IMPACT

Identify Mechanisms to Preserve Agility in Cognition and Thinking

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From the
ABC Lab
at **Northwestern Memorial Hospital**

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Brain Health Tip:

Your Brain and What You Eat

What you eat can have a big impact on your brain. Your **gut influences your metabolism, inflammation, blood vessel health, and brain signaling**, which matter for memory, thinking, and dementia prevention as we age.

A 2025 international expert panel released a statement about nutrition and dementia prevention.

Their message: **"Small changes in everyday eating habits can support long-term brain health."**

5 “Brain-and-Gut Friendly” Habits to Try This Month

1. **Add fiber** like beans, lentils, oats, vegetables, berries, nuts or seeds.

2. **Choose healthy fats** like olive or canola oil, and fish and nuts.

3. Eat more **fruits and vegetables.**

4. **Cut back on ultra-processed foods** (when you can).

5. **Aim for consistency, not perfection;** start with one change you can maintain.

A "Brain Health Plate"

1/2 plate: **Vegetables & Fruit**

1/4 plate: **Whole Grains** (brown rice, oats, whole wheat, quinoa)

1/4 plate: **Protein** (beans, lentils, fish, poultry, tofu, eggs)

Add: olive oil, nuts/seeds, yogurt/kefir, herbs/spices

Drink: water, unsweetened tea/coffee (as appropriate)

“Gut-Friendly” Foods

Nuts/seeds:
walnuts, almonds, chia, flax, pumpkin seeds

Fermented options:
yogurt with live cultures, kefir, kimchi, sauerkraut, miso

High-fiber staples:
beans, lentils, chickpeas, oats, barley, whole wheat, berries, leafy greens, broccoli, sweet potatoes

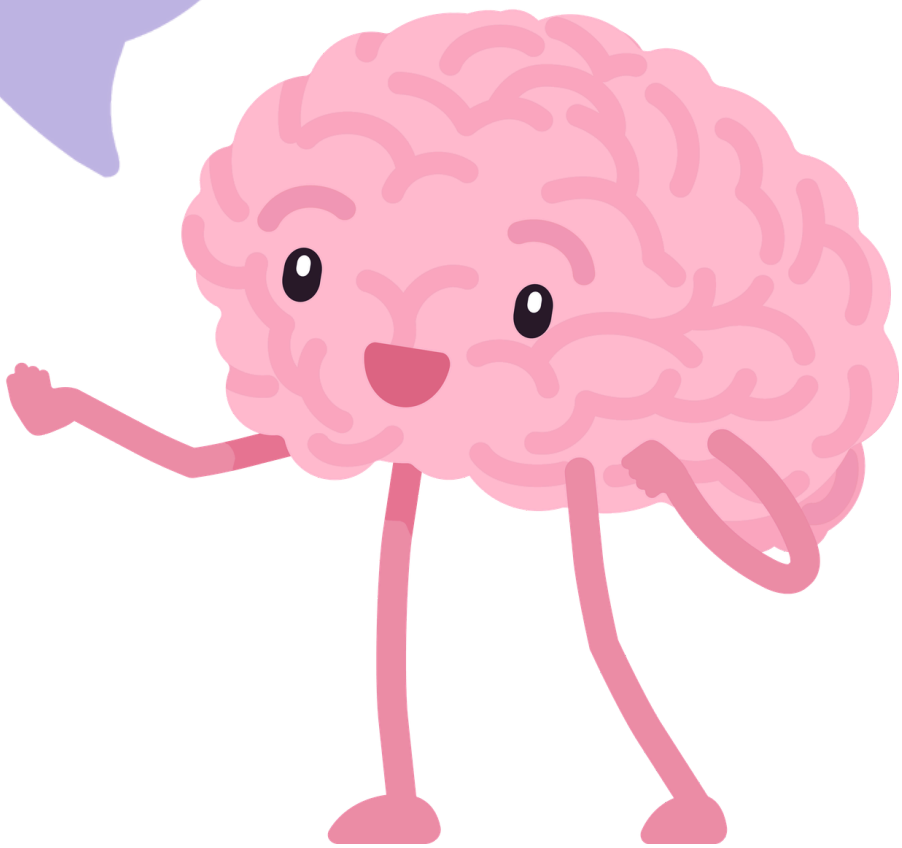
Short on Time?

Try these quick meal upgrades!

