

Is there really a connection between depression and nutrition? In fact, scientists have linked mood swings and other symptoms of depression to poor eating habits and some vitamin and mineral deficiencies. Although there is no one perfect diet to keep both your mind and body healthy, it's wise to follow eating guidelines that ensure you're getting the right nutritional building blocks for wellness, and not overindulging in foods that can aggravate your symptoms.

Getting started

Take a good look at your diet to see where there may be room for improvement. Keeping a “food diary” that tracks your emotions and what you eat throughout the day can help reveal how the foods you consume may be related to the way you feel.



Charting your nutritional choices and assessing how those choices may affect your mood can be an important first step in breaking bad habits. Making changes to your diet requires patience and dedication, but it can bring great benefits to your emotional wellness.

Eat better to feel better

We can all do something to improve our diets, and sometimes even small changes can do a lot to improve the way we feel. Here are some tips to keep in mind when considering your own nutritional needs:

- Both high-sugar and high-fat meals can have a negative effect on mood, so limit fast food and junk food
- Choose complex carbohydrates, such as healthy grains, to ensure maximum nutritional and digestive benefits with fewer “spikes” to disrupt brain chemistry.

- Avoid processed sugars (such as candy, cookies, and soda) and refined carbohydrates (breads, cakes, and pastas made with white flour). The initial energy burst you get won't last, and it can leave you wanting more sweets and starches to prop up your mood and energy level.
- Increase your intake of the vitamins and minerals shown to combat depression, such as vitamins in the B family, including B6, B12, and Folic Acid, and Vitamin D and Omega-3 fatty acids.
- Limit caffeinated beverages like coffee or soda, which can have a stimulating effect at first, only to be followed by a drop in energy level and mood later. Avoid alcohol. Drink plenty of water.

In addition to considering **what** foods you eat, pay attention to the following when developing a moderate, sensible eating plan:

- Listen to your body's signals to know when to eat, and when to stop. Eat when you feel physical hunger, and stop eating *before* you feel full.
- Regulate your portion size - both overeating and undereating can stress your body physically and emotionally.
- Eat on a regular schedule, and don't skip breakfast.
- Think ahead: pack healthy snacks to avoid between-meal cravings.

For more information:

- University of Michigan Depression Center
- 1-800-475-MICH or 734-936-4400
- <http://www.depressioncenter.org/toolkit>

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