

Nutrition Nibbles

Break through common nutrition myths, see what's trending, catch up on latest research, and get great tips from our team of Registered Dietitians.

MYTH

Getting "hangry" isn't a real thing.

FACT

The word "hangry" is a concise way to describe a common feeling. Hangry is a clever portmanteau of hungry and angry, and an adjective that describes being irritable due to hunger. The easiest way to handle hanger is to eat something before you get too hungry. Regular meals at regular times, starting with breakfast, helps keep blood sugar levels stable throughout the day and can prevent stress hormones from being released.

JANUARY

Food and Mood

Research suggests that nutrition and other lifestyle factors play an important role in our mental health. Learn more about how alcohol, exercise, and food can affect brain chemistry!

Alcohol can temporarily make us feel better, but over the long-term it can cause problems for our mental health. Regular alcohol consumption disrupts serotonin, a neurotransmitter which helps to regulate mood. Alcohol depresses our inhibitions and allows us to express our emotions, whether positive (ie a shy person becomes witty or playful) or negative (ie a person holding a grudge becomes argumentative). It can contribute to feelings of depression and anxiety, and it can worsen existing depression and anxiety. Alcohol consumption can make it more difficult to cope with stress, and there is a connection between alcohol intake and self-harm, suicide, psychosis, depression, poor sleep and memory loss.

Physical activity has been shown to improve depression and reduce anxiety. Regular exercise can: enhance one's sense of well-being, help boost self-confidence, provide opportunities for social interactions, shift the focus away from the negative cycle of thoughts associated with depression and anxiety, and offer an opportunity to help individuals manage their stress, depression, and anxiety in a healthy way. Improvements in depression and anxiety can be achieved with 30 minutes of exercise over 3 to 5 days per week; more vigorous activity may lead to improvements in mood sooner. It is important to focus on enjoyable activities, as the mental health benefits of exercise may only last for as long as an individual is engaging in regular activity.

Some mental health conditions may be influenced by the food we eat. Diets which are high in processed foods and added sugars are quickly digested and absorbed by the body. This can cause spikes and drops in blood sugar levels, leaving an individual feeling tired and low in energy. Conversely, diets that focus on whole foods, ie., fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, and nuts and seeds are digested and absorbed more slowly, providing our bodies with a consistent source of energy which may be helpful in managing mood. A poor quality diet, lacking in nutrient-dense foods, may lead to nutrient deficiencies, some which have been associated with mental health issues. The relationship between major and minor nutrients plays an important role in the maintenance of the structure and function of the brain. A disruption in this relationship may play a role in the onset of depression and other mental health conditions. Refer to the table on the next page for details.



Nutrient	Role in Mood	Food Sources
Vitamin D (1,25 dihydroxy vitamin D)	Suggested connection between low vitamin D cognitive functioning, depression, bipolar, and schizophrenia, although results are inconsistent (2)	Fatty fish, fortified dairy products, fortified cereals, sun exposure - produced in skin
Pyridoxine (B6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Correlation shown in studies between low B6 levels and depression • Inadequate levels related to substance abuse, could result in reduced production of neurotransmitters 	Fortified cereals and soy products, organ meats
Folate (B9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Correlation shown in studies between low folate levels and depression. Some research suggesting certain patients with depression have a genotype that results in reduced levels of folate in the blood. • Involved in keeping moods stable 	Dark leafy green vegetables, enriched whole grain breads and fortified cereals
Cobalamin (B12)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Correlation shown in studies between low B12 levels and depression • Inadequate levels related to substance abuse, could result in reduced production of neurotransmitters 	Meats, fortified cereals, fortified tofu and soy milk, red-star yeast product
Magnesium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals with ADHD tend to have deficiencies of magnesium • Magnesium has been used in studies to treat insomnia - more research is needed • Substance abuse is associated with low magnesium levels 	Leafy green vegetables, nuts and seeds (ex. almonds), halibut, quinoa
Selenium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Associated with keeping mood stable • Substance abuse associated with low selenium levels 	Organ meats, seafood, some nuts
Zinc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ADHD at higher risk for low Zinc • Pica has been associated with low Zinc • Involved in studies examining sleep disorders • Substance abuse is associated with low Zinc levels 	Red meat, seafood, fortified cereal
Omega 3 Fatty Acids	Involved in regulating neuro-inflammatory responses and the release of some neurotransmitters; helps normalize BDNF (brain-derived neurotrophic factor), maintains neuronal cell membrane integrity and fluidity, and plays an important role in signal transduction.	Fatty fish, walnuts, flax seed (Research examining the effects of omega 3 supplementation on depression have provided conflicting results)
Amino Acids: Tryptophan	Serve as precursors to neurotransmitters. A precursor to serotonin. Deficiency can lead to low mood, difficulty sleeping, lacking joy.	Fish, eggs, avocado, poultry, cheese, wheat germ
Tyrosine	Precursor to dopamine and norepinephrine. Deficiency can result in lacking drive, motivation and/or enthusiasm for life.	Vitamin C rich fruit and vegetables, wheat germ
Glutamine	Precursor to GABA. Deficiency can cause anxiety, irritability and inability to relax.	Dark green vegetables, seeds, nuts, bananas, potatoes

<https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/alcohol-facts/health-effects-of-alcohol/mental-health/alcohol-and-mental-health/>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21495519>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2738337/>

Dietitians of Canada (2012). Promoting Mental Health through Healthy Eating and Nutritional Care. 1-182.

<https://www.dietitians.ca/Downloads/Public/Nutrition-and-Mental-Health-complete-2012.aspx>

Mental Health Foundation. Feeding Minds, The Impact of Food on Mental Health. P. 1-69.

<http://www.omega3gall.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Omega-3-polyunsaturated-fatty-acids-and-the-treatment-of-depression.pdf>

Talk to your Registered Dietitian for more information



Recipes of the Month

Super Simple Salmon (All Recipes)

Makes 4-6 Servings

Ingredients

- 1 tablespoon garlic powder
- 1 tablespoon dried basil
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 4 (6 ounce) salmon
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 4 lemon wedges



Instructions

1. Stir together the garlic powder, basil, and salt in a small bowl; rub in equal amounts onto the salmon fillets.
2. Melt the butter in a skillet over medium heat; cook the salmon in the butter until browned and flaky, about 5 minutes per side. Serve each piece of salmon with a lemon wedge.

Strawberry Spinach Salad (All Recipes)

Makes 4-6 Servings



Ingredients

- 1 tablespoon poppy seeds
- 1/2 cup white sugar
- 1/2 cup olive oil
- 1/4 cup distilled white vinegar
- 1/4 teaspoon paprika
- 1/4 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tablespoon minced onion
- 1/4 cup almonds, blanched and slivered
- 1 quart strawberries - cleaned, hulled and sliced

Instructions

1. In a medium bowl, whisk together the sesame seeds, poppy seeds, sugar, olive oil, vinegar, paprika, Worcestershire sauce and onion. Cover, and chill for one hour.
2. In a large bowl, combine the spinach, strawberries and almonds. Pour dressing over salad, and toss. Refrigerate 10 to 15 minutes before serving.

