

Food and mood

FACTSHEET

We often turn to certain foods to help us feel better, or to give us a feeling of nostalgia and security, therefore the expression ‘comfort’ food.

There is a messenger chemical in the brain called serotonin, which improves mood and how we feel. Serotonin is made with a part of protein from the diet (tryptophan), and more of this may get into the brain when carbohydrate-rich foods are eaten. This suggestion has been used to explain ‘carbohydrate craving’ – eating sweet, comfort foods to boost mood. However, there is not enough research to show that eating lots of tryptophan or eating a lot of carbohydrates can really support mood improvement in humans. But it may be that not consuming adequate amounts of carbohydrate (high protein/high fat diets) leads to low moods.⁽¹⁾ The link between healthy eating and mood has long been known. Below are some examples of ‘good mood’ foods.⁽²⁾

BERRIES

Blueberries and blackberries that are rich in flavonoids improve blood flow to the brain, which in turn has a very positive impact on our brain function.

DARK CHOCOLATE

Dark chocolate containing high levels of cocoa is extremely rich in magnesium, which is a mineral that aids in relaxation and calmness. It is also full of PEA, or phenylethylamine which is the neurotransmitter released when we fall in love, and just a small amount can contribute to elevated moods and euphoria. Two squares of 70% or more dark chocolate a day are recommended.

SALMON

Packed to the gills with omega 3 oils, which are vital for brain function and some say eating plenty of fish can lead to a healthy mind.

SWEET POTATO

They have a low GI index compared to normal potatoes which allow to regulate blood sugar levels. Insulin spikes and unstable blood sugar levels can alter mood by affecting our hormones, and it’s best to avoid foods that cause these, such as simple sugars and processed foods.

SPINACH

Packed with magnesium and iron which are essential for healthy nervous system and can help us relax.

WHAT TO CONSIDER FOR IMPROVED MOOD WITH FOOD

HOW REGULARLY DO YOU EAT?	If your blood sugar drops you might feel tired, irritable and depressed. You need to eat regularly to keep your sugar level steady, and choose foods that release energy slowly.
DO YOU GET YOUR 5 A DAY?	Vegetables and fruit contain a lot of the minerals, vitamins and fibre we need to keep us physically and mentally healthy.
DO YOU KEEP YOURSELF HYDRATED?	If you don't drink enough water, you may find it difficult to concentrate or think clearly. You might also start to feel constipated.
ARE YOU EATING THE RIGHT FATS?	Your brain needs fatty oils (such as omega-3 and -6) to keep it working well. So rather than avoiding all fats, it's important to eat the right ones.
ARE YOU HAVING TOO MUCH CAFFEINE?	Caffeine is a stimulant. Having too much can make you feel anxious and depressed, disturb your sleep (especially if you have it last thing at night), or give you withdrawal symptoms if you stop suddenly. (taken from Mind.org.uk)
ARE YOU DRINKING TOO MUCH ALCOHOL?	Alcohol not only affects the lining of the stomach and can also suppress appetite; it can affect the absorption of key minerals and vitamins. Alcohol is also a depressant so will affect mood.

REFERENCE

(1) www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts/foodmood.pdf

(2) www.alustforlife.com