



# OPTIMIZE YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

6 tips

+

12 seasonal recipes

## **Disclaimer:**

The information within this eBook is intended for informational purposes only and is not in any way a substitution for professional medical advice.

These recommendations are not individualized; every person has unique health challenges and opportunities to optimize their diet, of which there is no one-size-fits-all solution.

However, it is of the opinion of the author that real, organic food as close to its whole form as possible is of the most universally beneficial.



# Every 3 seconds, someone in the world develops dementia.

An estimated 16 million people in the United States are living with cognitive impairment, which refers to a range of mild to severe cognitive challenges that affect a person's memory, thinking, judgement, attention span, concentration, and ability to learn new things and make decisions. Age-Related Cognitive Decline, or ARCD, typically occurs gradually, while more severe cognitive decline comes on suddenly.

We've been conditioned to expect a certain degree of cognitive decline with aging. We accept the slow blunting of memory as we age and brush off what we often call "senior moments" as par for the course. However in functional medicine, the goal is to get to the root cause of disease. From an integrated medical perspective, severe cognitive decline is not readily considered part of normal aging; yet, current rates of dementia and cognitive decline are on the rise so dramatically that the condition has quickly gone from atypical to commonplace among the elderly.

**Currently, 1 in 3 seniors dies with dementia.** By 2050, an estimated 15 million Americans will be living with Alzheimer's disease, the most common form of dementia. Research suggests that reducing risk factors associated with lifestyle by just 10% could prevent nearly 9 million of these cases. Stress management, exercise, relationships, and what we eat all contribute to the health of our brains. In my work as a personal chef, I've noticed that dietary changes are the most difficult to implement out of all recommended changes for better brain health. That said, changes within the brain often begin decades before the first noticeable symptoms appear. The sooner we adopt a preventive, proactive strategy for long-term cognitive health, the better. **This e-book emphasizes six food-related focus areas for you to use to start making supportive lifestyle choices now.** I encourage you to digest the tips one at a time and to choose small nutritional changes you can make in your daily routine. Ask yourself questions. Be curious. For example: Given this information about the magic of plant compounds, how can I adjust my breakfast routine to include more vegetables? Small, positive changes are what lead to sustainable, long-term habits.

It's okay to feel discouraged, overwhelmed, frustrated, confused, or resigned at the start or along the way. Consistency is the key here. Changing your behavior is no small undertaking. Keep in mind, every action you take to support your health is a win. Celebrate these daily actions.

And keep your "why" top of mind. When I remember my "why" for making choices that support my mind and body, I find it easier to act in alignment with my commitment to nourish my body and live vibrantly. I encourage you to uncover your deepest "why" for supporting your mind and body, as this discovery will make lifestyle changes easier to sustain. Take it one (delicious, nourishing) bite at a time. I'm wishing you empowerment, curiosity, and patience as you walk your path for **vivid** health.

# **THE TIPS**

1: EAT MORE VEGGIES

2: EAT MORE (HEALTHY) FAT

3: READ LABELS

4: UPGRADE YOUR PANTRY

5: GO ORGANIC

6: COOK AT HOME



# TIP #1: EAT MORE VEGGIES

Next time you're in the checkout line at the grocery store, take a look in your shopping cart.

If the majority of your shopping cart doesn't contain vegetables, the majority of your plate won't either, and that's what we're trying to work up to: a plate full of life. Vegetables contain potent compounds called polyphenols that benefit us on a cellular level. When I teach cooking classes to kids, I tell them that vegetables and fruits are like candy for our cells. They make the body sing! By design, nature *intentionally* offers us a wide variety of nutrients in a rainbow of colors.

When you sit down to lunch or dinner, aim to cover at least half of your plate with vegetables. This can be in the form of a big and colorful salad, or a mix of cooked, fermented, and raw vegetables. Each color in fruits and vegetables correlates to a special set of polyphenols, and it's important to eat all colors. Dark leafy greens are particularly nourishing for cognitive health. To get the best tasting and most nutrient-dense vegetables, buy seasonally. Tomatoes and zucchini are beautiful during summer but aren't great in winter. Fresh peas and asparagus taste best at the peak of spring. Orange squashes are most delicious during colder seasons, etc. Also: some of the most beneficial nutrients in many vegetables will be most readily absorbed by the body when cooked in a healthy fat. This is especially true for carrots, golden beets, and orange squashes. Lightly steam them, or roast them in the oven slowly at a low temperature with ghee or coconut oil. Eating a mix of colorful raw, cooked, and fermented vegetables is ideal.

