

THE NATURAL PATH

*Your Guide to Good Health & Vitality
Cutting Edge Research Made Easy*

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BACK TO SCHOOL



YOU KNEW THAT SUPPLEMENTS COULD HELP COGNITION IN SENIORS. DID YOU KNOW THEY COULD HELP YOUR KIDS TOO?

When we think of supplements for memory and cognition, we usually think of seniors. But there is a growing body of research on natural supplements for children's cognition. Here are some research highlights that can help your kids go back to school at their cognitive best.

Passing Tests: Barking Up the Right Tree

Pine bark extract is well known as a potent antioxidant. Turns out it not only prevents free radicals but also failing exams. University students who took pine bark extract for 8 weeks experienced significant improvements in attention, memory and executive function. While 10.71% of students in the control group failed an exam, only 6.25% in the pine bark group did. Exam scores in the pine bark group were a significant 7.6% higher (*Panminerva Med* 2011;53:75-82).

Proven to Improve Grades

Pine bark is not the only supplement that is actually proven to improve grades. *Rhodiola rosea* boosts mental energy and increases learning, thinking and remembering. A double-blind study that gave rhodiola or a placebo to students during final exams found that the herb significantly improved final grades, mental fatigue and well being (*Phytomed* 2000;7(2):85-9).

LOOK INSIDE

- Better than Drugs for Migraine
- Natural Help for Kids with Arthritis
- An Aromatherapy Lullaby
- Sleeping to Stay Young

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MENTAL HEALTH



RECENT SCIENCE SUPPORTS NATURAL SUPPLEMENTS FOR A VARIETY OF MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES: EVEN ONES YOU DIDN'T EXPECT!

We read a lot about depression, anxiety and stress. And with good reason! But there are other less talked about, difficult to treat mental health issues for which natural supplements are recently receiving support from science.

Build Your Self-Esteem

Let's start with a common one you might think there is no help for: low self-esteem. A recent double-blind study tried giving 86 women with low mood and poor sleep a placebo or 14mg of saffron extract morning and evening for 12 weeks. The primary outcome of the study was the effect on depression. Given saffron's track record, it is not surprising that it helped the depression. More surprising is that saffron produced significantly greater improvement in self-esteem. There was a 10% improvement in the saffron group compared to 4.8% on placebo. The finding is important because reducing depression does not guarantee increasing self-esteem. A meta-analysis of youths with depression concluded that antidepressant drugs do not improve self-esteem (*Front. Nutr.* June 2026;13:1838513).

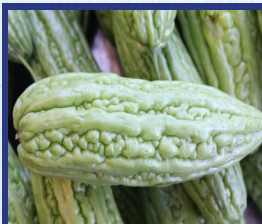
Aggression

It may also surprise you to learn that there is natural help for aggression.

Science supports the idea that poor nutrition is linked to behavioural problems. One theory is that the link between poor nutrition and aggression is omega-3 EFA's. And studies have shown that supplementing omega-3 can reduce aggressive behaviour. But how much evidence is there?

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Photo by Ted Snider



Lifesaver: Herbal Help for Prediabetics

This 12-week double-blind study of 36 adults with prediabetes compared 3.6g of dried bitter melon, a well studied herb for diabetes, to a control group. The bitter melon improved fasting plasma glucose and insulin and was significantly better at improving insulin resistance compared to the control group (*J Ethnopharmacol.* May 12, 2025;347:119756).





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A new meta-analysis of 29 controlled studies of 3,918 people set out to answer that question. It found that supplementing omega-3 modestly, but significantly, reduces aggressive behaviour in children and adults. It found that omega-3 calms both proactive and reactive aggression (*Aggressive & Violent Behavior*. October 2024;78;101956).

Natural Help for PTSD

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a severe psychiatric disorder that brings intense suffering. But there is little conventional medicine can do.

PTSD is caused by severe trauma. It severely impacts quality of life by causing terrible memories and dreams, bad sleep, dissociative reactions, avoidance, fear and mood and cognitive disturbances.

Pharmaceutical treatments have proven to be only moderately effective and come with high dropout rates. Nature might offer a more promising treatment.

Palmitoylethanolamide (PEA) is naturally made in your body. It is a cannabinoid-like compound that has no psychotropic effects. There is early evidence that the endocannabinoid system plays a key role in PTSD. So, researchers set out to see if PEA could help people with PTSD.

The gold standard treatment for PTSD is cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). This 18-month study gave 60 people with PTSD either a placebo, PEA, CBT + placebo or CBT + PEA. The results were exciting. PEA dramatically outperformed placebo. While the placebo had barely any effect, reducing PTSD symptoms only from 54.7 to 52.3, the PEA reduced symptoms from 64.3 to 22.

