



# FOOD 4 MOOD

How food can affect  
your mood

## HOW FOOD CAN AFFECT YOUR MOOD

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When you're feeling down, it can be tempting to turn to food to lift your spirits. However, the sugary, high calorie treats that many people resort to have negative consequences of their own.

You may wonder if there are any healthy foods which can improve your mood.

Knowing what foods we should and shouldn't be eating can be really confusing, especially when it feels like the advice changes regularly. Recently, research on the relationship between nutrition and mental health has shown that as well as affecting our physical health, what we eat may also affect the way we feel.

Yet, it's important to note that mood can be influenced by many factors, such as stress, environment, poor sleep, genetics, mood disorders, and nutritional deficiencies.

Improving your diet may help to:

- Improve your mood
- Give you more energy
- Help you think more clearly
- May enable you to have a more productive day

## HOW TO MANAGE YOUR MOOD WITH FOOD

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Here are some tips to help you explore the relationship between what you eat and how you feel.

### EATING REGULARLY

- If your blood sugar drops you might feel tired, irritable and depressed. Eating regularly and choosing foods that release energy slowly will help to keep your sugar levels steady.
- Slow release energy foods include: brown pasta, brown rice, oats, wholegrain bread and cereals, nuts and seeds.

#### Tips:

- Eating breakfast gets the day off to a good start
- Instead of eating a large lunch and dinner, try eating smaller portions spaced out more regularly throughout the day.
- Avoid foods which make your blood sugar rise and fall rapidly, such as sweets, biscuits, sugary drinks, and alcohol.

### STAYING HYDRATED

- If you don't drink enough fluid, you may find it difficult to concentrate or think clearly. You might also start to feel constipated (which doesn't help anyone's mood).

#### Tips:

- It's recommended that you drink between 6-8 glasses of fluid a day.
- Water is a cheap and healthy option.
- Tea, coffee, juices and smoothies all count towards your intake (but be aware that these may also contain caffeine or sugar).

### GETTING YOUR 5 A DAY

- Vegetables and fruit contain a lot of the minerals, vitamins and fibre we need to keep us physically and mentally healthy.
- Eating a variety of different coloured fruits and vegetables daily means you'll get a good range of nutrients.

#### Tips:

- Fresh, frozen, tinned, dried and juiced (one glass) fruits and vegetables all count towards your 5 a day.
- As a general rule, one portion is about a handful, small bowl or a small glass.



## LOOKING AFTER YOUR GUT

- Sometimes your gut can reflect how you are feeling emotionally. If you're stressed or anxious this can make your gut slow down or speed up. For a healthy digestion you need to have plenty of fibre, fluid and exercise regularly.
- Healthy gut foods include: fruits, vegetables, wholegrains, beans, pulses, live yoghurt and other probiotics.

### Tips:

- It might take your gut time to get used to a new eating pattern, so make changes slowly to give yourself time to adjust.
- If you're feeling stressed and you think it is affecting your gut, try some relaxation techniques or breathing exercises.

## GETTING ENOUGH PROTEIN

- Protein contains amino acids, which make up the chemicals your brain needs to regulate your thoughts and feelings. It also helps keep you feeling fuller for longer.
- Protein is in: lean meat, fish, eggs, cheese, legumes (peas, beans and lentils), soya products, nuts and seeds.

### Tip:

- Whatever your diet, why not do some research into other foods that contain protein, and find something new to try?

## EATING THE RIGHT FATS

- Your brain needs fatty acids (such as omega 3 and 6) to keep it working well. So rather than avoiding all fats, it's important to eat the right ones.
- Healthy fats are found in: oily fish, poultry, nuts (especially walnuts and almonds), olive and sunflower oils, seeds (such as sunflower and pumpkin), avocados, milk, yoghurt, cheese and eggs.

### Tip:

- Try to avoid anything which lists 'trans fats' or 'partially hydrogenated oils' in the list of ingredients (such as some shop bought cakes and biscuits). They can be tempting when you're feeling low, but this kind of fat isn't good for your mood or your physical health in the long run.

## HEALTHY FOODS THAT MAY LIFT YOUR MOOD

Certain foods have been shown to improve overall brain health and certain types of mood disorders.

### FATTY FISH

- Omega 3 fatty acids are a group of essential fats that you must obtain through your diet because your body can't produce them on its own.
- Fatty fish like salmon and albacore tuna are rich in two types of omega 3s docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) and eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) that are linked to lower levels of depression.
- Omega 3s contribute to the fluidity of your brain's cell membrane and appear to play key roles in brain development and cell signalling.
- Although there's no standard dose, most experts agree that most adults should get at least 250 500 mg of combined EPA and DHA per day
- Given that a 3.5 ounce (100 gram) serving of salmon provides 2,260 mg of EPA and DHA, eating this fish a few times per week is a great way to get these fats into your diet.



