



Food and Mood

How does nutrition affect me?

The food you eat is important to how you feel. Nutrition affects your health, energy, and sometimes your mood. The right combination of vitamins, minerals, amino acids, fatty acids and fiber helps a person stay in ideal health. People also need the right balance of proteins, carbohydrates and fats to reduce the risk of chronic diseases.



Good nutrition helps everyone, but people with illnesses like depression or bipolar disorder may find that being aware of what, when, how much and sometimes why they eat helps them more than they thought it would. If your body has the nourishment it needs, your brain can function more effectively.

Meals and Nutrients

Food affects different people in different ways. Excessive amounts of sugar, caffeine, alcohol or chocolate may be more likely to contribute to mood disturbance. Foods such as vegetables, fruit, oil-rich fish and whole grains may be more likely help with stability.

Eating habits that benefit most people include three meals a day (or more than three smaller, nutritious meals spaced evenly throughout the day) at approximately the same times each day. This keeps your blood sugar from rising or falling dramatically. It's also important to get enough vitamins and minerals. Adequate levels of B-vitamins (including folic acid), vitamin C and zinc are thought to help stabilize mood.

Research on Omega-3 fatty acids is ongoing. They have been found to improve heart health but their effects on mood have not yet been determined. They can be found in fish, soybeans, flaxseed, walnuts and wheat germ, or can be taken in pill form. Talk to your doctor before trying Omega 3 fatty acids or adding any other supplement to your diet.

Crash diets that promise quick weight loss can be tempting, especially when coping with medication-related weight gain, which is both common and frustrating. But completely eliminating any one thing, even fat, from your diet may have negative consequences for your mood and overall health.



Mindful Eating

- It may be helpful to keep a food journal. Include everything you eat and drink, your physical activities and your moods.
- Find out when your stress is most likely to lead to cravings. Anticipate your cravings and have healthy, naturally sweet food such as fruit or yogurt ready.
- If you notice that certain foods seem to be causing mood swings, try avoiding them for a week or so and see if you notice a change.
- What you drink is as important as what you eat. Too much caffeine can contribute to anxiety, nervousness and mood swings. Alcohol can worsen depression, interfere with sleep and make treatment less effective.
- Eating disorders can co-occur with mood disorders. An eating disorder is a separate illness that requires a separate treatment. If you experience drastic changes in weight, and tend to severely restrict your diet or binge and purge, talk to your doctor about treatment for a possible eating disorder. More information is available at www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/eatingdisorders.cfm.
- If you have frequent cravings, distract yourself by exercising (even a short walk up the stairs or around the block), cleaning your home or another activity.



What can I do?

- Talk to your health care providers about food and mood.
- Take a minute to think about what you eat and how it makes you feel.
- Be aware of the snacks you eat.
- Learn all you can about your illness and how nutrition can help.
- Keep a food journal.

For more information:

American Dietetic Association • www.eatright.org
Federal Citizen Information Center • 888-878-3256
U.S. Dept. of Agriculture • www.mypyramid.gov