And while CBT reduced PTSD symptoms from 61.3 to 45.5, adding PEA enhanced the improvement, dropping symptom scores from 67.3 to 20.

These results show that PEA alone has a direct effect on PTSD symptoms and that adding it to CBT improves the results of therapy.

These results are highly significant, and PEA accomplishes them with an impressive safety profile (*Journal of Psychiatric Research*. January 2026;192:439-50).

Schizophrenia

Schizophrenia is a serious mental health condition. But it is often misunderstood and misrepresented.

Schizophrenia is characterized by positive and negative symptoms. The positive symptoms of schizophrenia, like hallucinations, grab all the attention in Hollywood. But they are only part of the picture. There are also negative symptoms, like lack of ability to feel pleasure, loss of interest

in activities and relationships, lack of motivation and lack of expression or emotion in the body, face or voice.

Positive symptoms are added mental features like hearing things; negative symptoms are missing mental features like lack of emotion. Negative symptoms are a common feature of schizophrenia, and they often persist even after treatment has improved the positive symptoms. There are no pharmaceutical treatments specifically for negative symptoms. But there may be natural ones!

To see if curcumin could broaden treatment to include the negative symptoms of schizophrenia, researchers added either placebo or curcumin to the antipsychotic drugs of 38 people with schizophrenia in a double-blind study. At the end of 6-month study, there was a significantly better response in the curcumin group on the Positive and Negative Symptoms Scale (PANSS) and on the negative symptoms subscale. There was no difference between groups on the positive symptom subscale. The researchers call these results "promising" because they suggest a safe, effective, natural way of addressing the previously resistant negative symptoms of schizophrenia (*Clin Neuropharmacol* 2019;42(4):117-122).

A new systematic review and meta-analysis of 4 controlled studies demonstrates that curcumin,



though it did not affect positive symptoms, significantly reduce negative symptoms as well as general psychopathology (*Psychiatric Quarterly*. 2026;97:463-482).

Ashwagandha is another herb that can improve the negative symptoms of schizophrenia. A double-blind study of 66 schizophrenics added either a placebo or 500mg a day of ashwagandha extract to their treatment for one week and then 1g for another 11 weeks. The ashwagandha group had significantly greater improvement on the PANSS total, general and negative scores, but not on the positive scores. While 27.3% of the placebo group had to up their dose of drug or add a second drug, only 6.1% of the ashwagandha group did (*J Clin Psychiatry* 2018;79(5):17m11826).

Another double-blind study put ashwagandha to the test by adding it to the treatment of people with schizophrenia who positive symptoms were still getting worse despite conventional treatment. The researchers wanted to see if the herb could help with the depression and anxiety they were suffering. For 12-weeks period, the 66 people were

given either a placebo or 1,000mg of standardized ashwagandha extract. The depression subscore of PANSS went down by 31.7% and the anxiety-depression subscore went down by 31.4% more than the placebo. And the ashwagandha was safe (*Ann Clin Psychiatry* 2019;31(2):123-129).

Another recent study tried a different approach. 69 people with schizophrenia were given either a placebo or a combination of probiotics and 400IU vitamin D a day for 12 weeks. Scores on the Montreal Cognitive Assessment test increased by a significant 1.96 units in the supplement group versus placebo. The percentage of people with scores above 26 went up significantly in the supplement group but not in the placebo group. This result is important because, on the 30 point scale, a score below 26 indicates cognitive impairment.

Severity of disease scores (PANNS) were reduced by 2.82 units in the supplement group, but the difference was not significant. This study suggests that taking vitamin D and probiotics can improve cognition and prevent cognitive impairment in people with schizophrenia (*Neuropsychopharmacol Rep*. 2024 Jun;44(2):389-398).

Several older studies by Canadian researcher Abram Hoffer and others point to impressive results with vitamin B3.

People with schizophrenia are more likely to be deficient in folic acid. Supplementing that B vitamin has been shown in double-blind research to help people with schizophrenia who have low or borderline levels of folic acid (*Br J Psychiatry* 1991)0 or who have elevated levels of homocysteine, in which case B6 and B12 were added (*Biol Psychiatry*. 2006;60:265-9).

L-tryptophan can reduce aggressive symptoms (*Biol Psychiatry* 1983;18:575-8) and improve memory (*J Nerv Ment Dis* 2003;191:568-73) in people with schizophrenia. Adding 1g of NAC twice a day to antipsychotic drugs produces a significantly greater improvement in symptom severity scores (PANSS) total scores versus placebo (*Biol Psychiatry* 2008;64(5):361-8). One double-blind study found that adding 400mg a day of L-theanine to antipsychotic medications leads to significant improvement (*Clin Neuropharmacol* 2011;34:155-160). Alpha-lipoic acid also might help (*J Clin Psychopharmacol* 2017;37(6):697-701).

