

Lutein may have role in brain health

October 27 2014, by Julie Flaherty



Researchers have known for a while that getting enough lutein in your diet seems to be a good thing for eye health; people who consume more of this deep yellow pigment found in dark green leafy vegetables and brightly colored fruits are less likely to develop age-related macular degeneration, for example. But lutein may have a special role in brain health as well.

In an article she wrote for the journal *Nutrition Reviews*, Elizabeth Johnson, a scientist in the Antioxidants Research Laboratory at the Jean Mayer USDA Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging at Tufts, makes a case for studying [lutein](#)'s cognitive benefits. She points out that the brain absorbs more lutein than it does other carotenoids (including beta carotene and lycopene). One study found that having a lutein-rich brain was associated with better marks on a wide range of cognitive

measures, including executive function, language, learning and memory.

The need for lutein may start early. Johnston writes that because children have twice the percentage of lutein in their brains as adults, there is a good chance that lutein is important for neural development during the first years of life.

Unfortunately, most Americans don't get enough lutein. While there is no recommended dietary allowance for lutein, it takes 6 mg per day to lower the risk of [age-related macular degeneration](#). The average adult gets less than 2 mg per day. Kale, collards and spinach are the lutein powerhouses, but you can also find it in broccoli, eggs and avocados, among other places.

Provided by Tufts University

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