*Make a weekly tally chart with each color of the rainbow, and check off when you've eaten each color. See if you can increase the variability and abundance of colors as you go.*

**Green:** avocado, cucumber, kale, Brussels sprouts, green beans, zucchini, broccoli, broccolini, lettuce, fresh herbs, asparagus, artichokes, collard greens, chard, all other leafy greens, cabbage, celery, leeks, green bell peppers, peas, green onions

**Red and Purple:** purple cabbage, radish, red onion, beets, tomatoes, radicchio, red leaf lettuce, rhubarb, red bell pepper, red potatoes, eggplant, black salsify, purple carrots, black olives, purple bell peppers, purple asparagus

**Yellow and Orange:** golden beets, pumpkin, winter squashes, sweet potatoes, yellow tomatoes, yellow bell pepper, carrots, yellow potatoes

**White:** cauliflower, garlic, ginger, Jerusalem artichokes (aka sunchokes), jicama, kohlrabi, onions, parsnips, white potatoes, shallots, turnips, mushrooms

# TIP #2: EAT MORE FAT

The brain is composed of nearly 60% saturated and unsaturated fats.

Fats are critical to cell structure; they add fluidity and stability to the barrier surrounding the delicate contents of every cell within the body. This selective semipermeable barrier performs as a strict gatekeeper for nutrients and wastes moving in and out of the cell. Nowhere in the body is this feature more important than in the brain and the gut.

Cholesterol is a building block for myelin sheath, which is the protective, conductive coating around nerve cells that allows electrical impulses to travel along those neurons. The body needs nourishing fats to absorb fat-soluble vitamins (Vitamins A, D, E, and K), each of which are critical to brain, heart, bone, and immune health.

Perhaps some of the most conflicting and confusing nutrition information available involves the best fats to choose when cooking. Chemically speaking, vegetable oils are polyunsaturated, which means they have several double bonds (poly = more than one; unsaturated = not saturated with hydrogen bonds; less rigid and stable) along their fatty acid chain. Each of these double bonds represents a point of vulnerability to rancidity and the production of free radicals as a result of exposure to heat, light, or oxygen. Food manufacturers claim higher smoke points of polyunsaturated oils; while this is true, it's important that we pay attention to the chemical structure and associated vulnerability of these fats when they are processed and bottled (at which point they are likely already rancid) before cooking with them. Stick to cooking with healthy fats and avoid unhealthy fats altogether. Both are listed below, as well as recommended cooking temperatures.

## HEALTHY FATS to choose:

avocado, avocado oil, olives, extra virgin olive oil, raw nuts and seeds, raw nut and seed butters, wild-caught salmon, mackerel, anchovies, sardines, herring, dark chocolate (85% or higher cacao content), chia seeds, eggs, coconut butter, coconut oil, ghee and butter (if tolerated) from pasture-raised cows

**UNHEALTHY FATS to avoid:** margarine, hydrogenated oils, Crisco and other types of shortening, oils such as vegetable, canola, cottonseed, grapeseed, peanut, soybean, corn, sunflower, and safflower

**Raw/No Heat:** Extra virgin olive oil, small amounts of walnut oil and sesame oil

**Low-Medium Temp:** Extra virgin olive oil, coconut oil, avocado oil, grass-fed ghee, grass-fed butter (if you tolerate dairy), grass-fed beef tallow, lard, schmaltz (chicken fat)

**High Temp:** When it comes to the health of the brain, we want to reduce inflammation as much as possible, and this means minimizing high-heat cooking methods. Try to minimize cooking at very high temps, and when you do, use fats that are saturated and naturally solid at room temperature. These include coconut oil, ghee, tallow, and lard.

# TIP #3: READ LABELS

Reading labels is one of the best things you can do to support your cognitive and overall health.

While it may seem obvious to know what's in our food, manufacturers are stealth in producing hyper-palatable Frankenfoods that keep us coming back for more once we're hooked. Packaged and processed foods harbor two of the harshest assaults to the brain: sugar and inflammatory oils. The only way to know exactly how much sugar or which oils you're eating is to read labels (or at a restaurant, to ask for the list of ingredients). Aim to eat no more than 6 teaspoons (24 grams) of added sugar per day, which is the recommendation of the American Heart Association. Ideally, I'd like you to work up to under 3 teaspoons (12 grams) per day, and eventually to zero on most days. This includes honey, maple syrup, and coconut sugar. And definitely say no to artificial sweeteners, corn syrup and high fructose corn syrup, each of which adversely affect insulin sensitivity and gut microbial balance. Fair warning: sugar is in nearly everything, including packaged nut milks and bread.

Watch for salad dressings, chips, packaged snacks, mayonnaise, and other bottled sauces and condiments containing any of the following oils we've already touched upon: vegetable, canola, cottonseed, peanut, soybean, corn, sunflower, rice bran, grapeseed, and safflower oils. No matter what health claims they tout, these inflammatory oils are extremely vulnerable to rancidity through heat, light, and oxygen, which means they don't belong in your kitchen (or your body). Remember that rancid, oxidized oils damage all cells in the body, including brain cells, and contribute to chronic, low-grade inflammation, which is a major player in almost every disease (including dementia). These oils are cheap to make, and 99% of food manufacturers use them in their packaged foods. By adopting this tip, you'll naturally give up many processed foods that are in direct opposition to the vitality of your brain, heart, and gut health, and you'll learn how to best replace them with more whole foods snacks.

