

YOUR BRAIN NEEDS MORE THAN FOOD

The missing link in the dementia conversation: breathing, oxygen and your nose

Your brain is roughly 2% of your body weight, yet it consumes around 20% of the body's energy at rest.

That makes it one of the most metabolically demanding organs you own.

And keeping it functioning for 80 or 90 years requires much more than simply eating the right food.

The brain needs **fuel**.

It needs healthy **blood vessels**.

And it needs a continuous supply of **oxygen**.

That last part is almost completely missing from the way we talk about long-term brain health.

DEMENTIA DOESN'T START WHEN YOU FORGET

One of the most important things we now understand about dementia is that the biological processes leading to cognitive decline can begin **decades before a diagnosis**.

By the time someone starts forgetting names, losing track of conversations or struggling with familiar tasks, the underlying changes may have been developing silently for years.

That means your 40s, 50s and 60s matter enormously.

And when we talk about protecting the brain during these decades, the conversation usually revolves around:

- What you eat
- Your cholesterol
- Blood pressure
- Diabetes
- Exercise
- Alcohol
- Weight

All important.

But there is another physiological input that the brain receives **every minute of every day**.

Oxygen.

THE BRAIN HAS THREE BASIC REQUIREMENTS

Think of brain health as a three-part system.

1. FUEL

The brain requires a constant supply of energy.

That is why dietary patterns that support healthy glucose regulation, cardiovascular health and metabolic function matter.

2. PLUMBING

The brain is supplied by an enormous network of tiny blood vessels.

High blood pressure, diabetes, abnormal cholesterol and other vascular risk factors can damage this system over many years.

And damaged blood vessels mean a brain that is less able to receive what it needs.

3. AIR

Every cell in the brain ultimately depends on oxygen.

And the journey of that oxygen begins with a breath.

Which brings us to the organ almost nobody includes in the dementia conversation: the nose.

YOUR NOSE IS NOT JUST A PIPE

We tend to think of the nose as something whose only job is to allow us to breathe.

It is much more sophisticated than that.

The nose filters, warms and humidifies the air you inhale.

Nasal breathing also contributes to nitric oxide biology in the upper airway, which has roles in vascular regulation and pulmonary gas exchange.

But perhaps its most important long-term relevance is this:

Your nose can influence how you breathe—especially when you sleep.

A chronically obstructed nose can encourage mouth breathing and contribute to snoring and sleep-disordered breathing in susceptible people.

And that takes us directly into another important conversation about dementia.

SLEEP.

THE NIGHT-TIME CONNECTION

Sleep isn't simply the time when the brain switches off.

It is an active biological state during which the brain performs important maintenance functions.

Repeated sleep disruption, obstructive sleep apnoea and intermittent reductions in oxygen availability can place physiological stress on the brain and cardiovascular system.

Sleep-disordered breathing has also been associated with problems involving attention, memory and executive function.

And sleep problems are increasingly being studied in relation to long-term cognitive decline and dementia.

This does **not** mean that a blocked nose causes dementia.

And it does not mean that correcting a nasal obstruction can guarantee prevention of dementia.

The evidence does not justify claims that strong.

But it does mean that **breathing and sleep deserve a place in the brain-health conversation.**

Especially when we are talking about decades of exposure rather than a single night's sleep.

THE FOOD LIST IS STILL IMPORTANT

The foods commonly associated with better long-term brain health still matter.

Oily fish.

Extra-virgin olive oil.

Leafy greens.

Berries.

Nuts.

Eggs and other choline sources.

Legumes.

Whole grains.

Fermented foods.

And reducing excessive intake of ultra-processed foods, sugary foods and drinks, processed meats and excessive alcohol.

Why?

Because food affects the very systems that keep the brain functioning:

blood vessels, glucose metabolism, inflammation and overall metabolic health.

These are also closely connected to several established modifiable risk factors for dementia.

But nutrition is only one piece of the puzzle.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

If you really want to think about protecting your brain over the next 30 or 40 years, don't ask only:

"What should I eat?"

Ask:

How is my blood pressure?

How is my glucose control?

How are my cholesterol and metabolic health?

How much muscle and physical activity do I have?

How well am I sleeping?

Do I snore?

Do I wake up choking or gasping?

Do I breathe through my mouth at night?

Is my nose chronically blocked?

Could I have undiagnosed sleep-disordered breathing?

Because dementia isn't simply a story about what happens inside the brain.

It is also a story about everything that happens to the brain's **blood supply, metabolism, sleep and oxygenation over decades.**

FOOD. BLOOD. AIR. SLEEP.

Perhaps the simplest way to think about it is this:

Food provides the fuel.

Blood vessels provide the delivery network.

Breathing provides the oxygen.

Sleep gives the brain time to recover and maintain itself.

And all four systems interact.

So the next time someone talks about dementia prevention and gives you a list of foods, don't stop there.

Look beyond the plate.

Look at the blood pressure.

Look at the metabolic health.

Look at the sleep.

And **look at the nose.**

Because your brain doesn't live in isolation.

It depends on every breath you take.

BRAIN HEALTH IS NOT JUST ABOUT WHAT YOU EAT.

It is also about how well you breathe, how well you sleep, and how efficiently your body delivers oxygen to the brain—year after year, decade after decade.