

## SESSION TWO

# BRAIN HEALTH AND NUTRITION

The brain is the greediest organ we own – it uses upwards of 20% of the carbohydrates we consume to fuel its needs, despite being only 2% body weight. The body and brain convert foods we eat into a variety of essential compounds using vitamins and minerals. Without enough of these nutrients, also called co-factors, the brain cannot make the compounds it needs to function optimally, which impacts cognition negatively.

**STEP 1:** Critically examine your fridge and pantry to see which foods you naturally reach for when you're looking for a snack or want to make a quick meal. Ask yourself these questions:

- Will this food keep my blood glucose stable?
- Is it nutrient dense?
- Does it contain refined sugar and/or additives, like preservatives, flavourings and/or colorants?
- Is it supporting my brain?

**STEP 2:** If the answers are 'No' then it's time to look for replacements. Use these questions as guides when looking for new snack and meal options:

- Does the ingredient list contain more than five ingredients?
- Does this food contain added vitamins and minerals (a sign that many more have been removed)?
- Is this food in a crinkly, brightly coloured package?
- Can this food stay 'fresh' on the shelf for a very long time?

**STEP 3:** If the answers to the above are all 'No' then it's a good replacement. If the answers are 'Yes' then look for another item and ask the same questions.

**STEP 4:** Prepare naturally colourful meals. These meals contain powerful compounds that support brain health in a variety of ways. They also contain more fibre than processed meals, along with more vitamins and minerals. Add good fats and clean protein to meals to increase nutrient density.

Use this list as a guide to what your pantry and fridge should be stocked with:

- Colourful foods — green leaves, red and purple berries, fruit and vegetables, orange fruit and vegetables, brassicas, onions, garlic and citrus fruits
- Sprouts
- A wide variety of nuts and seeds, including tahini, and organic cold-pressed nut and seed oils as well as oily fruit such as avocados and olives
- Whole, unprocessed, gluten-free grains and legumes
- Legumes, such as lentils, chickpeas, and beans
- Tomato pasta sauce with no additives or preservatives
- Coconut oil, milk and cream
- Spices and herbs, such as turmeric, ginger, coriander, basil and other green herbs
- Dark chocolate (at least 70 per cent)
- Organic superfoods, such as Goji, Camu Camu and Maqui berries, and minimally processed superfood powders, such as Barley grass and Acai powder
- Organic, grass-fed animal products

**PLUS:** Move more! Set a goal for more steps per day, to increase heart rate and get flushed cheeks! Moving helps keep your brain healthy with fresh oxygenated blood and the nutrients that come with it.