## **\*A note about eating meat:**

Animals that are raised with respect, allowed to roam on pasture, and fed their natural diet contain healthy fats and protein, and I am a proponent of eating meat this way. I am not a proponent of eating animals raised in concentrated feed-lot operations that are fed a non-native diet of corn and grains and pumped with antibiotics in order to hasten their growth. We eat whatever the animals eat, including the antibiotics. I encourage you to seek local sources of organic, grass-fed grass-finished red meat, responsibly raised pork, and pastured poultry and eggs.



# TIP #4: UPGRADE YOUR PANTRY

Sugar is sneaky, and rancid oils are everywhere.

Both love to hide in your favorite sauces and condiments. Unhealthy oils and sugar stoke the flames of chronic, low-grade inflammation. Condiments also pack high levels of sodium. It's true: the cheapest foods are generally also the biggest offenders. When you upgrade your pantry, you'll realize that includes getting rid of some of your favorite snacks and condiments because they're manufactured with ingredients that don't support your long-term health.

Here's the bright side: Once your body gets an honest taste of real food and you give it a break from what's not real, it'll become difficult to go back. You'll love how great you feel too much! And your taste buds will definitely notice the difference. Luckily you can find a homemade recipe online for just about any old beloved condiment, from Bitchin' Sauce (my favorite) to chocolate pudding. To start, look at your selection of bottled salad dressings. Read the back label and note the sugar content per serving. Do the math to figure out how many servings and how much sugar you're eating. Notice which oils are used. Primal Kitchen makes a selection of bottled salad dressings, sauces, and mayonnaise without inflammatory oils. If you have a food processor or blender, homemade sauces are a cinch to whip up at home. Here are some other condiment swaps to make:

**PEANUT BUTTER** (swap to) **RAW ORGANIC PEANUT BUTTER** (CHECK FOR OILS), **ALMOND BUTTER**, **WALNUT BUTTER**, **TAHINI**

**SOY SAUCE** (swap to) **COCONUT AMINOS**

**KETCHUP** (swap to) **ORGANIC, SUGAR-FREE KETCHUP** OR **HOMEMADE**

**MAYONNAISE** (swap to) **AVOCADO OIL-BASED MAYO** OR **HOMEMADE**

**BBQ SAUCE** (swap to) **HOMEMADE** OR **HOT SAUCE + MISO**

**SUGAR, CORN SYRUP, AGAVE SYRUP** (swap to) **RAW HONEY, REAL MAPLE SYRUP**

## *OTHER FLAVORINGS AND CONDIMENTS TO KEEP:*

- SPICES (especially turmeric, ginger, dried herbs, cinnamon, black pepper, and sea salt)
- SAUERKRAUT AND KIMCHI (both are fermented foods that support healthy gut microbiota)
- VINEGARS (apple cider, balsamic, red wine, white wine, sherry, rice)
- MUSTARD (Dijon, spicy, coarse ground – watch for gluten and added sugar/oils)
- CAPERS

# TIP #5: GO ORGANIC

A compelling reason to go organic when it comes to brain health involves glyphosate, the most widely used weed-killer in the U.S.

Glyphosate is present in over 750 common herbicides, and these herbicides are used on crops all over the U.S. to kill crop-eating bugs. Doesn't sound so bad, but let's take a closer look: Glyphosate suppresses the enzyme responsible for synthesizing aromatic amino acids (AAs) in what's called the shikimate biosynthetic pathway. Humans don't synthesize AAs this way and instead must obtain them through diet. BUT: microorganisms do, which begs the question: what is glyphosate doing to the health of microorganisms in the soil, and what is it doing to the tens of trillions of gut microorganisms that maintain the body's ecology when it suppresses this vital step of the shikimate pathway? Furthermore, what does this have to do with our brains?

The body contains natural barriers that line the digestive tract and the brain, and these natural barriers act as firewalls to both harmful and beneficial agents in the bloodstream. The integrity of these barriers determines the degree to which the body is vulnerable to pathogens and environmental antigens and has been linked to the pathogenesis of various autoimmune conditions. More and more evidence is surfacing to suggest that Alzheimer's disease, one of many neurodegenerative disorders, is autoimmune in nature.

It is known that glyphosate significantly alters gut microbiota in mice. Gut microbiota play a critical role in maintaining intestinal barrier permeability and mediating the body's immune response. Autoimmunity arises when the immune system unleashes antimicrobial defenses upon normal components of the body. When we mess with our gut microbiome, we're messing with its ability to maintain intestinal permeability and regulate appropriate immune responses, which has a direct effect on cognitive health AND the health of our blood-brain barrier.

Organic crops are not treated with glyphosate. Additionally, organic vegetables and fruits are richer in polyphenols, those potent plant compounds that support healthy mucous membranes found in the digestive tract, respiratory and urogenital systems, and the insides of our ears and eyelids. Mucosal layers are a major player in the body's first line of defense against pathogens and other harmful agents. With that in mind, it makes sense to support them! Read on for a list of organic produce to prioritize.

# **DIRTY DOZEN + CLEAN 15**

Each year, the Environmental Working Group comprises a list of the top 12 "dirtiest" and top 15 "cleanest" fruits and vegetables.

The Dirty Dozen list includes fruits and vegetables with the highest traces of pesticides used in commercial farming. Conventionally-grown (or non-organic) produce on the Clean Fifteen list contain the least amount of pesticides.

