



BACK TO SCHOOL: ADVICE FOR AN IRON-CLAD MEMORY

The importance of animal proteins for concentration.

Milan, 17 September 2018 – Ready to go **back to school**? If you want to be, and if you want to return after the long summer break and face the challenges of the new academic year with additional energy, you had better be prepared. Here are two useful pieces of advice for **good academic performance**: do **sport** and follow a **varied and balanced diet**. The food we eat, in fact, can have an important impact on our brain, and on how we use it.

The **brain**, in fact, is always hungry for energy. Even though it takes up only **2% of our body weight**, it devours more than **20% of the energy** we consume daily. With such high demands, the food we eat and the nutrients it contains **strongly influence brain structure and operation**.

Some items of food more than others are useful when studying, because they optimise the cognitive functions. **Iron** is undoubtedly an important nutrient; if our body does not have enough iron we can **develop anaemia**, with negative effects even on **intellectual performance**.

A lack of iron is considered the most common nutritional deficiency **in the world**, and the greatest cause of anaemia, very common in smaller children, even in industrialised countries. The World Health Organisation is **perturbed by** and is paying **great attention to** the negative effects of iron-deficiency anaemia and its consequences on the cognitive and physical development of children.

Generally, **children aged between 4 and 10** need **11-13 milligrams of iron every day**. Their requirements increase greatly when they become **adolescents**, in fact the amount needed by girls from 11 to 17 in particular increases to **18 milligrams a day**. Keeping a **stable presence of iron** in the organism is even more important **when school starts again** and students have to face months of **lessons, tests and homework**. Having a clear, active mind is also fundamental for students who have to maintain a **high level of concentration** for several hours a day.

The best way for the organism to absorb these nutrients is a balanced diet, which includes a correct portion of **animal proteins**. With **children** and **young people**, in particular, consuming animal proteins can contribute positively to cerebral functions such as **learning** and **memory**, and even **cognitive, behavioural** and **motorial** abilities.

Most of the studies looking into the association between **nutrition and cognitive development** concentrate on single **micronutrients**, held to be essential for correct brain development: **vitamin B12, folic acid, zinc, iron, iodine** and **omega-3 fatty acids**, all supplied in a privileged manner by food of animal origin, in particular **meat**.

But care must be taken: even though some nutrients are good for the brain, there are others that can harm neuron function. A diet with lots of **fats and sugar** or that is **high in calories** can, through **free radicals**, damage the cerebral structures, synapses for example, and reduce cerebral functions. An overweight or obese child is more open to the risk of **memory deficiency**, while various studies have associated the weight of children with their performance in **mathematics**, for example.

*"No single food can supply our body or our brain with all the essential nutrients, but if we exercise and eat a wide **variety of food**, we obtain a suitable quantity of essential nutrients such as proteins, vitamins and minerals, carbohydrates and fibre, all of which are important for physical and mental health,"* explains **Elisabetta Bernardi**, a **nutritionist and biologist at the University of Bari** who offers some advice about the most suitable diet for students: *"**Food of animal origin**, more than other types, can be **useful when studying**, because it helps **optimise the cognitive functions**. A varied and balanced diet must therefore contain meat, from which we obtain all the micronutrients that are essential for cognitive development and memory functions."*



Carni Sostenibili is the project promoted by three category associations - Assocarni, Assica and Unaitalia that represent all the meat supply chains in Italy (beef, pork and poultry). Its objective is to discuss all the matters related to the world of meat in a transversal manner: an unprecedented project in Italy which, by using a training approach, will contribute to balanced information on health, nutrition and sustainability. www.carnisostenibili.it

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