A meta-analysis of 3 controlled studies that compared *Ginkgo biloba* to the antipsychotic drugs clozapine, haloperidol or olanzapine found that ginkgo reduces symptoms of schizophrenia and is superior to the drugs (*Evid Based Complement Alternat Med* 2013;2013:915691). A second meta-analysis of 8 double-blind, placebo-controlled studies of 1,033 people with schizophrenia found that adding 240-360mg of ginkgo to antipsychotic drugs produces significant improvement over taking the drugs alone (*Psychiatry Res* 2015;228:121-7).



Spotlight: Omega-3 EFA's Beat the Drugs for Migraine Headaches

Migraine headaches are very common, and they lead to serious reduction in quality of life. There are lots of FDA-approved drugs, but they have response rates of only about 40%-50% and can cause adverse events. This large network meta-analysis points to a better way.

The meta-analysis included 40 controlled studies with a total of 6,616 people. It compared high-dose supplementation of omega-3 EFA's to the FDA approved migraine drugs.

The primary outcome measured was migraine frequency. Omega-3 EFA's and the drugs valproate and topiramate led to fewer migraine days than placebo. But the greatest improvement in migraine days was produced by

the omega-3 EFA's.

No treatment was significantly better than placebo for children, but when focussing only on studies of adults, a variety of treatments beat placebo, but the best, again, was high-dose omega-3 EFA's.

When it came to the secondary outcomes, the results were the same. High dose omega-3 EFA's, valproate and topiramate all significantly outperformed placebo for severity of migraine attack, but the most effective was the omega-3's.

And the news gets better still. The essential fatty acids had a favourable low frequency of adverse events compared to the

FDA approved drugs.

Putting it all together, compared to FDA approved drugs for migraine, high dose omega-3 essential fatty acids leads to fewer and less severe migraines with the important bonus of being safer.

Adv Nutr. 2023 Dec 16;15(2):100163.



NATURAL PATH NEWSFLASH



Natural Help for Kids with Arthritis

51 kids with juvenile idiopathic arthritis (JIA) were given either standard therapy plus placebo or standard therapy plus 100mg a day of CoQ10 for 3 months in a single-blind study. JIA, in which the immune system becomes overactive and causes inflammation for no known reason, is the most common type of arthritis in children.

Improvement in the Juvenile Arthritis Disease Activity Score and in measures of quality of life were significantly greater when CoQ10 was added.

Immunopharmacol Immunotoxicol. 2026 Jun;48(3):388-395.

Aromatherapy Your Way to Sleep

This meta-analysis tested the ability of aromatherapy to help you sleep on cardiac patients.

It included 7 studies of lavender, 3 of damask rose, 2 of peppermint and one of orange.

Sleep quality was significantly improved on aromatherapy compared to controls.

Damask rose "greatly improved sleep quality," while the others "moderately improved" it.

Aromatherapy worked best on people over 60.

Complement Ther Med. November 2025;94:103247.

Ageless!



Sleeping to Stay Young with Saffron

Aging contributes to sleep problems, and sleep problems contribute to aging. This double-blind study looked at the effect of saffron on sleep in 52 people who were between 55 and 85.

Saffron led to a significant improvement in Pittsburgh sleep quality index global score as well as sleep efficiency, sleep quality, sleep duration and how fast they fell asleep. Saffron also improved REM sleep.

This study shows that by helping older people with sleep complaints to sleep better, saffron might also help them to age more healthily.

Food Funct. August 2025;16(17):6817-6832. doi: 10.1039/d5fo00917k.



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Think Quick!

Lavender essential oil calms you down while building up your brain. People given lavender are more relaxed and perform math calculations quicker and more accurately (*Int J Neurosci*. 1998 Dec;96(3-4):217-24).

Essential fatty acids are an important way to help your kids focus better in school. When researchers gave teenagers who had low omega-3 levels a cognitive test that measured information processing speed and a test that measured attention and focus, they found that the kids with higher levels of omega-3 had better processing speed and attention/focus (*Nutrients* 2016;8:13).

Ginkgo, Of Course!

The king of cognition herbs is *Ginkgo biloba*. But ginkgo may help your child in school in surprising ways.

Students are spending more and more time on computer. When people who spend a lot of time on computers are given ginkgo, they make significantly less errors than people given a placebo. And ginkgo users not only concentrate better, they suffer significantly less stress (*J Pharmako U Ther* 2007;Jan:3-9).

According to preliminary research, ginkgo might also help kids with dyslexia. When dyslexic kids were given 80mg a day of ginkgo, their dyslexia scores went down. 9 of the 15 kids on the word list test and 7 of the 15 on the reading test improved so much, they no longer met the criteria for dyslexia (*Phytomed* 2007;14(6):367-70).