When making the switch to organic, focus on these lists. When purchasing vegetables and fruits from The Dirty Dozen, go organic. These lists are updated annually and are current for the year 2020:

## **THE DIRTY DOZEN**

- 1) Strawberries
- 2) Spinach
- 3) Kale
- 4) Nectarines
- 5) Apples
- 6) Grapes
- 7) Peaches
- 8) Cherries
- 9) Pears
- 10) Tomatoes
- 11) Celery
- 12) Potatoes + Hot Peppers

## **THE CLEAN FIFTEEN**

- 1) Avocados
- 2) Sweet corn
- 3) Pineapple
- 4) Onions
- 5) Papaya
- 6) Sweet frozen peas
- 7) Eggplant
- 8) Asparagus
- 9) Cauliflower
- 10) Cantaloupe
- 11) Broccoli
- 12) Mushrooms
- 13) Cabbage
- 14) Honeydew melon
- 15) Kiwi



# TIP #6: COOK AT HOME

In today's world, we stand a slim chance of optimizing our health without learning to nurture ourselves by the work of our own hands.

One way to whole-heartedly commit to your long-term health is to cook. By doing so, you empower yourself. You claim your spot as the boss of your own nourishment. The nutrition you give your body today is not only what you need to feel your best today; it's also insurance against future health challenges. If you have the ability to hire someone to cook nourishing food for you, go for it! If not, unquestionably the best thing you can do for your vitality is to cook for yourself. It doesn't have to be hard; yet as with anything worth doing, cooking does take some time and effort. If you think you don't know how, I've got good news: I didn't either until I started learning. None of us do. We start by boiling water, and we build from there.

Your body and brain are going to thank you for nourishing it for years to come. I commend you for taking this important, rewarding step by learning a few do-able ways to support your long-term cognitive health. Note that the "Nutrition Hits" under each recipe in this eBook often highlight the benefits to gut and heart health as well as cognition. Our digestion and cardiovascular health are intimately tied to brain health, which is why it's compelling to consider foods that also nourish these systems, too.

The recipes do call for some cooking equipment that you may not yet have, such as a sharp chef's knife, food processor, a large soup pot, high-speed blender, and microplane. Each are well worth the investment. Acquire them as you're able.

For further nutrition and/or culinary support, please get in touch!  
Email [jacqui@realfooddesire.com](mailto:jacqui@realfooddesire.com) with inquiries, or send me a note about what you learned in this eBook. I'd love to hear from you.

Now, let's get cooking!



# THE RECIPES

## SPRING:

DEILED EGGS  
TAHINI MISO DIP  
CLEANSING RAINBOW SALAD

## SUMMER:

GREEK SALAD  
SUPERGREENS SOUP  
GRILLED STEAK (OR SALMON) WITH CHIMICHURRI HERB SAUCE

## FALL:

CHOCOLATE PUDDING  
CREAMY COCONUT BUTTERNUT SQUASH  
CINNAMON VANILLA WALNUT BUTTER

## WINTER:

POMEGRANATE SALSA  
TURMERIC GINGER DRESSING  
PERFECT CHICKEN SOUP



# DEVILED EGGS

Makes 1 dozen deviled eggs

## INGREDIENTS:

6 Pastured eggs  
2 TBSP Horseradish  
3 TBSP Avocado oil-based mayonnaise  
2 tsp Dijon mustard  
Sea salt to taste  
Aleppo pepper or paprika (sweet, regular, or smoked paprika are all good)

## TOOLS NEEDED:

Medium-sized soup pot  
Sharp knife (paring or chef's knife)  
Mixing bowl  
Spoon  
Fork  
Measuring spoons

## METHOD:

Add eggs to a pot and cover with cold water. Bring water to a rolling boil, then immediately turn off heat. Let eggs sit in hot water for 10 minutes. Drain and rinse eggs in cold water. Then peel them.

Use a sharp knife to slice eggs in half lengthwise. Scoop egg yolks from their whites and combine yolks in a bowl. To the bowl, add horseradish, Dijon mustard, and mayonnaise. Mash yolks and flavorings together with a fork. Scoop a bit of deviled yolk into each egg white. Sprinkle with sea salt and Aleppo pepper or paprika.

Deviled eggs can be made a day ahead and assembled as you want them. Chill the deviled yolk mixture separate from the hard-boiled whites and fill the whites just before it's time to eat.

## NUTRITION HITS:

Choline in yolks is used by the body to make "acetylcholine." Acetylcholine is the master neurotransmitter of the parasympathetic nervous system. Actions relating to "rest and digest" are the responsibility of this arm of the nervous system. Yolks also contain lutein and zeaxanthin. These carotenoids have neuro-protective properties and have been shown to improve the brain's processing speed. All of these nutrients are also necessary for the vitality of our eyes.



