



Managing Mood with Food

**A Guide to how a Healthy Diet can improve the
Symptoms of Anxiety and Depression**

MANAGING MOOD WITH FOOD

Have you ever woken up and felt unable to face the world until you have had your first cup of coffee? Or struggled to solve simple issues after missing breakfast? Or while rehashing a difficult day or coping with a stressful situation eaten too much chocolate, pizza, or ice-cream? Or found that a warm cup of Horlicks calms you and helps you to sleep; whilst by the end of a day having only managed to snack on crisps and biscuits, you are anxious and tired?

For centuries, millions of people all over the world have used foodstuffs (including food-beverages) in different situations to manage or alter moods. When you are under stress or suffering from anxiety and depression, eating well is more important than ever. However, it can often become more difficult at these times, as depression and anxiety can sometimes lead to loss of appetite and the neglect of your body's needs. This in turn can result in deficiencies of critical vitamins and minerals such as B vitamins, Vitamin C, magnesium, and calcium.

Although the relationship between different nutrients and the brain's chemistry is still unclear, malnourishment or weight problems definitely contribute to low mood and fatigue.

It is therefore vital that in managing depression and/or anxiety a conscious effort is made to monitor and adjust your daily diet.

Which foods can influence your mood?

The foods and drinks that are found to most often cause problems are those containing alcohol, sugar, caffeine, chocolate, wheat (such as bread, biscuits, and cakes), dairy products (such as cheese), certain artificial additives (or E numbers), aspartame, and hydrogenated fats.



These foods and drink are known to increase mood swings, anxiety, panic attacks, cravings or food 'addictions', depression (including postnatal depression), irritable or aggressive feelings, concentration, memory difficulties, premenstrual syndrome (PMS), obsessive-compulsive feelings, eating disorders, psychotic episodes, insomnia, fatigue, behavioural and learning disorders, and seasonal affective disorder (SAD). Of course, not all of listed foods and drink affect every person equally, and some may,

more frequently, affect one individual and not another. But they are the ones to look out for if you are suffering from anxiety and/or depression.

Which foods will help you to feel well?

Firstly, in order to maintain a healthy mind and body you need to remain hydrated. Dehydration leads to fatigue and other adverse physical symptoms. It's easy to overlook drinking the recommended six to eight glasses of water per day; however it is an important first step to feeling well and keeping fatigue, irritability and headaches at bay.

It is also important to have a minimum of five portions daily of fresh fruit and vegetables (one portion equals about a fist in size). These will provide you with the essential nutrients you need to nourish the mind and body.



In planning your mealtimes, it is best to ensure that you always have breakfast, and try to keep regular meal times, choosing foods that release energy slowly, such as oats and unrefined whole grains. Include protein foods, such as meat, fish, beans, eggs, cheese, nuts or seeds in at least one of these meals every day.

Red meat should ideally only be eaten at most twice a week as it has been linked to certain physical diseases, such as bowel cancer.

Making sure that you eat healthy and nutrient-packed foods will help to control the negative effects of fluctuating blood sugar levels and certain mineral and vitamin deficiencies. These effects include irritability, poor concentration, anxiety, fatigue, depression, and food cravings. Other useful foods for maintaining physical and mental well-being are oil-rich fish, such as mackerel and sardines, linseeds (flax), hemp seeds and their oils, and other seeds and nuts, such as sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, brazil nuts and walnuts. These are vital for the formation and healthy functioning of the brain.



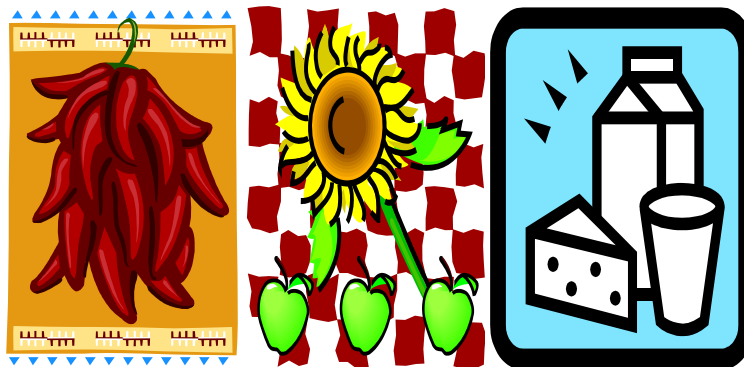
How do I find out if certain foods are having a negative effect on me?

The best way of finding out whether certain foods are affecting you badly is to keep a food and drink diary every day for about one week. You need to write down everything you eat and drink every day, the times you consumed this food and drink, how much you ate or drank in quantity, and how you felt before and afterwards. The more information you include in your diary, the more useful it is likely to be. It can be surprising for some to be able to identify how little they vary their diet on a day to day basis; or how frequently after consuming a certain food or drink they feel more anxious or depressed. Being able to develop this awareness is an important first step in identifying how your diet may be affecting you, and how changing your diet could potentially help to manage your symptoms.

Foods for relieving Anxiety: Complex carbohydrates such as popcorn, brown rice, oats, and rye bread. Avoid refined breads, cakes and cereals as these are quickly converted into glucose, and lead to rapid surges in blood sugar levels. The low blood sugar levels that follow exacerbate stress and fatigue. Also avoid caffeine-containing beverages as caffeine consumption can make you nervous and anxious.



Foods for fighting Depression: Foods containing tryptophan (milk, turkey), selenium (brazil nuts, canned light tuna, sunflower seeds, garlic, chili peppers), or folic acid (spinach and other dark leafy greens, lima beans). Tryptophan is converted into serotonin in the brain. Serotonin combats pain, reduces appetite, and increases feelings of calmness. Selenium has been shown in studies to correct a depressive mood in those with low selenium levels. Folic acid has been reported to be lacking in about third of depressed patients, and doses of folic acid bring serotonin levels in the brain back to normal.

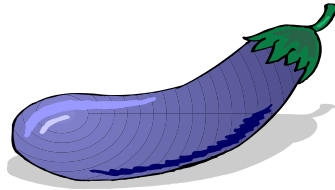


What steps do I need to take to change my daily diet?

Start by making changes slowly, one change at a time. Changing what you eat will take some effort and time. In order to create a healthier mealplan, you may even need to learn how to cook new dishes or do your grocery shopping in new places to find the food you need.

Remember not to try and implement all the changes you want to make at once. Small changes made one at a time will be easier for you to manage. While you make these changes try to keep up with completing your food and mood diary. This will help you to identify which foods are having a positive or negative effect.

Reducing some foods and drink, for example coffee or tea, can initially produce unpleasant side effects such as headaches. This only occasionally happens if you normally consume quite a lot of the particular food and drink daily. These side effects will only occur for a few days after giving up. However any side-effects from cutting out certain foods can be reduced if you cut down gradually, rather than all at once. When cutting out certain foods or drink from your diet try to find information from books or the internet, so that you will know what side effects to expect.



For further information or support with eating you can contact the below organizations:

The European Food Information Council

Website: www.eufic.org

British Nutrition Foundation

website: www.nutrition.org.uk

The Food and Mood Project

PO Box 2737, Lewes, East Sussex, BN7 2GN

tel. 01273 478 108

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