**Fish for Thought?**

Older people who eat more fish or its omega-3 fats were less likely to do poorly on cognitive tests, according to two new studies. Researchers in Norway—where fish is a staple—found that people in their 70s who ate more fish had higher scores on tests of memory, attention, and thinking speed than people who ate less fish. There was no extra benefit, though, beyond three ounces of fish a day.

And in a Dutch study, people aged 50 to 70 with higher levels of omega-3 fats in their blood had less of a drop in test scores that measure thinking speed (for example, how long it takes to follow instructions to cross out certain letters or numbers) three years later, compared to people with lower levels of omega-3 fats. Scores on tests of memory or word fluency weren’t linked to blood levels of omega-3s.

**What to do:** While these studies are promising, it’s not certain that fish—rather than something else about fish eaters—protects the brain.

Nevertheless, it’s worth eating fatty fish (like salmon) twice a week to protect your heart. That would supply 500 to 1,000 mg a day of the omega-3 fats DHA plus EPA. If you’re a vegetarian, look for supplements or foods that contain DHA from algal oil. And don’t fall for omega-3 claims on foods that get their omega-3s from flax or canola oil.

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**ACRYLAMIDE WORRIES**

Acrylamide may promote ovarian or uterine cancer, says a study that tracked some 62,000 Dutch women for 11 years.

Acrylamide is formed when asparagine and other amino acids in protein react with sugars at high temperatures. The highest levels have been found in French fries and potato chips, with lower levels in breads, cereals, and other baked or fried starches.

Acrylamide causes cancer in mice and rats, but this is the first good study in humans.

Nonsmokers who consumed the most acrylamide from French fries, potato chips, cookies, coffee, or a popular Dutch spiced cake had roughly double the risk of uterine or ovarian (but not breast) cancer, compared to nonsmokers who got the least.

**What to do:** Here’s one more reason to limit French fries, fried (or baked) potato chips, and cookies. But don’t abandon healthier foods like whole-grain breads and cereals, despite their low levels of acrylamide. Coffee has never been linked to cancer.

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**B-12 & THE BRAIN**

People with low blood levels of vitamin B-12 a decade earlier were more likely to score poorly on a test that’s widely used to screen for early signs of dementia. However, the usual blood test for vitamin B-12 wasn’t sensitive enough to detect a link. It appeared only when researchers looked at methylmalonic acid (which goes up when the body has too little B-12) or holo-transcobalamin (the active part of B-12).

**What to do:** People aged 55 or older can lose the ability to absorb the B-12 that’s bound naturally to protein, so they should take a multivitamin or eat fortified foods with at least 6 micrograms of vitamin B-12 (that’s the Daily Value).

This study isn’t proof that lower B-12 levels lead to memory loss, but severe B-12 deficiency can cause irreversible neurological damage that looks like Alzheimer’s disease.