# TAHINI MISO DIP

Makes about 1½ cups

## INGREDIENTS:

¼ cup fresh parsley leaves  
2 cloves garlic  
1 cup tahini  
2 TBSP white or red miso  
Juice of 1 lemon (equal to ¼ cup fresh juice)  
1 tsp dried turmeric powder (or 2 tsp fresh turmeric)  
¼ tsp black pepper  
¼ cup or more water

## TOOLS NEEDED:

Sharp chef's knife  
Food processor  
Dry measuring cups  
Measuring spoons  
Spatula

## METHOD:

Peel the garlic. Roughly chop parsley leaves and add to the food processor with the garlic cloves. Pulse until finely chopped.

Add tahini, miso, lemon juice, turmeric, and black pepper. Spin in food processor until mixture is smooth. Add water by the tablespoon through the feed tube while processor is running. You will probably need at least ¼ of a cup of water. Only add more, 1 TBSP at a time, if the mixture isn't smoothing out.

This dip goes well with fresh spring vegetables! You could also thin it out with much more water, lemon juice, and olive oil and make into a vinaigrette to go with raw or lightly steamed spring greens.

## NUTRITION HITS:

Miso is a fermented food and provides the gut with beneficial bacteria. Turmeric is anti-inflammatory and much more bioavailable when consumed with black pepper. Tahini contains copper, an essential trace mineral that the body uses to convert iron into hemoglobin, and to utilize Vitamin C.

# CLEANSING RAINBOW SALAD

Serves 4

## INGREDIENTS:

2 orange carrots  
1 large or 2 small red beets (substitute 1 cup shredded purple cabbage)  
2 small green zucchini  
2 spring onions (substitute 1 small red onion)  
2 ripe avocados  
6 cups spring greens  
½ cup raw pumpkin or sunflower seeds  
1 cup Turmeric Ginger Dressing (recipe on pg 22)

## TOOLS NEEDED:

Vegetable peeler  
Food processor  
Spatula  
Spoon  
Big salad bowl or platter  
Sharp chef's knife + butter knife  
Cutting board  
Tongs for serving

## METHOD:

Peel the carrots and use your food processor to shred them. Transfer shredded carrots to a bowl using hands or a spatula. Trim and peel the beets. Shred them in your food processor. Dice the zucchini and peel and slice the onions thinly. Slice each avocado carefully around the pit, twist the halves, and squeeze the half with the pit to release it. Use a butter knife to cut a grid into the flesh of the avocado and scoop the pieces from each half. Scoop thoroughly! The highest concentration of nutrients are closest to the peel.

Layer all vegetables in a big salad bowl or large platter, starting with the spring greens. Top with diced avocado and pumpkin or sunflower seeds, and serve with Turmeric Ginger Dressing on the side.

## NUTRITION HITS:

Raw beets have a type of phytonutrient called betalains, which are most concentrated in raw beets and progressively lose their potency with longer exposure to heat. Betalains play a critical role during the second phase of detoxification in the liver. A properly supported liver and effective detox system help promote hormonal balance, energy metabolism, and healthy blood lipid levels. Spring greens are a source of chlorophyll, which is also supportive of liver detox and boosting to the immune system, What naturally supports the immune system also supports the gut and brain.

# GREEK SALAD

Serves 4

## INGREDIENTS:

2 large cucumbers  
2 green zucchini  
1 pint cherry tomatoes (a mix of colors is pretty)  
1 medium red onion  
¾ cup whole kalamata olives  
Handful fresh oregano leaves  
Handful fresh mint leaves

## GREEK DRESSING:

¼ cup red wine vinegar  
½ cup extra virgin olive oil  
Sea salt to taste  
Black pepper to taste  
Optional: pinch of dried oregano

## TOOLS NEEDED:

Sharp chef's knife  
Cutting board  
Mixing bowl  
Whisk  
Large serving bowl or platter  
Tongs for serving

## METHOD:

Chop the cucumber and zucchini into 1-inch pieces. Slice cherry tomatoes in half. Slice onion in half, peel each half, and slice the halves thinly. Add the vegetables and olives to a mixing bowl. Tear the herbs and scatter over the salad.

Whisk the dressing ingredients together and drizzle over your salad. Toss gently to combine. Transfer to your serving bowl or platter.

## NUTRITION HITS:

Fresh, raw tomatoes are high in Vitamin C. Vitamin C is used by the body's cells to limit the harmful effects of free radicals. Zucchini is a source of lutein, which is a phytonutrient known to protect the eyes and the brain. Lutein is more bioavailable when eaten with healthy fat, such as olive oil. Onions contain Vitamin C and quercetin; quercetin helps boost the immune system with its antiviral and anti-inflammatory properties. Quercetin is present in fresh oregano, too.

# SUPERGREENS SOUP

Serves 4

## INGREDIENTS:

1 white onion

1 head broccoli

2 stalks celery

½ lb green beans

3 cloves garlic

3 TBSP extra virgin olive oil + extra for serving

6 cups bone broth or vegetable broth

2 bunches kale leaves

2 zucchini

2 TBSP fresh oregano, chopped

¼ cup fresh dill, mint, and basil (use any combination)

Sea salt and black pepper to taste

**For serving:** raw sunflower or pumpkin seeds, extra virgin olive oil, fresh lemon

## METHOD:

Chop all veggies into bite-sized pieces but keep them separate. Peel and mince the garlic. Add the olive oil to your soup pot and heat it slowly over medium heat.

