

Food & Mood

Believe it or not, the food you eat can influence your mood, and your mood will influence your food choices. With depression affecting around 20% of us, food can play an important role in preventing and managing the symptoms of depression. Start your day with a good quality wholegrain carbohydrate and protein rich breakfast, and ensure a good mix of carbohydrates, proteins and unsaturated fats throughout your day. This will help you to concentrate and reduce mood disturbances.

Serotonin is a feel good chemical released by the brain. Carbohydrate rich foods increase serotonin levels and often result in feelings of contentedness and calmness. The brain has a preference for carbohydrate (glucose) as its fuel source and functions best when you feed it the right type of carbohydrate. Low Glycaemic Index (GI) carbohydrates provide your brain with sustained releases of glucose over time, this helps to avoid the sugar highs and subsequent lows that are experienced with high GI foods (highly refined carbohydrates). High consumption of sugary snack foods and other high-GI foods can lead to less regulation of blood glucose levels, increasing your risk of type-two diabetes, tiredness and irritability. The best carbohydrate foods to help with low mood and depression include: dairy, wholegrain breads & cereals, rice, pasta, legumes, and fruit.

Protein rich foods containing the amino acid tryptophan can also help to prevent depression as tryptophan also boosts serotonin levels. Tryptophan helps relaxation and can induce sleepiness. Foods high in tryptophan include: dairy, turkey, chicken, fish, pasta and rice. Other protein rich foods contain the amino acid tyrosine, which promotes alertness and sharpens brain function by encouraging production of brain chemicals including dopamine & norepinephrine. These chemicals are needed for the quick response to stressors, the fight or flight response that enabled our pre historic ancestors to flee from danger, or enable us to quickly respond to hazards while driving. Foods rich in tyrosine include: lean meat, chicken, eggs and fish.

The good oils such as unsaturated fats from nuts, seeds and fish can help to reduce the effects of stress. Stress increases the clotting capacity of blood, which increases your risk of stroke and cardio-vascular disease. Unsaturated fats such as the omega-3; found in oily fish has an anti-clotting effect on your blood, and have been shown to have a positive effect on mood. Many depressed people have low levels of omega-3 fats in their diet.

Caffeine is commonly known to increase alertness by acting on the adrenal system. It increases heart rate, stimulates the nervous system and kidneys and dilates blood vessels. The effects of caffeine usually are at a peak around one hour after consumption. However, over consumption (more than 3 per day) can produce negative effects such as: nervousness, palpitations, irritability, headaches, lethargy and kidney irritation. Caffeine is found in tea, coffee, aspirin, cola drinks and guarana bars and drinks. Although tea contains caffeine (less than coffee), it also contains theanine, an antioxidant

that has shown to increase mental alertness with relaxation, why not try a cup of tea in the afternoon instead of coffee.

Alcohol in moderation can help relaxation, but when taken excessively it is a depressant, impairing judgement and brain function. The recently revised alcohol guidelines from The National Health & Medical Research Council (NHMRC) suggest that both men and women have no more than 2 standard drinks per day with two alcohol free days per week. This reduces the risk of long-term damage from alcohol. A standard drink is 100mls wine, a 30ml nip of spirits, or a stubby of mid-strength beer.

Around 50% of Australians don't get enough exercise for good health. Regular physical activity has shown to reduce the risk of depression. Thirty minutes of moderate to brisk walking per day has important overall health benefits, including the release of feel good hormones (endorphins) to help boost your mood. The basic rule of thumb with exercise is the more you do, the better you'll feel – so get into it!

The basic principles for eating well to feel the well are:

- Avoid skipping meals, especially breakfast – choose low GI carbs such as wholegrain bread & cereals, protein, fruit & vegetables at each meal
- Include fish, seeds & nuts in your diet to increase intake of omega-3 fats
- Limit caffeine
- Limit alcohol
- Enjoy at least 30 minutes of physical activity per day

Useful websites:

www.beyondblue.org.au

www.lifeline.org.au

www.kidshelp.com.au

www.menslineaus.org.au