- Add beans to soup, salad, tacos, or pasta sauce
- Top yogurt or oatmeal with berries + nuts
- Swap refined grains for whole grains
- Keep “grab-and-go” options: baby carrots, apples, hummus, mixed nuts

Did You Know?

Your gut microbes can change with your diet in a matter of days. **Long-term habits matter most.**



This newsletter is not medical advice. If you have diabetes, kidney disease, food allergies, GI conditions, or take medications affected by diet, please discuss changes with your doctor or a registered dietitian.

Dr. Shahin Yaghoobi, MD (he/him)

How Sex Differences Affect Dementia Risk

We are thrilled to announce that **postdoctoral fellow from the ABC Lab Shahin Yaghoobi, MD** has received the Shaw Innovation Award. Each year, the Center for Reproductive Science grants the **Shaw Innovation Award** to projects that **advance sex-inclusive research.** Dr. Yaghoobi's project, “Imaging Bio-markers of Sex-Specific Brain Aging and Cognition", is a 2025-2026 award winner.

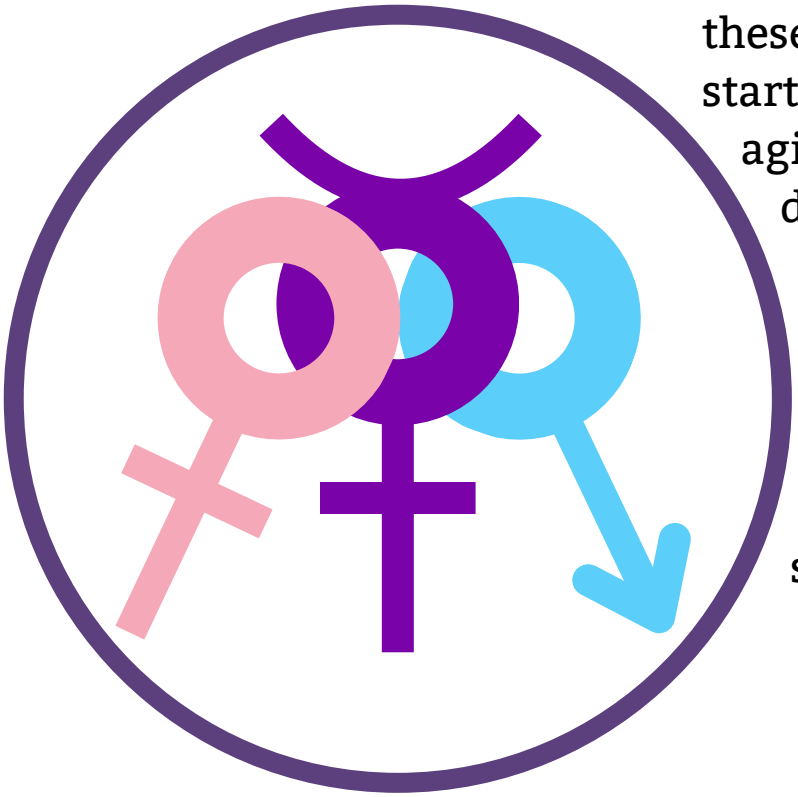
People with **high blood pressure, diabetes, and high cholesterol** are more likely to have a **stroke or develop dementia**. Yet if a woman and a man have the same blood pressure, cholesterol, and diabetes profile, the woman is more likely to develop dementia.

Why is the woman's dementia risk higher?

One possible explanation is that "normal" levels of risk factors is different between sexes. For example, ideal blood pressure might be lower for women than for men.

Dr. Yaghoobi asks: "Are female and male brains **differently affected** by risk factors?"

Dr. Yaghoobi's project examines whether there are sex-specific patterns of brain damage, and whether certain brain regions are more vulnerable in female brains than in male brains at similar levels of vascular risk.



By linking these measures of brain damage to vascular risk factors and cognitive performance, the study will search for why female brains often carry a greater burden of injury.

The team aims to identify sex-specific levels at which these common risk factors start to accelerate brain aging and regional brain damage. Ultimately, the **goal is to develop more precise, sex-informed prevention strategies**, instead of assuming that "normal" looks the same for everyone.

We'd love your feedback!

If you have any feedback on your visit(s) or this newsletter, please email **ABCLab@northwestern.edu** or call **(312) 612-0316.**

Learn more about our study
and how you can get involved on
our website: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