Add the onion, broccoli, and celery to the pot and stir until the broccoli is bright green and the onion and celery are tender. Add the minced garlic and cook for 30 seconds. Then add enough broth to cover the vegetables by about an inch. Bring soup to a quick boil and then turn heat down to a simmer. Simmer for 15-20 minutes.

Meanwhile, strip the kale leaves from their stems and chop leaves into small pieces. Dice the zucchini and tear up the fresh herbs.

After 15-20 minutes of simmering, take a taste of your veggies in the soup. Are they soft enough? Simmer longer if they're not. Add the zucchini and kale to the soup, stir, and continue to cook for another 3-5 minutes. Turn off heat and add torn herbs. Taste and season with sea salt and black pepper.

## NUTRITION HITS:

Broccoli and kale have high amounts of Vitamin K1. The body uses K1 to produce clotting factors for the blood and for bone metabolism. A 2013 Quebec study including 320 men and women aged between 70-85 years showed an association between higher blood levels of Vitamin K1 and better verbal episodic memory performances, suggesting that intake of green vegetables containing Vitamin K1 is supportive of cognitive health as we age. Extra virgin olive oil, pumpkin seeds, and sunflower seeds all provide Vitamin E, an important fat-soluble antioxidant.

# GRILLED STEAK (OR SALMON) WITH CHIMICHURRI HERB SAUCE

Serves 4

## INGREDIENTS:

1½ lbs 100% grass-fed skirt steak OR 1½ lbs wild-caught salmon (with skin, cut into equal filets)

Sea salt and ground black pepper

For salmon: softened ghee or coconut oil

## CHIMICHURRI HERB SAUCE:

1 bunch parsley

2 bunches cilantro

¼ cup fresh oregano leaves

4 cloves garlic

½ tsp sea salt

Juice of ½ lime

2 TBSP raw apple cider vinegar

¼ cup extra virgin olive oil

Pinch red pepper flakes

## METHOD:

Take the steak or salmon from the fridge and rest it on a plate for 30 minutes before it's time to grill. Preheat your grill. Meanwhile, make the chimichurri herb sauce: Tear the parsley leaves from their stems. Do the same with the cilantro and oregano. Add leaves to your food processor. Peel the garlic and mince the cloves. Add the salt, lime juice, and apple cider vinegar. Pulse to combine all ingredients, then slowly pour the olive oil through the feed tube while the motor is running. Stir in the red pepper flakes. Taste and adjust with more salt or olive oil. Pour into a jar for serving and mix in red pepper flakes.

Season the steak or salmon well with sea salt and black pepper. Grill steak until it's cooked to your preference. Slice steak into about 4-inch sections with the grain; slice each section into thin pieces perpendicular across the grain. Rub salmon with softened ghee or coconut oil and grill skin-side down for about 6 minutes. Flip and finish grilling until salmon is cooked to your preference. Serve with Chimichurri.

## NUTRITION HITS:

Grass-fed beef packs a punch of B vitamins, iron, selenium, zinc, Omega-3 fats, and Vitamin E. Garlic, herbs, and olive oil in the Chimichurri Herb Sauce provide the body with antioxidants to help counteract chemicals produced in grilled meat. Beef is one of the best sources of zinc, an essential mineral to the brain. Neurons need zinc to communicate with other neurons. Salmon contains Omega 3s that are essential for heart and brain health.



# CHOCOLATE PUDDING

Makes just over 2 cups

## INGREDIENTS:

1 ripe avocado  
¼ cup raw cacao powder  
1 13.5-oz can full-fat coconut milk  
1 TBSP chia seeds  
½ ripe peeled banana  
pinch ground cinnamon  
Optional: 1-2 TBSP raw honey or maple syrup

## TOOLS NEEDED:

Dry measuring cups  
Measuring spoons  
Sharp chef's knife  
Can opener  
Cutting board  
High-speed blender  
Glass container with lid for storage

## METHOD:

Slice each avocado carefully around the pit, twist the halves, and squeeze the half with the pit to release it. Scoop the avocado thoroughly from each half and add to your blender. The highest concentration of an avocado's nutrients are closest to the peel.

Add the rest of the ingredients to your blender and blend on high for 1 minute. Pour into a glass container, cover, and chill overnight.

## NUTRITION HITS:

Raw cacao contains copper and magnesium. One study in mice found that when subjects with enlarged hearts were fed extra doses of copper (still below the upper limit of copper but above the daily value for humans), their hearts returned to normal size, suggesting that copper may help people with thickened heart muscle conditions. Copper is a critical mineral used by enzymes that activate the brain's neurotransmitters and is essential to the health of the brain when at rest. Magnesium is a master mineral used by over 300 enzymes in the processes of energy metabolism, protein synthesis, heart health maintenance, blood sugar regulation, and healthy nervous system function. Chia seeds provide protein, Omega-3 fatty acids, and also help to create structure in the pudding. Bananas and avocados both contain potassium, which regulates internal fluid balance and helps normalize heart rhythms.

