

Making this food swap in diet could slash risk of dementia, health expert says

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Most Americans worry about keeping their minds sharp as they age, especially with dementia rates climbing. While genetics play a major role, mounting evidence shows that what we eat today can significantly impact our brain health tomorrow.

The answer might be simpler than you think, according to Simon Greenberg, Founder of Medidex, an AI-powered medical platform that helps people access reliable health information. His advice centres on swapping one food group for another, a change that could reduce your dementia risk by 20 per cent.

“People often think protecting brain health requires dramatic lifestyle overhauls, but sometimes the most powerful changes are the smallest ones,” says Greenberg. “What we’re seeing is that replacing processed red meat with plant proteins like nuts and beans can have remarkable long-term benefits for cognitive function.”

The swap involves ditching your daily bacon, hot dogs, or deli meat sandwich for plant-based proteins. This doesn’t mean eliminating all meat. Instead, it involves reducing processed varieties that contain high levels of preservatives and sodium.

Below, Greenberg breaks down the science behind this food swap and shares practical ways to make the transition without sacrificing flavour or satisfaction.

Why Processed Red Meat Harms Your Brain

Bacon, sausage, and deli meats affect not only your waistline, but also actively work against your brain health. These foods contain nitrites and nitrates, preservatives that may trigger inflammation in brain tissue over time.

“When we look at processed meats, we’re seeing a perfect storm of compounds that can damage cognitive function,” explains Greenberg. “High sodium levels can affect blood flow to the brain, while the preservatives create oxidative stress that accelerates cellular ageing.”

The numbers are striking. Each daily serving of processed red meat appears to add about 1.6 years of cognitive ageing, affecting everything from memory to problem-solving skills. That morning, bacon habit could be costing your brain more than you realise.

The Plant Protein Advantage

Nuts, beans, and legumes work differently in your body. These foods are packed with antioxidants that fight inflammation and healthy fats that support brain cell communication. They also provide steady energy without the blood sugar spikes that can damage brain vessels over time.

“Plant proteins come with built-in brain protection,” says Greenberg. “Walnuts contain omega-3 fatty acids, beans provide folate for neurotransmitter production, and legumes offer fibre that supports the gut-brain connection.”

Simple Daily Swaps That Actually Taste Good

Making this change doesn't mean choking down bland tofu. Greenberg lists four practical swaps that won't leave you missing your old favourites:

1. Morning Makeover: Skip the bacon and try almond butter on whole-grain toast with sliced banana. The protein keeps you full, and the combination tastes indulgent.
2. Lunch Liberation: Replace your deli meat sandwich with a chickpea salad wrap. Mash chickpeas with avocado, add some lemon juice and herbs - it's creamy, satisfying, and brain-friendly.
3. Snack Smart: Ditch the jerky for a handful of mixed nuts. Keep small portions in your car, desk, or gym bag for easy access.
4. Dinner Wins: Try lentil bolognese over pasta instead of meat sauce. The texture is surprisingly similar, and the flavour is rich and hearty.

Brain-Protection Tips for Mid-Life Adults

Your 40s and 50s are the sweet spot for brain protection. The changes you make now can pay dividends for decades.

“This is when prevention really matters,” notes Greenberg. “Your brain is still adaptable, but damage from poor dietary choices is starting to accumulate.”

Start small, aiming for one plant protein meal per day. Build from there as your taste buds adjust. Focus on variety to keep things interesting: black bean tacos on Monday, walnut-crusted salmon on Wednesday, tofu stir-fry on Friday.

Consider meal prep to make healthy choices easier. Cook a big batch of lentils on Sunday and use them throughout the week in salads, soups, and grain bowls.