

The final years at school can be hectic, often with stressful periods during exam time. There is more to doing well on an exam than knowing the content. If you're looking to squeeze the most out of your brain, you'll want to make sure you're giving it the best fuel! Here are some tips that can sharpen your memory and help give you extra brain power throughout this busy time.

Tip #1: Get a head start by eating breakfast – To think quickly and find the right answers your brain needs fuel. Breakfast helps provide that fuel. Aim for a breakfast with plenty of carbohydrate and protein, but low in sugar.

Why not try some of the following breakfast ideas:

- **Oatmeal porridge or cereal.** Oats are high in fibre and contain carbohydrate and protein to keep you full and focused. Add some fruit and cinnamon for sweetness and extra flavour. The vitamins in fruit help keep your immune system in top shape which is especially important to help you stay illness-free around exam time.
- **Eggs on wholegrain toast.** Eggs are high in protein and amino acids which are great fuel for the brain. To save time in the morning, have some boiled eggs in the fridge which can also be eaten as a snack later in the day.
- **A healthy smoothie.** For a breakfast on the go, blend together some low fat milk and yoghurt, fruit and some wheat biscuits for a balanced meal to start the day. Fruits that work well in smoothies are bananas, berries, kiwi fruit and mango – all of which can be frozen until you're ready to use them.





Brain Fuel - Tips for a Mastermind

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Tip #2: Omega-3 oils to keep your brain running smoothly – Just like putting oil into a car to help it run smoothly, omega-3 oils are essential to keep your brain running well. Omega-3 oils are found in oily fish (e.g. salmon and tuna). If you don't eat the recommended 2 serves of oily fish a week, or you are a vegetarian, flax seeds and walnuts can give you some of the oils your brain needs.

Get more Omega-3 oils into your day:

- **Eat more oily fish like tuna or salmon.** Tinned fish can be a great snack that doesn't need refrigerating until the can is opened. Try it on its own, with wholegrain crackers, or on a salad sandwich.

Tip #3 Carbohydrate – Eating carbohydrate rich foods is important because they are converted to glucose when digested. Not all carbohydrate containing foods are equal. Glucose is our brain's primary energy source. The best types are those found in grainy bread, pasta and wholegrain cereals. The body takes a little longer to digest these carbohydrates and releases glucose into the bloodstream more slowly. This means that the energy derived from these carbohydrates will generally last longer. Also, eating foods high in carbohydrate increases the levels of serotonin in your brain. When your serotonin levels are high, you feel calmer and more relaxed, which is important if you're taking an exam.

Tip #4: Power up with protein foods - Once foods high in protein are digested, they are broken down into amino acids that help keep the brain alert and focused. Foods high in protein include red meat, chicken, fish, eggs, legumes, nuts and seeds and dairy products.

Try some of these quick meal and snack ideas to make sure you're getting enough protein:

- Wholegrain crackers and cheese
- Low fat yoghurt
- Mixed nuts (your school may be nut free so check this before bringing to school)
- Adding cheese, egg or lean meat like chicken to a sandwich.

Tip #5: Get your energy from whole foods – Foods such as fruit, vegetables and whole grains are rich sources of vitamins, minerals and phytonutrients. These can help your immune system ward off sickness. Processed snack foods often contain limited amounts of vitamins and minerals. They can be high in sugar and salt to make them last longer on the shelf. Sugary drinks and caffeine can give you an instant energy burst, but they cause a crash in focus and concentration levels and should be avoided. Preparing meals and snacks from scratch with lots of fruit, vegetables and whole grains can provide you with longer lasting energy.

Here are some fresh food snack ideas:

- Vegetable sticks with dips such as cottage cheese, hummus or tomato salsa
- Mini pizzas on English muffins with low fat cheese, lean ham or chicken and some chopped vegetables (e.g. mushrooms, capsicum)
- Fresh fruit salad with low fat yoghurt

Tip #6: Boost the number of meals to boost your mind – Your brain works 24/7 and while studying, it's probably working very hard. If you only eat a couple of times a day and skip meals, your brain can slow down. Having a regular meal pattern, where you eat every 3-4 hours, can keep your mind working at maximum speed. Why not try:

- Allowing regular study breaks and if you need a snack choose something healthy such as a piece of fruit, low fat yoghurt or a handful of fruit and nut mix.
- Going to school prepared – have a healthy lunch packed and include snacks for morning tea and afternoon tea.

Putting it all together

Feeding your brain with the right fuel is easier now that you know the secrets. Keep these tips in mind to sharpen your memory and help give you extra brain power throughout this busy time.

