

Mental stimulation limits the effect of Western diet on thinking skills

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Researchers at the Alzheimer's Association International Conference 2016 have suggested that people with more education, a mentally challenging job and an active social life might be able to better withstand the decline in memory and thinking skills associated with a diet containing lots of sugar and processed foods.

The Toronto-based researchers followed a group of 351 older adults over a period of three years. The participants answered questionnaires about their diet, educational background, [social engagement](#) and occupational history and undertook tests of memory and thinking ability. The researchers found that a Western diet was associated with faster [cognitive decline](#), but that this relationship was less evident in those people with a higher cognitive reserve – those who reported higher education, a more complex occupation and higher levels of social engagement.

Dr David Reynolds, Chief Scientific Officer of Alzheimer's Research UK, said:

"Previous research shows that a balanced diet with plenty of fruits and vegetables is likely to be better for brain health than a more typical 'Western diet' with large amounts of processed foods, sugar, and fat. These results suggest that education, job complexity and social engagement could all influence the brain's ability to resist damage and this could go some way to counteracting cognitive decline driven by an unhealthy diet."

"Age, genetics and lifestyle factors all contribute to a person's risk of memory and thinking problems as they age, and the relative importance of each will differ for every individual. Understanding the interplay between the many and varied factors influencing [brain health](#) will help to shape public health messaging that has the power to reduce the impact of cognitive decline and dementia across the population as a whole. Alongside a healthy [diet](#) and mental activity, the best current evidence shows that not smoking, taking regular exercise, only drinking in moderation and keeping blood pressure and cholesterol in check can all help to keep our brains healthy as we age."

Provided by Alzheimer's Research UK

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