# CREAMY COCONUT BUTTERNUT SQUASH

Serves 4

## INGREDIENTS:

1 large butternut squash  
2 or 3 TBSP coconut oil  
Sea salt and black pepper to taste  
Pinch of ground nutmeg

## TOOLS NEEDED:

Baking sheet + parchment paper  
Sharp chef's knife  
Cutting board  
Dry measuring cups  
Spoon

## METHOD:

Preheat oven to 400 degrees F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Arrange a baking rack in the middle of your oven. Carefully slice the stem from the squash. Then slice the squash in half lengthwise (no need to scoop out the seeds yet).

Rub the cut surface of each squash half with 1 tsp of coconut oil and place the halves on your baking sheet cut side down. Roast until you can easily pierce a knife through the skin and flesh of the squash. Flesh will be caramelized and very tender. This takes about 50 minutes to an hour. Remove the squash from the oven and let it cool enough to handle. Scoop out the seeds and discard. Scoop the flesh into a bowl. Break up the squash with a spoon as you mix in the coconut oil, sea salt, pepper, and nutmeg. Taste and season more as desired.

## NUTRITION HITS:

Squash contains a good amount of fiber which is vital to a properly-functioning digestive system (though fiber can be aggravating to digestion if you're suffering from any kind of gut dysbiosis, and will require some targeted gut therapeutics before an increase in fiber is advised). Squash is also very high in provitamin A, or carotene. Cooking butternut squash in a stable fat (such as coconut oil) improves the conversion rate of carotene to the active form of Vitamin A. The body uses active Vitamin A to strengthen our bones, teeth, gums, hair, immune system, and to maintain the epithelial layer of the skin, respiratory tract, bladder, and gut. Vitamin A also shortens the length of illness and counteracts night blindness. It's an essential vitamin for the health of our eyes.

# CINNAMON VANILLA WALNUT BUTTER

(Inspired by Linda Kiker)

Makes 2 cups

## INGREDIENTS:

2 TBSP coconut oil  
2 cups raw, unsalted walnut pieces  
¼ tsp sea salt  
1 tsp pure vanilla extract  
2 tsp ground cinnamon  
1 TBSP raw honey

## TOOLS NEEDED:

Small sauce pot  
Measuring spoons  
Dry measuring cups  
Food processor  
Spatula

## METHOD:

Melt coconut oil slowly in a sauce pot. Add walnuts to a food processor with sea salt, vanilla, cinnamon, melted coconut oil, and honey.

Process the walnuts until smooth. This takes about 10 minutes. Stop the food processor and scrape down the sides of the bowl as you go. Store in the fridge.

## NUTRITION HITS:

Walnuts are a source of Omega-3 fatty acids, and they contain the highest level of antioxidants of any nut. Adult human clinical trials have shown association between eating walnuts and improved cognitive performance and memory when compared to baseline. It's also been shown that walnuts reduce oxidative damage, increase antioxidant defense, and decrease inflammation in the brain and heart.

# POMEGRANATE SALSA

(Inspired by Tippy Maurant)

Makes 2 cups

## INGREDIENTS:

1 bunch radishes  
1 small red onion (about 1/3 cup minced)  
1 small jalapeno (or use half if it's a very spicy pepper)  
1 to 2 limes  
1 bunch cilantro  
1-inch piece of ginger  
2 cups pomegranate seeds (from 2 to 3 pomegranates)  
Sea salt to taste

## TOOLS NEEDED:

Sharp chef's knife  
Cutting board  
2 Mixing bowls  
Metal spoon  
Microplane

## METHOD:

Trim the radishes and dice them finely. Mince red onion and jalapeno. Slice the limes in half and squeeze the juice into a clean bowl. Tear cilantro leaves from their stems and chop the leaves into small pieces. To get to the pomegranate seeds, cut the pomegranate in half widthwise. Then cut each half in quarters. Place pomegranate pieces in mixing bowl and use your hands to scoop out seeds. Discard the pith.

Use a metal spoon to peel the ginger and your microplane to grate it finely. Combine all ingredients with the pomegranate seeds and mix! Add sea salt and lime juice to taste.

## NUTRITION HITS:

Pomegranates have a special compound that helps protect the mucosal lining of the gastrointestinal tract. Pomegranates help improve the flow of oxygen in the blood, and studies have shown neuroprotective benefits and the ability of pomegranate juice to stave off neurodegeneration in animal models of Alzheimer's disease. Store-bought pomegranate juice tends to be high in sugar and devoid of fiber, which is why it's recommended to eat the seeds whole instead.

