

## Building Brain Health with Blueberries

By Cheryl J. Dye, PhD

Director, Clemson University Institute for Engaged Aging

Many people are concerned about their brain health as they get older. According to the Alzheimer's Association, between 2000 and 2013, the cause of death due to Alzheimer's Disease (AD) grew by 71% compared to cancer which increased by only 6% and heart disease which declined by 14%. There is a lot we don't know about Alzheimer's Disease and, sadly, there is no treatment or cure.

Fortunately, there are things we can do to reduce risk of Alzheimer's Disease and other dementias. Research published in *Alzheimer's & Dementia: The Journal of the Alzheimer's Association* (2015) has shown that those who follow the MIND diet (Mediterranean-DASH Intervention for Neurodegenerative Delay) were able to reduce their risk of AD by 53% if they followed it closely, and even those who followed it only moderately well were able to reduce their risk by 35%.

The MIND diet emphasizes vegetables, fish such as salmon which is high in Omega 3, and berries. The most beneficial berry is the blueberry, followed by strawberries. Blueberries are rich in flavonoids, which possess antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties. Research published in *Applied Physiology, Nutrition, and Metabolism* (2017) showed that consumption of a blueberry concentrate supplementation for 12 weeks increased activation of brain areas associated with cognitive processes including memory and executive function (the ability to create and carry out a plan).

A colleague who was a bench scientist researching neurological diseases told me about the blueberry and brain health connection 15 years ago. She suggested that I eat one cup a day which I have since been attempting to do. In the summer I eat them with Greek yogurt and in the winter, I eat them with oatmeal. It is best to eat them fresh or barely thawed from frozen as blueberries lose much of their beneficial properties when cooked. Blueberries are a delicious way to take care of your brain!

Suggested read:

Enhanced task-related brain activation and resting perfusion in health older adults after chronic blueberry supplementation. Bowtell, Aboo-Bakkar, Conway, Adlam, Fulford. *Applied Physiology, Nutrition, and Metabolism*. 2017

<http://www.nrcresearchpress.com/doi/10.1139/apnm-2016-0550#.W0PYMtVKjRY>