

10 Herbs and Supplements That Help Boost Memory: Current Studies

PREMIUM FEATURED HERBAL MEDICINE



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Memory is an essential cognitive function that enables us to store, retain, and retrieve information. However, as we age or face various cognitive challenges, our memory may start to decline. Fortunately, there are many cognition enhancers, vitamins, and other supplements that can boost memory and cognitive function.

1. Omega-3 Fatty Acids

Omega-3 fatty acids are essential fats that play a vital role in brain health and cognitive function. They are found in fatty fish, such as salmon and mackerel, as well as in nuts and seeds.

A [systematic review](#) looked at 14 studies to conclude that omega-3s could be used as a preventive or therapeutic tool for cognitive decline in aged or elderly adults.

A 2016 double-blind placebo-controlled proof-of-concept study published in the [Journal of Alzheimer's Disease](#) found that omega-3s exert “positive effects on memory functions in healthy older adults.”



Fish such as mackerel, salmon, and saury are rich in fatty acids, including DHA (docosahexaenoic acid) and EPA (eicosapentaenoic acid). These fatty acids are essential to a healthy brain and body. (Tatiana Bralnina/Shutterstock)

2. Bacopa Monnieri

Bacopa monnieri is an herb that has been used in traditional Ayurvedic medicine for centuries. Studies have shown that Bacopa monnieri can improve memory and learning abilities, particularly in older adults.

In one study, Bacopa monnieri [showed modest improvements](#) in study participants with memory loss, while another found [using an extract](#) of the herb improved spatial working memory and encouraged the growth of new neurons in an animal model.



Bacopa monnieri. (AmyLv/Shutterstock)

3. Caffeine

Caffeine is a stimulant commonly found in coffee, tea, and energy drinks. It can improve alertness and concentration. Research suggests that a delicious cup of joe can also enhance memory.

The findings of [one study suggest](#) caffeine has a specific benefit for memory during students' "non-optimal time of day"—early morning. These findings have real-world implications for students taking morning exams.

A [review of studies](#) finds chronic treatment with caffeine was shown to be effective in preventing β -amyloid production and memory deficits in experimental models of Alzheimer's disease.

However, it's essential to keep in mind that too much caffeine can lead to negative side effects, such as anxiety and insomnia.



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4. Ginkgo Biloba

Ginkgo biloba is an herb that has been used in traditional Chinese medicine for centuries. It's believed to improve blood flow to the brain, which could enhance memory and cognitive function.

A randomized, [double-blind crossover study](#) found that two tablets of Ginkgo biloba extract taken daily over 14 days extract improved cognitive processing during working memory tasks. Each tablet contained the equivalent of 2 grams of dry leaf and was standardized to provide 10.7 milligrams of ginkgo flavonol glycosides and 2.7 milligrams of ginkgolides and bilobalide.

A [review of studies](#) that investigated Ginkgo biloba [extract EGb 761](#), a standardized form of the plant extract, found that EGb 761 at 240 milligrams a day can stabilize or slow decline in cognition in participants with cognitive impairment and dementia.



Ginkgo biloba. (v.apl/Shutterstock)

Ginkgo biloba is considered [safe and well-tolerated](#). The maximum recommended dose for ginkgo extract is 240 milligrams a day. It can have mild adverse effects that include headaches, heart palpitations, gastrointestinal upset, constipation, and allergic skin reactions.

5. L-Theanine

L-theanine is an amino acid commonly found in green tea and mushrooms. It can enhance relaxation and reduce stress, which may improve cognitive function, including memory.

Researchers found middle-aged participants who took a [single dose of l-theanine](#) (100.6 mg) experienced improved reaction time in attention tasks and an increased number of correct answers, as well as a decreased number of omission errors in working memory tasks.

An [investigation of elderly people](#) with normal or slight cognitive dysfunction, who were given powdered green tea containing a high theanine concentration (about 47.5 mg) experienced a significantly lower decline in cognitive function compared to a placebo group.



(5 second Studio/Shutterstock)

6. Vitamin B12

Vitamin B12 is an essential vitamin that plays a crucial role in brain health and cognitive function. It is found in animal products, such as meat, fish, and dairy.

A cross-sectional, multicenter [study of patients](#) with minimal cognitive impairment assessed for vitamin B12 levels to identify those deficient in the vitamin. Those patients were then given B12 replacement therapy, and of 202 patients included in the study, 84 percent reported marked symptomatic improvement.

[Another study found](#) that vitamin B12 combined with vitamin B9 (folate) can prevent [hyperhomocysteinemia](#), which is associated with increased Alzheimer's disease risk.



