



Improve your Mood with Food

The relationship between food, state of mind, and emotions is very complex. Stressful events such as injury, illness, pain, the break-up of a relationship, or the loss of a loved one can trigger negative emotions and a [depressed mood](#). Diets that are high in sugar, sodium, and saturated fat can promote a depressed mood while a diet that meets the [daily recommended amounts](#) of omega-3 fatty acids, protein, carbohydrates, vitamins B6 and B12, iron, and water can produce a warm positive mood. Anxiety and a depressive mood are typically accompanied by symptoms that could potentially produce nutritional consequences. Symptoms such as the loss of appetite, disinterest in food, erratic eating habits, difficulty chewing and swallowing, and lack of concentration can negatively impact dietary intake, nutritional status, and overall physical health. Food choices affect your mood and your mood affects food choices. For example, excess calories in a meal is associated with decreased alertness and concentration after the meal; sadness tends to increase the consumption of less healthy comfort foods; and eating favorite foods can trigger a positive mood. Healthy eating can help to relieve mood swings.

How the brain and food work to improve your mood

Nutrients from food are responsible for helping the brain determine an individual's mood and relating that mood to the rest of the body. Omega-3 fatty acids, protein, carbohydrates, vitamins B6 and B12, iron, and water are necessary for the brain to communicate with the body and improve your mood. Nerve cells and neurotransmitters that enable the brain to communicate with itself and other parts of the body are made of essential fatty acids and protein that is obtained from food.

The Effects of Nutrients on Mood

Omega-3 Fatty Acids

Omega-3 fatty acids are important to the structure of brain cells and communication between the cells. Thirty three percent of the brain's grey matter is made of omega-3 fatty acids. Omega-3 fatty acids are also responsible for elevating the level of the neurotransmitter, serotonin, which stimulates a calm mood.

- **Sources:** The highest concentration of omega-3 fatty acids is found in fish such as salmon, sardines, mackerel, and herring. Other sources include flax seeds/oil and walnuts.



Carbohydrates

Carbohydrates help make the neurotransmitter serotonin which increases the feeling of calmness and relaxation. A diet with insufficient amounts of carbohydrates may decrease the amount of available serotonin and promote feelings of anxiety and tension.

- **Sources:** Healthy sources of carbohydrates include whole grain (e.g., wheat, rye, oat, barley, and quinoa), bread, pasta, and cereal, and fruit, vegetables, and beans.

Protein

Protein releases the neurotransmitters dopamine and norepinephrine which is responsible for increasing alertness, concentration, and motivation.

- **Sources:** Lean cuts of beef, poultry, lamb, and pork, eggs, beans, tofu, and nuts.

Vitamins B6, B12, and Folate

Vitamins B6, B12, and folate are necessary to create and regulate neurotransmitters serotonin and dopamine.

- **B6 Sources:** Turkey breast, lean cuts of beef and pork, beef liver, oatmeal, bananas, avocados, watermelon, and fortified ready-to-eat whole grain cereal.
- **B12 Sources:** Fortified ready-to-eat whole grain cereal, sardines, salmon, tuna, low-fat fruit yogurt, and low-fat milk.
- **Folate Sources:** Beef liver, dark green leafy vegetables, oranges, orange juice, fortified ready-to-eat whole grain cereal, and broccoli.

Iron

Iron is necessary for the synthesis of neurotransmitters and the transport of oxygen throughout the body. A deficiency in iron reduces the body's ability to transport oxygen which results in decreased energy and low and depressed moods.

- **Sources:** Clams, lean cuts of beef and lamb, beef liver, spinach, chick peas, beans (kidney, navy, and lima), and lentils.

Keep in mind that proper nutrition may potentially lift your spirits and improve your mood; however, it is not a substitute for medication prescribed to treat mental illness diagnosed by a health professional.