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# An avocado a day keeps the neurologist away

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Tufts University has released results of a study linking eating avocados to helping improve cognitive brain function in older adults, news especially relevant to Hispanics who have been found to have the longest life expectancy rate in the U.S. Published in the journal *Nutrients* and supported by the USDA and the Hass Avocado Board, the research tracked how 40 healthy adults ages 50 and over who ate one fresh avocado a day for six months experienced a 25 percent increase in lutein levels in their eyes and significantly improved working memory and problem-solving skills.

Lutein is a type of carotenoid antioxidant, or pigment, commonly found in fruits and vegetables already widely accepted to have a role in preserving eye health and now increasingly thought to have a positive impact on brain health as well. As study participants incorporated one medium avocado into their daily diet, researchers monitored gradual growth in the amount of lutein in their eyes and progressive improvement in cognition skills as measured by tests designed to evaluate memory, processing speed and attention levels. In contrast, the control group, which did not eat avocados, experienced fewer improvements in cognitive health during the study period.

"The results of this study suggest that the monounsaturated fats, fiber, lutein and other bioactives make avocados particularly effective at enriching neural lutein levels, which may provide benefits for not only eye health, but for brain health," said Elizabeth Johnson, lead investigator of the study from the Jean Mayer USDA Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging at Tufts University. "Furthermore, the results of this new research reveal that macular pigment density more than doubled in subjects that consumed fresh avocados, compared to a supplement, as evidenced by my previous published research. Thus, a balanced diet that includes fresh avocados may be an effective strategy for cognitive health."

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"Tuft's findings that eating avocados is linked to a positive impact on memory is one more reason to enjoy healthy avocados daily. It's especially good news for Hispanic households where avocados are already so popular and older generations are culturally central to the core family unit," said Emiliano Escobedo, executive director of the Hass Avocado Board. "More research is needed in different populations with different amounts of avocado to better understand the connection between avocados and brain health."

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