Fight Back Against Depression With Proper Nutrition

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The Relationship Between Nutrition and Depression

Ever since you were young, chances are your parents, caregivers, or doctors have been stressing the importance of healthy eating – but can the foods you eat actually have an effect on your mental health? Yes. In fact, we are going to look at the connection between nutrition and depression.

Although foods alone cannot replace medication or therapy, there are certain foods that have been proven to help control the symptoms of mental illnesses, including depression.

Eating the right foods and adopting a healthy diet is an important step in maintaining good mental health, regardless of who you are. Basic human needs – such as sleep and nutrition – are the foundation of your mental health, so it is important to make them a priority in your everyday life.

Keep on reading to learn more about the best and worst foods for depression, and other nutrition and depression advice.

Exploring the Best Foods for Depression

If you have depression, there are certain foods that have been proven to ward off common depressive symptoms. Used in combination with other forms of therapy, the foods you choose to consume can have a profound effect on your overall well-being.

Eat Your Fruits and Veggies

Choosing even one food, to begin with, can make a difference, especially if that food is dark, leafy greens. This food group includes nutrient-packed plants like spinach, kale and Swiss chard.

Dark, leafy greens have also been proven to reduce many different types of inflammation, which has been linked to severe depression. In terms of general health benefits, leafy greens also contain high levels of vitamins A, C, E and K, as well as minerals and phytochemicals.

Avocados have seemingly been all the rage in the food world lately and for good reason. Avocados contain oleic acid (a healthy, monounsaturated fat that your brain needs to run smoothly), 4 grams of protein, 11 grams of dietary fiber, as well as vitamins B, C, E12 and K.

Did you know that 80% to 90% of the body's serotonin is manufactured in your gut? Low levels of serotonin are common in those with depression, but taking care of your intestinal health can help.

Mushrooms promote healthy gut bacteria and help lower blood sugar levels, which evens out your mood. Onions also reduce your risk of cancers of the digestive tract, further promoting gut health.

Foods high in folic acid and alpha-lipoic acid are depression fighters, as many individuals with depression have a folate deficiency or an excess of homocysteine, which restricts the production of important neurotransmitters like serotonin, dopamine and norepinephrine. Tomatoes are one of the best foods to eat to increase your folic acid intake.

Antioxidants also assist with depression, as they repair DNA and fixing the cells throughout your body, preventing them from cancer and other diseases. Berries – including strawberries, blueberries, raspberries and blackberries – are all packed with antioxidants.

Our bodies naturally create molecules called free radicals, but these molecules can lead to cell damage, aging, and other issues. Studies have shown that the brain is at the greatest risk of damage by free radicals, but their effect can be diminished by antioxidants.

Apples, like berries, are also high in antioxidants. They are full of soluble fiber, which helps balance blood sugar levels in the body.

Antioxidant-rich foods containing beta-carotene, vitamin C and vitamin E include: broccoli, sweet potato, pumpkin, carrots, spinach, peppers, tomatoes, apricots, peaches, cantaloupe, oranges, grapefruit, nuts and seeds.

Beans, Nuts and Seeds

Walnuts have also been proven to reduce depression symptoms, as they are one of the richest plant sources of omega-3 fatty acids. Numerous studies have shown that omega-3 fatty acids support brain function.

Seeds – including sunflower seeds, hemp seeds, chia seeds and flaxseeds – are not only a great source of omega-3s, but they also increase the absorption of the protective nutrients in vegetables eaten at the same time.

Beans are digested by the body slowly, which stabilizes blood sugar levels. They are good for the heart and can even help with weight loss, as they help mitigate cravings for bread or processed grains.

Limit Your Sugar Intake

Eating too much sugar has numerous negative effects on your overall health, but it is especially important to keep your sugar intake to a minimum as someone with depression. Too much sugar can actually increase one’s risk for mood disorders like depression.

Complex carbohydrates like vegetables, fruits and grains are all sources of naturally-occurring sugar. These are the healthiest sources of sugar, but unfortunately, too few people make complex carbs a staple in their own diets.

Too many people rely on refined foods like pasta, cakes, baked goods, bread and candy. These carbs are easily digestible but contain far more sugar than what should be consumed.

When you begin to cut back on or eliminate sugar from your diet, you will find that you crave much less. This is because your palate will adjust and you will only need a small amount to satisfy a craving.

As stated previously, inflammation has been linked to depression, and refined carbs actually promote inflammation.

Read the labels on your food products carefully for hidden sugars and limit the amount that you are allowing into your body. Increasing your intake of complex carbohydrates will ensure that your diet is full of whole, healthy foods, rather than processed and refined products.

Talk to Your Doctor for Nutrition and Depression Advice

Before drastically changing your diet, be sure to talk to your doctor about what nutrition plans may work for you. It

is important to remember that each of us is unique and our bodies might have different requirements.

Small changes to your diet can help you take your first few steps in the right direction. If you do not regularly eat fruits, try buying a few apples next time you visit the grocery store.

It may seem insignificant, but with each small change, you can promote a healthier body and mind. You can also feel good about warding off the symptoms of depression with each healthy choice you make.