

## Richard Béliveau's column

### Healthy Aging – Eat Well to Fight Cognitive Loss



Memory, language, rational thinking and reasoning are all exclusively human cognitive functions that have been made possible through the extraordinary development of our brain throughout evolution. However, these cognitive functions can deteriorate with the aging process, just like every other organ in the body. For example, it has been recently proven that reasoning capabilities may decline by approximately 4% by the age of 45-50 years, and by as much as 10% by 65-70. In light of these findings, the identification of factors to help avoid or at least slow down the cognitive decline becomes very important.

The brain is a high-consuming organ – it alone consumes close to 25% of all oxygen required by the body. However, this high metabolism produces large amounts of free radicals, which are harmful to brain cells. Many studies have shown that this oxidative stress may hinder the good functioning of nerve cells et contribute to the brain's loss of flexible functionality with aging. On the short term, this slight decline might not cause any problems – but later in life, the person's cognitive loss may become more significant and cause negative consequences on his quality of life.

«Thankfully, many lifestyle factors are renowned for slowing down this loss of cognitive functions. The following elements are all associated with a lower risk of cognitive decline with aging: not smoking, doing physical activity on a regular basis, “exercising one's brain “ by solving problems (crossword puzzles, Sudoku, jigsaw puzzles), as well as maintaining a healthy body weight.



The quality and nature of one's diet also seems to have a significant impact. Many studies suggest that the regular consumption of polyphenol-rich foods, such as green tea, red wine or certain plants, is associated with a lower risk of developing cognitive losses and even developing dementia-related diseases, such as Alzheimer's disease. In foods, recent studies also show that berries have high protective values: as such, a study carried out with a group of seniors has shown that the consumption of berries, such as strawberries and blueberries, helped improve cognitive performances on a short-term basis.

These very encouraging results have recently been confirmed by the largest study ever conducted on the impact of berries on brain functions. The food habits of over 16,000 women were studied by a group of researchers, who found that women who consumed 2 servings of

strawberries and blueberries per week were less affected by a decline in their cognitive functions. In addition, it was found that the women with the highest consumption of berries would delay this loss of cognitive functions by approximately two and a half years!

Antioxidant-rich foods like berries are not only some of Nature's best delicacies; they also constitute powerful allies in the prevention of certain chronic diseases. So enjoy these small berries with big benefits!

Richard Béliveau, PhD