## DARK CHOCOLATE 70%+

- Chocolate is rich in many mood boosting compounds.
- Its sugar may improve mood since it's a quick source of fuel for your brain.
- Furthermore, it may release a cascade of feel good compounds, such as caffeine, theobromine, and N acylethanolamine a substance chemically similar to cannabinoids that has been linked to improved mood.
- It's high in health promoting flavonoids, which have been shown to increase blood flow to your brain, reduce inflammation, and boost brain health , all of which may support mood
- Finally, chocolate has a high hedonic rating, meaning that its pleasurable taste, texture, and smell may also promote good mood.
- Because milk chocolate contains added ingredients like sugar and fat, it's best to opt for rich dark chocolate which is higher in flavonoids and lower in added sugar. You should still only stick to 12 small squares (of 70% or more cocoa solids) at a time since it's a high calorie food.

## FERMENTED FOODS

- Fermented foods , which include kimchi, yogurt, kefir, kombucha, and sauerkraut, may improve gut health and mood.
- The fermentation process allows live bacteria to thrive in foods that are then able to convert sugars into alcohol and acids.
- During this process, probiotics are created. These live microorganisms support the growth of healthy bacteria in your gut and may increase serotonin levels.
- It's important to note that not all fermented foods are significant sources of probiotics, such as in the case of beer, some breads, and wine, due to cooking and filtering.
- Serotonin is a neurotransmitter that affects many areas of human behaviour, such as mood, stress response and appetite. Up to 90% of your body's serotonin is produced by your gut microbiome, or the collection of healthy bacteria in your gut.
- In addition, the gut microbiome plays a role in brain health. More and more research is beginning to show a connection between healthy gut bacteria and lower rates of depression.

## BANANAS

- They're high in vitamin B6, which helps synthesize feel good neurotransmitters like dopamine and serotonin.
- Furthermore, one large banana (136 grams) provides 16 grams of sugar and 3.5 grams of fibre.
- When paired with fibre, sugar is released slowly into your bloodstream, allowing for stable blood sugar levels and better mood control. Blood sugar levels that are too low may lead to irritability and mood swings.
- Finally, this tropical fruit, especially when still showing green on the peel, is an excellent source of prebiotics , a type of fibre that helps feed healthy bacteria in your gut. A robust gut microbiome is associated with lower rates of mood disorders.

## OATS

- Oats are a whole grain that can keep you in good spirits all morning. You can enjoy them in many forms, such as overnight oats , oatmeal, muesli, and
- They're an excellent source of fibre, providing 8 grams in a single raw cup (81 grams).
- Fibre helps slow your digestion of carbs, allowing for a gradual release of sugar into the bloodstream to keep your energy levels stable.



- Although other sources of whole grains can have this effect, oats may be especially advantageous, as they're also a great source of iron, with 1 raw cup (81 grams) boasting 19% of your daily needs.
- Iron deficiency anaemia, one of the most common nutrient deficiencies, is associated with low iron intake. Its symptoms include fatigue, sluggishness, and mood disorders.

## BERRIES

- Eating more fruits and vegetables is linked to lower rates of depression.
- A diet rich in antioxidants may help manage inflammation associated with depression and other mood disorders.
- Berries pack a wide range of antioxidants and phenolic compounds, which play a key role in combatting oxidative stress and an imbalance of harmful compounds in your body.
- They're particularly high in anthocyanins, a pigment that gives certain berries their purple/blue colour.
- If you can't find them fresh, try buying frozen berries which are frozen at their peak ripeness to retain the maximum amount of antioxidants.

## NUTS AND SEEDS

- Nuts and seeds are high in plant-based proteins, healthy fats, and fibre.
- Additionally, they provide tryptophan, an amino acid responsible for producing mood-boosting serotonin. Almonds, cashews, peanuts, and walnuts, as well as pumpkin, sesame, and sunflower seeds, are excellent sources.
- Moreover, nuts and seeds are a large component of both the MIND and Mediterranean diets, which may support a healthy brain. Each of these diets promotes fresh, whole foods and limits your intake of processed items.
- What's more, a 10-year study in 15,980 people linked moderate nut intake to a 23% lower risk of depression.

- Finally, certain nuts and seeds, such as Brazil nuts, almonds, and pine nuts, are good sources of zinc and selenium.

Deficiency in these minerals, which are important for brain function, is associated with higher rates of depression.

## BEANS AND LENTILS

- In addition to being high in fibre and plant-based protein, beans and lentils are full of feel-good nutrients.
- They're an excellent source of B vitamins, which help improve mood by increasing levels of neurotransmitters like serotonin, dopamine, norepinephrine, and gamma aminobutyric acid (GABA), all of which are important for regulating mood.
- Furthermore, B vitamins play a key role in nerve signalling, which allows proper communication between nerve cells.
- Low levels of these vitamins, especially B12 and folate, have been linked to mood disorders, such as depression.
- Finally, they're a good source of zinc, magnesium, selenium, and non-heme iron, which may likewise elevate your spirits.

## Advice

When feeling blue, you may crave calorie-rich, high-sugar foods like ice cream or sweets to try to lift your spirits. While this might give you a sugar rush, it's unlikely to help you in the long term and may have negative consequences. Instead, you should aim for wholesome foods that have been shown to not only boost your mood but also your overall health. Try out some of the foods above to kick-start your positive routine.

