

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

CONNECTING YOUR DIET AND MOOD

Steering your diet toward whole, unrefined foods can have positive psychological effects

Did you know that certain foods help your brain produce chemicals that boost your mood, attention and focus, while other foods zap your energy? The medical field increasingly acknowledges the connection between food and mood, and you can make food choices that support better mental health.

- Mood-boosting meals should include complex carbohydrates from whole foods like sweet potatoes, rolled oats, beans and quinoa. These foods increase the feel-good chemical, serotonin, in your brain.
- Protein consumption (from foods like fatty fish, beef, chicken, turkey, tofu, eggs and unsweetened yogurt) has been linked to higher levels of dopamine and norepinephrine in the brain. These are chemicals that play a role in your mood, motivation and concentration.
- Other mood-boosting foods include bananas, berries, nuts and seeds, lentils, fermented foods (including kimchi, yogurt, kefir, kombucha and sauerkraut), and dark chocolate.
- A diet based on whole, unrefined foods with enough protein, healthy fat and fiber also helps keep blood sugar stable after eating, which has been linked to improvements in mood and anxiety.
- Conversely, high consumption of processed carbohydrates such as sugar-sweetened beverages or refined flour-based foods such as breads, crackers and cookies can increase the risk of depression and anxiety through rapid and repeated increases and decreases in blood glucose. Although foods with low nutritional value like processed carbohydrates can provide a quick energy boost, later, after eating them, there can be a drop in energy and mood.
- Studies have shown that eating a large proportion of foods associated with dietary inflammation such as trans fats and refined carbohydrates can lead to depression.
- Be patient when making dietary changes. Try making gradual, step-by-step changes. It can take up to two to three weeks to see any improvement in mood once dietary changes are made.
- Consider eating a "clean" diet for several weeks by cutting out all processed foods and sugar. It can lead to feeling better both physically and emotionally.

