best of all potassium sources. Spinach, chard is richer in potassium than other greens such as kale and broccoli. Mushrooms, avocados and bananas are some other of the best options for vegans, too.

Berries: Berries have potent combinations of antioxidants that improve both memory and motor coordination. Neuroscientist James A. Joseph says that the antioxidants in berries counteract oxidative stress and function as anti-inflammatory agents, which are "the evil twins of brain ageing [4]." Researcher Leigh Gibson found that "the brain works best with about 25 grams of glucose circulating in the blood stream — about the amount found in a banana [5]."

Nuts: Nuts contain protein, high amounts of fiber, and they are rich in beneficial fats. For getting an immediate energy boost that won't turn into a spike later, you can't do better than nuts. Nuts also contain plenty of vitamin E, which is essential to cognitive function. Fruits and nuts always hold the number one choice of a healthy snack, and here is why they are stimulating our focus too.

Last but not least, here are some delicious brain-boosting types of food and beverages that we can allow ourselves to consume guilty-free while enjoying their benefits:

- a. **Hummus** combines the protein of chickpeas and sesame-based tahini with vitamin-C-packed lemon juice and the essential fatty acids in olive oil. Hummus as a whole contains plenty of Omega 3 fatty acids, which are great for improving intelligence and maintaining a healthy heart. On top of it all, this dish also has iron, vitamin B6, manganese, copper, folic acid, and amino acids. Tryptophan, phenylalanine, and tyrosine are the amino acids found in hummus that can promote good quality sleep and uplift one's mood.
- b. **Sweet potatoes** have more Vitamin C, fewer calories, more fiber and fewer carbs than the white potatoes. They are loaded with carotenoids, giving them a rich orange color. Carotenoids are important for the brain because they act as antioxidants, protecting cells from damage. Carotenoids also help form vitamin A, which is important in helping to sprout new neurons and to help neurons find each other to form new connections.
- c. **Peanut Butter** has healthy fats in the form of polyunsaturated and monounsaturated that your brain and body both need. For years these types of fats were lumped together with saturated fat and labeled bad as part of the low-fat and no-fat dieting strategies. But the more that is discovered about these fats the more it's seen how essential they are to overall health. You'll have to get the kind of peanut butter that is made from only peanuts, preferably organic, as you don't want any of the additional oils that are added to many conventional peanut butter brands.
- d. **Honey** is made up of equal parts of glucose and fructose and it contains a variety of B-vitamins, magnesium, manganese, phosphorus, potassium and anti-oxidants - all of which are good for brain health. The fructose in honey fuels the brain, which is the most energy demanding organ in the body. Thus, honey protects the brain from mental exhaustion and keeps the brain perked up.
- e. **Chocolate - Dark chocolate** contains antioxidant properties that increase the production of endorphins while enhancing focus and concentration, whereas milk chocolate is good for quickening reaction time and improving verbal and visual memory.
- f. **Coffee** benefits to your brain in addition to providing you with a detectable energy boost (note: it's not as simple as boosting your brain-power, but it can make you work more effectively). A study from Johns Hopkins University found swallowing the amount of caffeine in one or two cups of coffee boosts a person's memory for new information by roughly 10 percent. Caffeine helps ramp up the activity of those brain chemicals involved in memory storage. There's also some evidence that coffee may strengthen the sense-based information your brain collects.
- g. **Red Wine:** For several years wine has been recommended by doctors for its ability to thin the blood, and prevent heart disease and cancer. The resveratrol it contains has been shown to increase blood flow to the brain, but it's especially unique because it's able to cross the blood-brain barrier, something most antioxidants and other substances are unable to do. This means that the positive effects of antioxidants are able to reach your brain cells and protect them from damage.

Starting your new eating regime might sound complicated at first and some people find it easier to begin with the things they need to eliminate or reduce in their diet, such as the popular and easily accessible options that a lot of us reach out for when busy at work, often ready meals and fast food. Try to avoid carbs at lunch (bread, pasta, potatoes, which includes French fries) and sugary snacks (donuts, candy bars, and even some granola bars). Instead, eat mini snacks throughout the day that include walnuts, almonds, and fruit, fresh, dried or frozen. If it's dried, make sure sugar has not been added. Something to keep in mind is that when it comes to being more productive at work, we're more likely to look at external factors, like how we plan and organise our work, rather than internal ones, like how we're fuelling our body without bearing in mind that they are strongly related.

According to the World Health Organization, with the right ingredients, we can boost brain power by as much as 20% [6]. This number is enough to make us brain fit without giving up on the little daily temptations.

Conclusion

Becoming more productive is a combination of knowledge about your nutrients, consistency in eating habits and minimization of the deficient in goodness products (such as sugary snacks, bread, pasta, and fries). Some of the best sources of brain-boost come from foods rich in Vitamin A, Iron, Omega-3 fatty acids, Iodine, Vitamin B12, Zinc, Protein, Potassium and the healthiest snacking in-between meals option of nuts and berries.

There is no quick fix for malnutrition, therefore we must maintain a consistent daily eating plan to prevent us not only from diseases, but also to help keep our concentration sharp and energize our bodies to conduct work more efficiently. There is plenty of nutrient choice for meat-eaters, vegetarians and vegans, including: tuna fish, white and red meat, sardines, shrimp, eggs, carrots, leafy greens, tofu, butternut squash, walnuts, beans and cocoa. It is a personal choice whether a healthy diet would commence by first eliminating the junk foods or how the healthy ingredients would be integrated in one's meal as long as the 20% dependence of our productivity is covered by conscious eating.

"We all know eating healthy is always good for us, but what other foods can we indulge with that can serve as a brain stimulant?"

Bibliography

1. <http://www.healthline.com/health/nutrition-and-productivity#2>
2. Müller, O and M Krawinkel. "Malnutrition and health in developing countries". *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 173.3 (2005): 279-286.
3. <http://www.who.int/nutrition/topics/ida/en/>
4. <http://www.businessinsider.com.au/foods-you-should-eat-to-increase-productivity-2012-5#any-kind-of-berry-is-golden-the-potent-combinations-of-antioxidants-they-contain-can-improve-both-memory-and-motor-coordination-1>
5. <http://lifehacker.com/5953060/how-the-food-you-eat-makes-you-more-or-less-productive>
6. <http://www.businessinsider.com/foods-you-should-eat-to-increase-productivity-2013-5?op=1&IR=T>

Volume 1 Issue 1 December 2014

© All rights are reserved by Claudio Teri.