ENCEPHALITIS411.ORG

NOURISHING THE BRAIN

Brain-Healthy Nutrition During Encephalitis Recovery

A supportive tool, not a treatment

Nutrition cannot cure encephalitis or replace medical care. A nourishing eating pattern can, however, support overall health and provide the brain and body with energy, protein, healthy fats, vitamins, minerals and fluids during recovery.

Start with a Mediterranean-style pattern

Research on brain health supports dietary patterns rich in vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans, nuts, fish and olive oil. The MIND pattern combines elements of Mediterranean and DASH eating. These patterns are associated with cognitive health, but they have not been proven to treat encephalitis or its neurological effects.

COLOR YOUR PLATE — Vegetables & fruit
Leafy greens, broccoli, peppers, tomatoes, berries, citrus and other colorful produce.

POWER WITH PROTEIN — Protein-rich foods
Fish, poultry, eggs, beans, lentils, Greek yogurt, nuts, seeds and minimally processed soy foods.

CHOOSE HEALTHY FATS — Unsaturated fats
Extra-virgin olive oil, avocado, walnuts, seeds and fatty fish such as salmon, sardines and trout.

ADD QUALITY CARBS — Fiber-rich carbohydrates
Oats, quinoa, brown rice, barley, whole-grain breads, beans, sweet potatoes, fruits and vegetables.

HYDRATE REGULARLY — Fluids matter
Keep water available and drink regularly unless your healthcare team has advised a fluid restriction.

LIMIT, DON'T LABEL — Less often
Highly processed foods, excess added sugar, sugary drinks, fried foods, excess sodium and foods high in saturated fat.

A simple brain-healthy plate

½	¼	¼
Vegetables & fruit	Protein	High-fiber carbs

+ add a small amount of healthy fat • choose water as your primary beverage

When recovery makes eating hard

Encephalitis recovery can include fatigue, cognitive changes and other neurological symptoms. For some people, planning meals, shopping, preparing food or remembering to eat can become difficult. Make nutrition easier, not more complicated.

Low-effort foods to keep on hand

Greek yogurt + berries • hard-boiled eggs • hummus + vegetables • fruit + nut butter • oatmeal + walnuts • tuna or salmon packets • bean or lentil soup • prewashed greens • frozen vegetables • rotisserie chicken • whole-grain crackers • unsalted nuts

A simple day of brain-supportive eating

BREAKFAST	Oatmeal + blueberries + walnuts + Greek yogurt

LUNCH	Salad or grain bowl + chicken or beans + colorful vegetables + olive oil dressing
SNACK	Apple + nut butter, or vegetables + hummus
DINNER	Salmon + roasted vegetables + quinoa, brown rice or sweet potato

Food first. Supplements second.

No vitamin or supplement has been established as a treatment for encephalitis. Supplements can interact with prescription medicines or be inappropriate for certain medical conditions. Ask your physician, pharmacist or registered dietitian before starting supplements, especially if you take anti-seizure medicines or other prescription medications.

Your recovery is individual

Encephalitis may affect appetite, swallowing, taste, memory, fatigue, behavior and the ability to prepare meals. Seek guidance from your healthcare team if eating or drinking has become difficult, you are losing weight unintentionally, you cough or choke while eating or drinking, or you have questions about your individual nutrition needs. A registered dietitian can help personalize a plan.

KEEP THE BIG PICTURE SIMPLE

VEGETABLES + FRUIT • PROTEIN • HEALTHY FATS • HIGH-FIBER CARBS • WATER

Progress matters more than perfection. Choose nourishing foods you enjoy, keep meals manageable, and follow the recommendations of your healthcare team.

Evidence & resources

- National Institute on Aging. Cognitive Health and Older Adults.
- National Institutes of Health. Healthful diet linked to reduced risk of cognitive decline (2024).
- American Heart Association. What is the Mediterranean Diet?
- Huang L, et al. MIND Diet and Cognitive Function and its Decline: A Prospective Study and Meta-analysis. Am J Clin Nutr. 2023.

For educational purposes only. This handout is not medical advice and is not a substitute for individualized care from a qualified healthcare professional. Draft prepared for Encephalitis411.org.

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