

EATING FOR

Mental Health

Taking positive steps toward your mental health involves a holistic approach to your care. One way in which you can better steward your mental health on a daily basis is through the food you eat. Our Cerebral Nutritionists work alongside you to care for your mental health. This guide walks you through nutrition and mental health and provides you with helpful and practical tips!

The Basics: Eat a Variety of Real Food

The building blocks for better nutrition for mental health are real, unprocessed foods. These foods protect us from unnecessary stress and inflammation, which affects our brains.

Low inflammation in the body and a reduced risk of anxiety, depression, and stress is associated with a diet rich in:

- Fruits
- Vegetables
- Whole Grains: brown rice, whole wheat, quinoa, buckwheat, oats
- Fish
- Healthy Fats: olive oil, avocado, nuts, seeds
- Legumes: lentils, beans, peas

Greater rates of anxiety and depression are associated with a diet high in:

- Excess calories
- Added sugars
- Trans Fats: baked goods, shortening, stick, margarine, fried foods, nondairy creamer, frozen pizza
- Saturated Fats: butter, lard, coconut oil, fatty meats, cheese
- Processed Meat: sausages, hot dogs, salami, bacon, beef jerky

A healthy lifestyle always allows us to enjoy our favorite foods without guilt. But, eating certain types of food over time may work against us for our mental health. So, it is wise to eat these sources in moderation.

Helpful Tips For Brain-Healthy Eating:

- Including a serving of fruits and vegetables at every meal
- Set a goal to eat all the colors of the rainbow throughout your week (red, orange/yellow, green, purple)
- Choose whole grains rather than refined grains
 - I.e. brown rice, quinoa, oats, whole wheat, buckwheat, barley, etc.
- Choose to snack on nuts and seeds daily
 - I.e. almonds, cashews, walnuts, chia seeds, flax seeds, sunflower seeds, etc.
- Select quality, lean protein sources
 - I.e. fish, chicken, turkey
- Adapt a meal-planning strategy to eat more home-cooked meals rather than fast food
- Substitute soda or pop with seltzer water or fruit-infused water

Destress with Your Diet

Evidence suggests a connection between mental health problems and inflammation and stress. High inflammation in the body has been shown to be associated with an increased risk of various mental disorders, such as depression. Luckily, it is well known that some foods contain powerful properties that fight off inflammation and stress in our body and brain.

Antioxidants

Antioxidants found in food have the ability to protect our bodies from stress. Many foods contain antioxidants to help lower stress and inflammation in our bodies.

- Polyphenols have antioxidant properties that have been shown to increase cognitive performance
- Flavonoids are a type of polyphenol that has the ability to cross the blood-brain barrier and provide protection to the brain

Foods High in Antioxidants

- Berries: blueberries, strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, cranberries, Goji berries
- Dark purple fruits: plums, cherries, black plums
- Dark leafy greens: spinach, kale, collard greens, arugula
- Beans and legumes: red kidney beans, pinto beans, black beans
- Dark chocolate
- Spices: cinnamon, oregano, turmeric, ginger
- Beverages: green tea, coffee, red wine (enjoyed in moderation)

Set a Goal: Eat one serving of antioxidant-rich food each day!

- Top Greek yogurt with berries
- Add a handful of spinach to a smoothie
- Add beans to a salad or bowl
- Savor a square of dark chocolate

Focus on Quality Fats

Dietary fat should be embraced rather than feared!

There are two main types of fat that exist in our diet: saturated and unsaturated fat:

- Saturated fat is solid at room temperature and is found in animal sources.
- Unsaturated fat is liquid at room temperature and is found in plant sources.
 - There are also two types of unsaturated fats: monounsaturated fatty acids (MUFAs) and polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFAs).
 - Eating more MUFAs and PUFAs instead of saturated fat is associated with less brain inflammation.

PUFAs encompass a particular type of fat with even more brain-protecting benefits. These fats are omega-3 fatty acids, including EPA and DHA.

