



ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE CHEST

Rosemary:

This woody-scented herb has a long history for improving memory—with good reason. Recent studies show that rosemary can protect against the degeneration of neurons by boosting antioxidant activity within the brain. That, in turn, has the potential to improve memory in both older people and those with traumatic brain injury. During one double-blind trial, 80 people were assigned to consume water spiked with rosemary or a placebo drink before taking part in a series of computerized cognitive tests. Using near-infrared spectroscopy, the researchers noted that those drinking the rosemary water not only had an uptick in cognitive function, their brains utilized oxygen more efficiently. Another study of 28 seniors found that low to moderate doses of rosemary improved memory speed. But the researchers noted that, when it comes to supplemental rosemary, more isn't necessarily better since those getting a high dose actually experienced impaired memory. Simply sniffing rosemary essential oil was shown to improve short-term memory in a group of 53 high school students. While inhaling rosemary essential oil is likely safe, do check with your doctor before taking it in supplemental form since rosemary can interact with some medications, including blood thinners, ACE inhibitors, and diabetes drugs.

KEEP YOUR MENTAL EDGE

If you're past the age of 40 you may feel like your mental skills aren't quite as sharp as they once were. It's not your imagination. According to researchers at the University of Minnesota, the brain's information-processing speed peaks around the age of 18. And short-term memory is strongest at age 25 before it begins to decline at age 35. But all (including your memory) is not lost! Here are five clinically proven herbs that can increase your brain power, starting today.



Korean Red Ginseng:

Best known for its adaptogenic properties, Korean red ginseng is one of the most well researched herbal remedies for enhancing cognition, even in later life. The secret to Korean red ginseng's brain-boosting capabilities are ginsenosides, compounds with powerful antioxidant and anti-inflammatory actions. The herb is so effective that animal studies have shown it promotes the growth of new neurons. How does that translate to people? Human studies have found that Korean red ginseng can have a beneficial impact on cognition, as well as memory and mood. In one clinical trial published in the *Journal of Ginseng Research*, researchers found that participants taking a high-dose ginseng supplement scored significantly better on cognitive tests than those taking a placebo. Another eight-day study found that a daily dose of ginseng improved feelings of calmness while also improving math skills. But to get all the benefits from these ginsenosides, they must first be converted to "noble" ginsenosides by the beneficial bacteria in your gut. The problem is, your body's ability to convert regular ginsenosides to noble ones isn't always efficient. There is, however, one proprietary form of Korean red ginseng that contains noble ginsenosides that don't need to be converted. Listed on labels as HRG80, this ginseng is hydroponically grown and then steam-cooked using traditional Korean methods. The resulting noble ginsenosides are readily absorbed by the body and seven times more concentrated than typical Korean red ginseng supplements.

Sage:

Sage has been shown to enhance cognition, memory, and mood. Studies report that sage also protects against dementia and other neurodegenerative problems by shielding brain cells from oxidative stress and the damage triggered by the accumulation of beta-amyloid proteins. In a four-month randomized, double-blind study of 42 patients with mild to moderate Alzheimer's, those taking sage experienced significant improvements in their cognition compared to those taking a placebo. Sage also increases levels of neurotrophins—specialized proteins that help brain cells survive and function properly. At the same time, this herb decreases levels of a potentially damaging enzyme called acetylcholinesterase. While generally safe, consult your health care provider if you are taking blood pressure or anti-seizure medications.



Rhodiola:

Rhodiola is an adaptogenic nootropic—an herb that improves cognition, memory, and learning. And because it's an adaptogen, it also protects the brain from the adverse effects of stress. In fact, one month-long study of 101 people found that 400 mg of rhodiola daily produced significant improvements in the symptoms of stress, such as fatigue, exhaustion, and anxiety. Other studies suggest that rhodiola might help alleviate brain fog and improve mental speed and executive function. The reason for many of these brain-boosting benefits come from rhodiola's strong antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties, as well as its ability to increase blood flow in the brain. A recent clinical trial found that rhodiola also boosts brain plasticity—the ability of your brain to adapt and recover from damage.

Curcumin:

Derived from the curry spice turmeric, curcumin is a powerful anti-inflammatory and antioxidant compound with the ability to readily cross the blood-brain barrier. That means it can directly benefit the brain. According to findings in the journal *GeroScience*, curcumin can protect against cognitive impairment by reducing oxidative stress and inflammation in the brain. Other research has shown that curcumin also improves blood flow within the brain. Curcumin is so powerful that preclinical studies report that it can inhibit the amount of beta-amyloid plaque—one of the key risk factors for Alzheimer's disease—that accumulates in the brain. But one drawback to most curcumin supplements is that they are not well absorbed by the body. Fortunately, one highly absorbable form of curcumin was found to prevent cognitive decline compared to a placebo in one year-long clinical trial. Listed on labels as BCM-95, this proprietary curcumin is blended with turmeric essential oil containing ar-turmerone complex for optimal absorption.

