

## Food and Your Mood

The link between food and mood simply lies in getting enough of the “good stuff” found in the right foods. The human diet nowadays consists of a lot of ‘junk’ food with very little nutritional value which makes people more tired and lethargic, and often leads to weight gain which has further negative effects on mood and self esteem.

### **What do I need?**

The most important thing is to eat regularly and include the main food groups in your daily diet: starchy foods (such as rice, potatoes and bread); fruit and vegetables; meat, fish, eggs and beans; milks and dairy foods; and foods containing fat and sugar. [But be careful not to eat too much sugar or fat, and to eat more of the ‘good’ fats – unsaturated and Omega-3 rich foods.] Not eating regularly means your blood sugar will drop, and your mood will drop with it.

### **What in my food affects my mood?**

- **Tryptophan:** an amino-acid that the body uses to help make serotonin, which is known to modulate mood, emotion, sleep and appetite. Tryptophan is found in bananas, walnuts, turkey, sunflower seeds, milk, eggs, cheese, brown rice, chicken and fish.
- **B-vitamins:** these vitamins help the process your body uses to get or make energy from food, so not getting enough B-vitamins in your diet can make you lethargic and even depressed. A lack of B6 or B12 can also cause anaemia. Foods that are rich in B-vitamins include whole grains (such as wheat and oats), fish and seafood, poultry and meats, eggs, milk, leafy green vegetables, beans and peas.
- **Omega-3 fatty acids:** essential fatty acids which are important to your overall health and wellbeing, and notably for nerve and brain function. Good sources of omega-3 are oily fish (such as salmon, mackerel and sardines), omega-3 eggs (check the box), walnuts, flaxseeds and sunflower seeds.

### **Some good mood-boosting foods**

- **Sweet Potatoes** are full of B vitamins folate and B6 which can help to alleviate premenstrual symptoms and depression. They also help to keep blood sugar levels steady and therefore help to prevent mood swings and sugar cravings.
- **Bananas** give a sustained energy boost and are packed with vitamins and tryptophan. They are also packed with potassium, levels of which can be depleted by stress.
- **Leafy greens** such as broccoli are an excellent source of folic acid, a lack of which has been linked to a depressed mood.
- **Avocados** contain tryptophan, vitamin B6 and folic acid.
- **Oatmeal** is rich in soluble fibre which helps to smooth out blood sugar levels by slowing the absorption of sugar into the blood.
- **Lentils** are an excellent source of B vitamin folate, low levels of which have been linked to depression. Lentils are a great food for vegetarians as they also contain protein.

### ***Drink plenty***

Dehydration can cause headaches, mood changes, lethargy, poor concentration and slower responses. Try to drink about 1.2 litres (6-8 glasses) a day, and more if you are very active or it is a hot day.

### ***Summary***

- Eat regularly to prevent blood sugar levels dropping.
- Try to eat foods that release energy slowly to keep your blood sugar levels steady for longer.
- Make sure you get enough essential vitamins and minerals in your food.
- How you feel physically affects your mood – look after your body.
- Drink plenty.

### ***Useful websites***

The 'eatwell' plate: getting the right balance in your diet – [www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Goodfood/Documents/Eatwellplate.pdf](http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Goodfood/Documents/Eatwellplate.pdf)

The MIND food and mood guide - [www.mind.org.uk/foodandmood](http://www.mind.org.uk/foodandmood)

Check if your diet is healthy - [www.nhs.uk/Tools/Pages/HealthyEating.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/Tools/Pages/HealthyEating.aspx)

Food & Mental Wellbeing – [www.foodforthebrain.org](http://www.foodforthebrain.org)

