



## The Relationship Between Food and Mood



**From Bite to Brain:** Food has the potential to affect thoughts, feelings, and behavior [i]. According to the American Psychological Association, the type, quality, and amount of food ingested affects mental health [ii].

You can positively influence your mood by choosing to eat nutrient-rich foods linked to improved mental health.

**What to Eat:** The Mediterranean diet is associated with lowering symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress [iii]. It includes a high intake of fruits, vegetables, wholegrains, fish, and lean meats. Olive-oil and low-fat dairy are additional staples of this diet. Other plant-based diets such as the DASH and vegan diets with restricted amounts of sodium, red meat, sweets, and sugar-sweetened beverages are associated with similar benefits, including reduced symptoms of anger and fatigue [iv]. These high fiber diets promote satiety, delay the onset of hunger, and help to feel satisfied.

**Some Foods to Avoid:** A high intake of calorie-dense, high-fat, high-sugar products as found in Ultra-processed foods, red and/or processed meat, refined grains, and alcohol is associated with increased symptoms of depression, anxiety, stress, trauma, and negative moods [iii, iv, v].

**What are Ultra-Processed Foods:** Ultra-processed foods are generally low-priced, shelf-stable, and highly palatable (high fat, high sugar). They are usually combined with artificial additives such as preservatives, fillers, and dyes. Emotional eating and comfort foods that are ultra-processed are often eaten in times of stress. But, eating ultra-processed foods can create a spiral effect – the more eaten, the more stress on the body, the more ultra-processed food desired [v]. Ultra-processed foods like potato chips occasionally may not be harmful, but a diet where ultra-processed foods like chips become a staple may. Try carrots instead of chips to keep the crunch and bananas or other fruit for sweetness.

**Foods to Boost Your Mood:** The role and causal mechanisms that diet may have on mood continues to unfold. In the meantime, a diet rich in the following are recommended:

- Fruits and Vegetables: eat a rainbow daily, include dark leafy greens, and strive for variety to obtain the most fiber and nutrients
- Protein: choose lean, high-quality protein (eg. meats, poultry, low-fat dairy products, and eggs), a variety of nuts, seeds, and legumes (consume legumes with rice for a complete protein meal)
- Omega 3 fatty acids: choose fatty fish, seafood, nuts, seeds, and flax seeds
- Fiber: choose whole grains (eg. quinoa, whole-grained bread, brown rice, oats), beans and legumes
- Fermented foods: choose sauerkraut, kimchi, unsweetened yogurt, miso, or other fermented foods

### Want to improve your mood? What foods will you choose for your next meal?

**Note:** As you consider the impact that diet may have on your mood, remember to reach out to your medical provider if you are experiencing any mental health issues. Taking care of your mental health is equally as important as taking care of your physical health and critical to optimizing overall well-being.

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