# TURMERIC GINGER DRESSING

(Inspired by Lindsey Bomgren)

Makes 1 cup

## INGREDIENTS:

1/3 cup fresh lemon juice (from 1 large or 2-3 small lemons)  
1 clove garlic  
1-inch piece fresh ginger root  
1 tsp raw honey  
1 tsp ground turmeric (or 2 tsp fresh turmeric, grated)  
1/4 tsp sea salt  
Pinch ground black pepper  
2/3 cup extra virgin olive oil

## TOOLS NEEDED:

Sharp chef's knife  
Cutting board  
Microplane  
Metal spoon  
Measuring spoons  
Liquid measuring cup  
Glass jar with matching lid  
Optional: blender

## METHOD:

Squeeze lemon juice into a glass jar. Peel and grate the garlic using a microplane. Using a metal spoon, peel the ginger and grate it with a microplane. Grate the garlic and add to your glass jar. Add honey, turmeric, sea salt, and pepper. Pour in olive oil, seal the jar, and shake until ingredients are combined.

ALTERNATIVELY: Add all ingredients to a blender and blend until combined.

Taste and adjust with more salt, pepper, or olive oil. Dressing separates quickly. Shake again before pouring!

## NUTRITION HITS:

When eaten together with ginger, turmeric is powerfully anti-inflammatory. Piperine in black pepper helps to increase the bioavailability of turmeric and ramp up its anti-inflammatory benefits. The potent compound in turmeric called curcumin is lipophilic, or “fat-loving,” and it’s the reason why you’ll often see instructions to sauté turmeric and other spices in coconut oil as one of the first steps in a curry recipe. Lipophilic compounds such as turmeric and Vitamin E scavenge for free radicals, those harmful agents that cause cellular damage. Turmeric also promotes healthy digestion by helping to stimulate bile production. Bile salts help the body break down fats,



# PERFECT CHICKEN SOUP

(Inspired by Barbara Kafka)

Serves 4

## INGREDIENTS:

1¾ lbs bone-in, skin-on organic pasture-raised chicken breast  
2 stalks celery  
2 carrots  
1 medium celeriac (also called celery root!)  
1 medium white onion  
2 Belgian endive  
3 TBSP coconut oil or ghee  
4 to 5 cups chicken bone broth  
1 can full-fat coconut milk  
2 tsp sea salt  
1 tsp black pepper  
Optional: fresh flat leaf parsley to garnish

## METHOD:

Preheat oven to 425 degrees F. Season chicken breasts with salt and black pepper. Roast in a glass baking dish or on a parchment-lined baking sheet for 30 minutes. Remove chicken from oven and set aside to cool slightly.

While chicken roasts, chop your celery, carrots, celeriac, onion, and Belgian endive into bite-sized pieces. Separate the endive from the rest of the ingredients to add toward the end of cooking. Add coconut oil or ghee to a medium-sized soup pot. Add chopped celery, carrots, celeriac, and onion. Stir vegetables to coat in oil, and sauté over medium heat until softened, about 5-7 minutes. Add 4 cups bone broth and the coconut milk. Bring to a simmer and add more bone broth as needed. Partially cover the pot and continue simmering until vegetables become tender to the bite. Once chicken has cooled enough to handle, tear off the chicken skin (save to eat separately or discard). Tear the meat from the bone and chop into rough, bite-sized pieces. Once veggies are tender, add chopped chicken to the soup and continue cooking for 5 minutes. Taste: add sea salt to your preference starting with 2 tsp. Add pepper. Serve soup garnished with chopped parsley.

## NUTRITION HITS:

Bone broth contains glycine, proline, and glutamine, all of which can be very beneficial to the gut and the brain. Chicken is a source of complete protein, which means it delivers a full spectrum of essential amino acids that the body requires to rebuild and repair tissues. Coconut milk and coconut oil have a special fat called lauric acid; this fat is converted to an antiviral, antibacterial, antifungal, and immune modulating compound called monolaurin.

# AUTHOR BIO

When I was young, I learned to cook by necessity. This turned out to be a great gift, as it gave me independence and an early foundation for self-advocacy when it comes to my health. After college, I spent a lot of time searching. I found my way to nutrition and cooking after working for several years in hospitality, fashion, and education. Cooking professionally was intimidating to me, but I'd always loved what food represented, and I was drawn to nurturing people.

While I was living in Seoul, I got really sick. My hormones were a mess, and I knew I had to make some radical lifestyle changes. I was fortunate to be exposed to a complimentary perspective on medicine; South Korea is incredibly modern; also, the knowing remains of how food and herbs can support the body's ability to repair.

I decided I'd pursue nutrition after experiencing fast results with a complete dietary overhaul, and I moved three suitcases and (true story!) a 6-month supply of homemade kimchi back to my hometown of Minneapolis to prepare to apply to graduate school. I enrolled in Nutrition Therapy Institute's Natural Food Chef program and went on to study nutrition therapy. One year later, my dad's health quickly deteriorated. He'd developed dementia. Consequently, I became ultra passionate and focused on protecting the brain through diet and lifestyle.

I teach people how to cook in a way that's supportive to their brains, and I also cook privately for a small number of families who are on a protocol for long-term cognitive health.

If you're ready to make sustainable changes to enhance the health of your brain, please send me an email: [jacqui@realfooddesire.com](mailto:jacqui@realfooddesire.com) so that we can set up a free 20-minute exploratory call. Or just write to say hello. I'd love to hear from you.

JOY to you-

A handwritten signature in green ink, appearing to be 'Jacqui', with a small dot above the first letter.

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