Ginkgo can also help kids with ADHD, though it is less effective than Ritalin (*Prog Neuropsychopharmacol Biol Psychiatry* 2010;34:76-80). But double-blind research has shown that kids with ADHD who add 80-120mg of ginkgo to their Ritalin have significantly greater improvement in inattention, total score and clinical response rate on the ADHD Rating Scale. More kids responded, and they responded more (*Complement Ther Clin Pract* 2015;21:61-7). An uncontrolled study of 120-240mg of ginkgo also demonstrated significant improvement in ADHD symptoms, including attention, hyperactivity and impulsiveness as well as in social behaviour and disruption of family life (*Kinder* 2014;42:337-47).

Saffron is Tops for ADHD

Another remarkable cognition herb for adults that also helps ADHD is saffron. In a remarkable study of kids with ADHD, saffron proved itself to be at least as effective as Ritalin. Improvement was significant in both groups, and the two treatments were equally effective. There was no significant difference in the number of kids who responded; although, on parent's rating scale, 100% of the saffron group were responders versus 96% in the Ritalin group.

96% of the saffron group improved by 50% or more versus 84% of the Ritalin group (*J Child Adolesc Psychopharmacol* 2019;doi:10.1089/cap.2018.0146).

When kids with ADHD were given either Ritalin alone or combined with saffron, scores in the saffron added group were significantly better (*Iran. J. Psychiatry Behav. Sci.* 2021;15,e108390).

The Latest Research for Your Kids Lutein & Zeaxanthin Improve Cognition in Teenagers

Lutein and zeaxanthin are crucial for cognition, but we often don't get enough of them in our diet, since many of us don't eat enough fruits and vegetables. A just published study shows that when teenagers supplement these two carotenes, it has a very positive impact on their cognition.

Previous research has already shown that supplementing lutein and zeaxanthin improves cognition. A systematic review found that 10mg of lutein a day leads to improvement in cognition (*Nutrients*. 2020;12(3):617). Studies have specifically shown that lutein-zeaxanthin improve cognition in children. 10mg of lutein combined with 2mg of zeaxanthin significantly improves



cognition, including focus, memory and learning, in children (*Adv Ther.* 2024 Feb 16;41(4):1496-1511).

But, until now, little research has been done on teenagers. This just-published double-blind study gave either a placebo or 10mg of lutein and 2mg of zeaxanthin to 82 teenagers who didn't eat enough fruits and vegetables and had at least 4 hours a day of screen time. The study lasted 6 months. The results show that, compared to placebo, the supplement led to significant improvement in attention and processing speed. The lutein-zeaxanthin was well tolerated, and there were no significant adverse reactions. This is the first study to show that supplementing lutein and zeaxanthin can enhance cognition

in teenagers (*Nutrition Research*. August 2026;152:132-55).

Both Gotu Kola & Bacopa Improve Cognition in Kids

A new study gave either bacopa or gotu kola to 180 boys between the ages of 8 and 10. Bacopa highly significantly improved memory on 9 of 10 subtests; gotu kola led to highly significant improvement on 8 and significant improvement in a ninth. Both herbs led to highly significant increases in memory and IQ scores. Gotu kola may have had the edge over bacopa (*J Ayurveda Integr Med*. July 3, 2025;16(4):101164).

Bacopa for young people is supported by several studies. A systematic review of 5 studies of bacopa and children and adolescents found significant consistent improvement in the language behaviour cognitive domain and in several memory sub-domains. It also significantly improved hyperactivity and attention-deficit (*Complement Ther Med*. 2016 Dec;29:56-62). A study of medical students demonstrated significant improvement on bacopa in working memory, logical memory and attention and distractibility. (*Evid Based Complement Alternat Med*. 2016;2016(1):4103423).

Brain Food

As in everything, diet counts. A study of 5,200 grade 5 kids found that the ones with the healthiest diets were 41% less likely to fail a standardized test of reading and writing than the kids with the worst diets. The kids who ate the most fruits and vegetables and less fat did better on the test (*J Sch Health* 2008;78(4):209-15).

This is not the only study to find that kids who eat more fruit and vegetables perform better in school (*Canadian Journal of Dietetic Practice and Research* 2008;69(3):141-144).

When "working class" kids between the ages of 6 and 12 were given either a low dose multi or a placebo, the ones given the multi had an increase in nonverbal IQ that was 2.5 points greater than the placebo group. While some kids had no increase in IQ while on the multi, the 35% of the kids who were insufficiently nourished by their daily diet for their brains to function at their peak had their nonverbal IQ soar by at least 15 points (*J Altern Complement Med* 2000;6(1):19-29).

About Linda Woolven & Ted Snider



The *Natural Path* is written by Ted Snider & Linda Woolven, a master herbalist, registered acupuncturist, reiki practitioner and solution-focused counselor with a practice in Toronto. For in person or virtual appointments, call 416.782.8211.

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