

The Connection Between Diet and Mental Health

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With the stress of the workplace or school, money, responsibilities, and added personal issues, the mental health of many people may be under pressure. Many studies now show that having a poor diet can increase the features of depression and even more serious mental health issues such as schizophrenia.

One step towards treating and preventing depression and poor mental health is eating properly. Surviving off a diet of fast food, caffeine, and highly processed food can be detrimental to anyone's physical health, but it can also affect the way you process emotions and stress.

The brain benefits from slightly different nutrients than the rest of the body, so 'brain food' may imply more than just fun facts and quotes. Here is a list of foods that can help boost cognitive functions and alleviate depression.

- **Leafy greens**, including spinach, broccoli, romaine lettuce, and even turnip greens. Dark green veggies include important nutrients like folic acid and vitamin B, which contribute to preventing depression, exhaustion, and insomnia.
- **Chicken and walnuts**. A strange combination, sure, but both of these foods are high in something called selenium. Selenium plays a pivotal role in regulating immune system functions, and a lack of this trace mineral can cause depression and fatigue.
- **Lean protein**. Along with being a perfect rhyme, lean proteins can do wonders for mental health. Fish, turkey, beans, and chicken are all high in protein, and having a healthy protein intake can affect serotonin levels.
- **Omega-3 fatty acids**. While this is one of the vaguer recommendations on the list, it can be important to treat your brain to fatty acids. Try incorporating things like cold-water fish such as salmon into your diet.
- **Whole grains**. These are omnipresent on almost every 'healthy eating' list on the internet, and for good reason! Whole grains provide your body with key components for improving moods. From grabbing a loaf of wheat bread to cooking a box of wild rice, you can help yourself to whole grains in a variety of ways.

Shopping for these items should mean making a list of your favorite foods or meals, and finding ways to incorporate these foods into your regular routine. A complete change of diet almost never sticks, so try to slowly guide yourself down a new road. Eating healthier can improve mental health alone or in conjunction with a medical plan of treatment if one has been recommended.