
Mood and food

Summary

- Choosing healthy foods may help you to feel well and happy.
 - A balanced wholesome diet may help to prevent and improve symptoms of depression and anxiety.
 - A diet rich in processed foods with added salt, sugars and fats may lead to poor mental health and exacerbate symptoms of depression and anxiety.
 - A healthy diet doesn't need to be hard work. Keeping convenient, healthy foods on hand can make it easier to make healthy food choices every day.
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Did you know your mood can affect your food choices? And, on the flip side, your food choices can affect your mood.

If you are experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety like low mood, irritability, lack of motivation and low energy levels, it may be difficult to find the energy and motivation to make healthy food choices.

You may reach out for convenience and comfort foods, or you may find it difficult to eat anything at all. But, a healthy diet is important for keeping your mental health in check. A poor diet can contribute to symptoms of depression and anxiety.

Fortunately, a healthy diet that is good for your overall health can also help to prevent symptoms of depression and anxiety. When you are feeling well, you may find it easier to stick to a healthy diet, which will in turn help you to continue to feel well.

The upshot? Aim to choose nutritious foods wherever possible. Embrace **healthy snacking** and **healthy eating**, and feel better for it!

How food can lift your mood

By enjoying a wide variety of vegetables, fruits, nuts, seeds, wholegrain cereals, legumes, low-fat dairy, lean meat and oily fish, you can prevent and improve symptoms of depression and anxiety.

A well balanced diet means that your body will have all the nutrients it needs for good health, including good mental health. However, a healthy diet is about more than just nutrients.

Studies that show a link between diet and mental health have found associations with whole dietary patterns, not just specific foods or nutrients. That means that there is no superfood for mental health; rather, it is important to eat a balanced diet.

The diets that seem to provide the most benefit for mental health are those that are considered to be 'traditional diets'. These include the Mediterranean diet, Norwegian diet and Japanese diet.

Some components of these diets that may be important for mental health include:

- Healthy fats like the ones found in fish and extra virgin olive oil. These fats have been shown to be important for our blood vessels and our brain, and may have an important anti-inflammatory effect that helps to prevent depression.
 - Wholegrains such as brown bread, rice and pasta. These fibre-rich foods can promote the growth of good gut bacteria that may have a positive effect on mental health.
 - Fruit and vegetables. These colourful components of the diet contain a wealth of important nutrients including antioxidants that help to prevent cell damage.
 - Fermented foods like yoghurt can also help to encourage the growth of good gut bacteria that positively impact on mental health.
 - Nuts, seeds and legumes. These powerhouses of the diet are good sources of plant-based protein, healthy
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fats and fibre.

And don't forget your liquid intake: water will keep you hydrated and help you to feel more alert and productive.

How food can lower your mood

Studies show that a Western diet, or one that is higher in processed foods with plenty of added salt, sugar and fat, can be more likely to lead to symptoms of depression and anxiety.

When motivation and energy are lacking, you may find foods such as takeaways, chips, soft drink and lollies appealing. Unfortunately, a diet focused on these types of foods is more likely to exacerbate symptoms of depression and anxiety.

To keep feeling at your best, reach for some healthy convenience foods:

- a bowl of cereal with low-fat milk
- plain yoghurt topped with fruit and nuts or oats
- wholegrain toast with peanut butter or avocado
- wholegrain biscuits with hummus.

If you are finding meal preparation to be too difficult or time consuming, try the following tips to create healthy meals for yourself every day of the week:

- Cook in bulk and freeze leftover portions in single-serve size containers ready to just heat and eat.
- Shop and cook with a friend. Spending time with others can also be great for improving your mood.
- Consider a food swap. Trade extra portions of meals that you have cooked with a friend in a similar situation.
- Keep plenty of convenient meal options on hand. Frozen vegetables are fantastic as they keep for ages and don't require any chopping. Tinned fish and canned beans are convenient sources of protein that you can use to top toast or stir into pasta or rice.

Remember...

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- A healthy diet doesn't need to be hard work. Keeping convenient, healthy foods on hand can make it easier to make healthy food choices every day.



This content was produced in conjunction with a Dietitians Association of Australia **Accredited Practising Dietitian**.

This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:

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