FOOD AND MOOD

Nutrition provides your brain with the chemical capacity for feeling your best. Research shows those who consume ample fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and fish report significantly less psychological distress and have up to a 35% lower risk for depression.

Here are a few ways to improve your mental health, one bite at a time.

- **Eat plants with every meal.** Aim for 5-9 half cup servings of fruits and vegetables every day.

- **Aim for at least 1 serving per day of dark, leafy greens.** Spinach, kale, collard greens, broccoli, and brussel sprouts have several micronutrients important for mood and cognition such as B vitamins, folate, fiber, magnesium, and more.

- **"Hanger" is a real thing.** Get adequate calories by eating every 3-5 hours, and include complex carbohydrates and protein with every meal to stabilize blood sugar and mood.

- **Unsaturated fats help improve cognitive functioning.** Enjoy fatty fish twice per week and include foods high in omega 3s every day (flax, chia, and hemp seeds, olive and canola oils). You may also supplement with fish oil — just make sure it contains EPA, the omega 3 with the most promising evidence base for mental health improvement.

- **Choose whole grains.** Whole grains such as oats, brown or wild rice, whole grain breads, and quinoa provide complex carbohydrates as well additional B vitamins and fiber.

- **Make time for micronutrients.** Did you know 95% of the serotonin in your body is made in the gut? Eating ample fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts, seeds, and whole grains provides the micronutrients needed to generate neurotransmitters and supports a healthy diversity of beneficial bacteria in your colon (the microbiome).

- **Include probiotic foods.** A diverse microbiome has been linked to positive mental health. Fermented foods such as low-fat yogurt, kefir, kombucha, sauerkraut, kimchi, and miso may help support a healthy diversity within your microbiome.

- **Limit caffeine intake to 400 mg/day.** That's around 2-3 cups of coffee. This will minimize caffeine's physiological responses similar to those of anxiety and help you maintain good sleep hygiene.

- **Proteins and complex carbohydrates are key for energy.** Having these macronutrients throughout the day provide your body with the building blocks and energy needed to make "feel good" neurotransmitters, such as serotonin and dopamine. However, too many of them can make you feel lethargic, cause mood swings, and trigger feelings of depression.

- **Find pleasure outside of food, too.** Pleasure often overrides physical signals of fullness, leading to excessive intake, so make sure you find enjoyment in many avenues in your life, not just food!

- **Love your body.** Taking time to appreciate what your body does for you helps you make respectful and enjoyable choices for your body, ultimately contributing to a stable and healthy weight.

- **Eat when you're hungry. Stop when you're full.** Eating mindfully encourages healthy choices, a healthy weight, and reduces risk for extreme eating behaviors and weight gain.

- **Be mindful of medication effects.** Some medications should be taken with food for optimal absorption and effectiveness. Some may increase or decrease appetite, leading to changes in weight. Be sure to consult with your psychiatrist, pharmacist, or dietitian to see what is right for you.

This information is intended for educational purposes only. Consult with a physician for additional guidance.
Source: https://healthyhorns.utexas.edu/images/pdf/HO%20-%20FoodMood.pdf

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