Different foods containing vitamin B12. (Tatjana Baibakova/Shutterstock)

7. Rhodiola Rosea

Rhodiola rosea is an herb that has been used in traditional medicine for centuries. It is believed to enhance cognitive function, including memory.

A systematic [review and meta-analysis](#) of studies concluded that Rhodiola rosea can improve learning and memory function, through factors that include its antioxidant and anti-inflammatory effects that improve coronary blood flow, and cerebral metabolism.

[Other research finds](#) that this plant has dual actions of cognitive stimulation and emotional calming that benefit cognitive and memory performance, and help long-term preservation of brain functions.



Rhodiola rosea. (Lukas Juocas/Shutterstock)

8. Creatine

Creatine is a compound commonly used by athletes to improve performance. Research suggests that it can also enhance cognitive functions, including memory.

A systematic review of [randomized controlled studies](#) finds evidence that short-term memory and intelligence/reasoning are improved in people who take creatine.

Other [researchers concluded that creatine](#) supplementation has the potential to improve cognitive processing, especially in conditions like aging and Alzheimer’s disease. But they emphasized that “the optimal creatine protocol able to increase brain creatine levels is still to be determined.”



Creatine is often found in some sports supplements. (RHJPhOTOS/Shutterstock)

9. Phosphatidylserine

Phosphatidylserine is a phospholipid that is found in high concentrations in the brain. It is believed to enhance cognitive function, including memory.

A [review of 127 studies](#) concluded that phosphatidylserine is absorbed efficiently in humans, crosses the blood-brain barrier, and supports cognitive functions that include:

- The formation of short-term memory
- Consolidation of long-term memory
- Ability to create new memories
- Ability to retrieve memories

In [research involving 51 patients](#) meeting clinical criteria for probable Alzheimer's disease, patients were treated for 12 weeks with 100 milligrams of animal-derived phosphatidylserine or a placebo. Those receiving phosphatidylserine showed improved cognition compared to the placebo group. The difference was most apparent in patients with less severe cognitive impairment.



(luchschenF/Shutterstock)

10. Ginseng

Ginseng is one of the best-known plants used in ancient Chinese medicine and comes in many varieties. American and Korean ginseng have both shown beneficial effects on brain function.

A [double-blind, placebo-controlled](#), crossover-design study looked at 52 healthy, middle-aged volunteers given either 200 milligrams of American ginseng or a placebo to find that American ginseng can “acutely benefit” working memory.

Another study looked at whether [Korean red ginseng](#) (KRG) could increase the amount of gray matter in our brains to increase our mental abilities. After eight weeks of KRG supplementation, researchers observed a significant increase in gray matter volume compared to the placebo group. The KRG group also showed greater enhancement in cognitive scores.

Keep in mind that you should check with your doctor before using herbs or supplements to make sure you're using the right dose and that it won't cause problems with any medications you're currently using.



Fresh ginseng. (Shutterstock)

Lifestyle Factors That Affect Memory

“Research indicates that the most powerful strategies for better overall brain health, as well as cognition, are prioritizing adequate sleep, getting regular exercise, eating a diet rich in diverse whole foods, and engaging in stress-mitigating exercises,” Dr. Austin Perlmutter, a board-certified internal medicine physician and senior director of clinical and scientific innovation at Big Bold Health, told The Epoch Times.

“Of these interventions, taking steps to improve your sleep quality may be most likely to have an immediate benefit to your memory,” noted Perlmutter, who is also a NY Times bestselling author.

Dr. Theodore Strange, chair of medicine at Staten Island University Hospital, part of Northwell Health in New York, said ways to improve recall ability and important information include:

- Writing information down
- Repeating important information to one’s self
- Attaching meaning to what you need to remember

He added that we should also avoid distractions like noise or poor lighting when trying to memorize things and that attaching information to a mnemonic or song will improve recall.

Diet can also play a big role in how well we can recall information.

“Research tells us that a diet rich in highly processed foods and added sugar may translate into an increased risk for memory impairment in the context of cognitive impairment and dementia,” said Perlmutter.

On the other hand, the Mediterranean diet and the MIND diet have been linked to lower risk for developing memory impairment regarding the prevention of Alzheimer’s disease, he noted.

“Both the Mediterranean diet and MIND diets emphasize eating more minimally processed foods, including fruits, vegetables, fish, nuts, olive oil, whole grains, and the minimization of added sugar,” Perlmutter noted.



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George Citroner reports on health and medicine, covering topics that include cancer, infectious diseases, and neurodegenerative

conditions. He was awarded the Media Orthopaedic Reporting Excellence (MORE) award in 2020 for a story on osteoporosis risk in men.

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