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Multivitamin supplements boost brain function, say UK researchers

By Barbara Diggs, 17-Apr-2012

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Taking a multivitamin supplement daily can improve cognitive performance in both children and adults, say UK researchers.

In a series of studies published in the *British Journal of Nutrition*, *Psychopharmacology*, and *Human Psychopharmacology*, teams of British neuroscientists investigated the effects of multivitamin supplementation on mood and cognitive function.

The researchers monitored groups of healthy children, men and women who took commercially-available vitamins and mineral supplements daily for 4 to 12 weeks, and tested their cognitive performance through tasks requiring attention, memory, accuracy and/or multitasking ability. The mood or stress levels of participants were also assessed.

Their findings indicated that vitamin and mineral supplementation improved cognitive performance after only a few weeks of supplementation.

Men taking high dose B-complex vitamins showed improved performance on cognitive tasks, were less mentally tired and showed improved vigor. Women taking multivitamin/mineral supplements were demonstrated to have increased accuracy and speed on multitasking batteries. Children, aged 8 – 14, showed increased accuracy in attention-based tasks.

“There’s been a huge research effort into the effects of one or two vitamins on cognitive function, not the effects of many,” said professor David Kennedy of the Brain, Performance and Nutrition Research Center at Northumbria University, and co-author of the studies.

Bridging the vitamin gap

These findings add to solid evidence indicating that multivitamin supplements offer significant and varied benefits. According to the UK’s National Diet and Nutrition Survey, the general population in the UK has vitamin deficiencies or insufficiencies across most vitamin groups.

“A vitamin deficiency predisposes you to diseases related to having too little of that vitamin,” said Dr Kennedy.

“The optimum level of a vitamin must be way above what you need to avoid disease. [The survey indicates that] there are people out there deficient in each vitamin group. But since most people don’t know which vitamins they’re

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Omega-3s & cerebral blood flow, function

Multivitamin supplements aren't the only nutrients to impact brain activity. In a study, published in *Biological Psychology*, Dr Kennedy and his colleagues studied whether omega-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids have impact on cognitive function. The research team found that healthy adults supplementing their diet daily with 1-2 grams of fish oil containing docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) did not have improved cognitive functioning.

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Nonetheless, through brain imaging techniques, they discovered that daily supplementation with the fish oil was associated with increased cerebral blood flow while subjects were engaged in cognitive tasks. "These results lend support to an emerging body of evidence which suggests that dietary DHA is influencing brain function in physiological terms," Kennedy and his colleagues wrote.

That DHA may effect changes in blood flow that has implications for aging healthily and dementia, added Kennedy.

Professor Kennedy will be speaking about these findings and other issues relating to essential nutrients and cognitive function at the Vitafoods Europe expo and conference in Geneva on May 23.

Sources:

British Journal of Nutrition

2008, 100, 1086–1096 doi:10.1017/S0007114508959213

'Cognitive and mood effects in healthy children during 12 weeks' supplementation with multi-vitamin/minerals'

Authors:Crystal F. Haskell, Andrew B. Scholey, Philippa A. Jackson, Jade M. Elliott, Margaret A. Defeyter, Joanna Greer,Bernadette C. Robertson Tom Buchanan,Brian Tiplady,and David O. Kennedy

Psychopharmacology

DOI 10.1007/s00213-010-1870-3

'Effects of high-dose B vitamin complex with vitamin C and minerals on subjective mood and performance in healthy males'

Authors: David O. Kennedy, Rachel Veasey, Anthony Watson, Fiona Dodd, Emma Jones, Silvia Maggini, Crystal F. Haskell

Human Psychopharmacology: Clinical & Experimental

2010; 25: 448–461. DOI: 10.1002/hup.1144

'Effects of a multi-vitamin/mineral supplement on cognitive function and fatigue during extended multi-tasking'

Authors: Crystal F. Haskell, Bernadette Robertson, Emma Jones, Joanne Forster, Rebecca Jones, Anthea Wilde, Silvia Maggini and David O. Kennedy

Biological Psychology

Volume 89, Issue 1 , January 2012, Pages 183–190

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Authors: Philippa A. Jackson, Jonathon L. Reay, Andrew B. Scholey, David O. Kennedy

Keywords: cognitivefunction, attention, omega-3, multivitamins, memory

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