

# Good Mood Food

The quality of the foods we eat, how regularly we eat and the nutrients we extract from food all affect brain chemistry, mood, memory and cognitive function. If you're eating a healthy balance of whole foods that contain a variety of nutrients, you're more likely to feel calmer, more content and generally in a better mood. Following a healthy pattern of eating is linked with better stress management, improved sleep quality, increased concentration, and better mental wellbeing in general.

## Ways to improve your mood through food

**Eat at regular intervals** to avoid problems, such as feeling foggy, frustrated, tired and low in energy from not consuming enough energy (calories) or going too long between meals.

**Fruit and vegetables** provide us with fibre to support a healthy gut environment. Fibre is a favourite food of the beneficial bacteria in our gut that play a range of roles in supporting our overall health. Fruit and vegetables also give us a wide range of vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants to support brain health. We should aim for two serves of fruit and five serves of veg a day.

**Wholegrains** are an important source of fibre to feed our good gut bacteria, plus healthy fats for brain function, and 'slow' carbohydrates for a steady source of brain fuel. A healthy, well-fuelled brain may also help to regulate your mood – so it's important to ensure your body has a constant supply of glucose from carbohydrate rich foods. Slow-releasing or wholegrain carbohydrates like oats, legumes (beans, lentils, chickpeas), fruit, and yoghurt give your brain the steady supply of glucose it needs to function at its best. Try to limit sugary treats like lollies, biscuits and cakes. You'll experience a quick rise in blood sugar, followed by a quick drop, which can make you feel a bit flat or irritable.

**Lean meats, fish, eggs, dairy, nuts and legumes** provide protein which are the building blocks of many brain chemicals that can influence our mood. Fish, especially oily fish, along with nuts, seeds and legumes are also a good source of those healthy fats and vitamins that support positive mental health and are known to protect against dementia and depression.

**Yoghurt and kefir** are cultured meaning they contain living beneficial bacteria (known as probiotics) that can boost our gut health, which influences our mood and mental wellbeing.

**Water** and other fluids prevent dehydration – a common cause of headaches, tiredness, and 'brain fog' that can affect our ability to concentrate. However, avoid quenching your thirst with drinks that are high in sugar, such as soft drinks.

**Increase intake of Omega-3 fatty acids**, found in oily fish, flaxseed, chia seeds, walnuts and Soy-Linseed bread. Animal sources of Omega-3 are better used by the body, so try to eat oily fish 2-3 times a week. Good sources are Atlantic and Australian salmon, blue-eye trevalla, blue mackerel, canned sardines and canned tuna. If you don't eat oily fish, get a good quality supplement (and take it every day).

**Get your nutrient levels checked.** Low levels of vitamin D, iron and B12 are associated with depression and mood disorders. Ask your GP for a blood test, especially if you're vegan, vegetarian, don't eat much dairy and meat or have a history of nutrient deficiencies.

**Get Active.** Regular exercise can have a profoundly positive impact on depression, anxiety, and ADHD. It also relieves stress, improves memory, helps you sleep better, and boosts your overall mood.

## Summary

- Increase the consumption of fruits and vegetables, wholegrains, legumes, fish, lean red meats, olive oil and nuts.
- Decrease consumption of sweets, refined cereals, fried food, fast-food, processed meats and sugary drinks.
- Exercise regularly, preferably every day.