- DHA provides an essential structural piece of the brain's membrane
- EPA plays a key role in the anti-inflammatory process in the body

- Omega-3 fats can prevent inflammation, increase serotonin (the Happiness Hormone), and increase dopamine (the pleasure hormone)
- Stress, anxiety, and depression levels tend to be less with a greater intake of omega-3 fats

Food Sources of MUFAs and Omega-3 Fats

- MUFAs
 - Olive Oil
 - Nuts: almonds, cashews, pecans
 - Nut butter: almond butter, peanut butter
 - Avocado
- Omega-3 Fatty Acids
 - Fatty fish: salmon, mackerel, sardines, oysters, anchovies
 - Seeds: flax seeds, chia seeds, hemp seeds
 - Walnuts
 - Seaweed and algae
 - Edamame

Set a Goal: Eat a serving of your favorite fish rich in omega-3s twice a week!

Go With Your Gut

The gut microbiome has grown in attention over the past decade due to the great impact it poses on our health. The gut microbiome includes microorganisms (microbiota) that live in our gut. This includes healthy bacteria. Evidence shows there is a “gut-brain” connection. In fact, the gut microbiome communicates with the brain using various signaling pathways.

A lack of healthy and diverse microbiota has been connected to:

- Higher stress responses
- Lower serotonin receptors in the brain
- Lower levels of BDNF, an important protein related to brain function

But, the consumption of probiotics is associated with a lower risk of depression.

Eating for Your Gut:

Fiber. Consume an adequate amount of fiber. The recommendation for women is to eat 21-25 grams of fiber per day. Men should eat 30-38 grams per day.

- You can get more fiber by eating more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts, and seeds
- High fiber foods suggestions:
 - Fruits: pears, apples, bananas, oranges, berries
 - Vegetables: broccoli, carrots, cauliflower, Brussel sprouts, beets, artichoke, sweet potatoes
 - Whole grains: whole wheat, brown rice, barley, quinoa, oats, popcorn
 - Legumes: lentils, black beans, split peas, lima beans, kidney beans, chickpeas
 - Nuts and Seeds: almonds, pistachios, chia seeds, sunflower seeds
 - Other: avocado
- Caution: Make sure to drink plenty of water when eating more fiber to avoid stomach distress!

Probiotics: Probiotics are healthy bacteria found in various foods. Aim to increase your servings of probiotic-rich foods per week.

- Probiotic foods:
 - Yogurt
 - Fermented food: sauerkraut, kimchi, kombucha, kefir, pickled vegetables

Prebiotics: Prebiotics are the fiber that gets eaten by the healthy bacteria in your gut. Increase your intake of prebiotics as you increase your probiotic intake.

- Prebiotic foods:
 - Legumes
 - Berries
 - Asparagus
 - Garlic
 - Onions
 - Oats
 - Banana
 - Artichokes

Helpful tips for incorporating probiotics and prebiotics into your diet:

- Top a salad with 2 Tbsp of kimchi
- Include minced garlic and onions in a stir fry
- Add Greek Yogurt and berries to a smoothie

- Add 2 Tbsp. of sauerkraut to a sandwich
- Top your favorite tacos with some pickled vegetables

Align Your Eating with Your Circadian Rhythms

Our circadian rhythm is our body's "clock". It involves a daily cycle that regulates our daily behaviors. Circadian rhythms encompass our sleep-wake cycle and are controlled by the brain. We can disturb our circadian rhythm by eating late into the night or staying up too late. This can affect our body's normal functions and hormones.

Disruption of the normal circadian rhythm has been linked to:

- Disruption of the gut microbiota
- An increased risk for various chronic diseases (obesity and diabetes)
- An increased risk of mental disorders (depression, insomnia, etc)

Practicing habits that align with the circadian rhythm has been shown to:

- Increase BDNF expression
- Improve the plasticity of our synapses in the brain

Helpful habits to align with your circadian rhythms:

- Allow yourself a nightly fast of at least 10-12 hours
- Always honor your hunger, but avoid late-night snacking if it pertains to boredom or habit

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