

Mental Health Matters

December 2020



Gut Feelings: How Food Affects Your Mood

What we eat, especially foods that contain chemical additives and ultra-processed foods, affects our gut environment and increases our risk of diseases. Ultra-processed foods contain substances extracted from food (such as sugar and starch), added from food constituents (hydrogenated fats), or made in a laboratory (flavor enhancers, food colorings). It's important to know that ultra-processed foods such as fast foods are manufactured to be extra tasty by the use of such ingredients or additives, and are cost effective to the consumer. These foods are very common in the typical Western diet. Some examples of processed foods are canned foods, sugar-coated dried fruits, and salted meat products. Some examples of ultra-processed foods are soda, sugary or savory packaged snack foods, packaged breads, buns and pastries, fish or chicken nuggets, and instant noodle soups.

Researchers recommend “fixing the food first” (in other words, what we eat) before trying gut modifying-therapies (probiotics, prebiotics) to improve how we feel. They suggest eating whole foods and avoiding processed and ultra-processed foods that we know cause inflammation and disease.

But what does my gut have to do with my mood?

Considering the connection between the brain and the gut, it's important to know that 90% of serotonin receptors are located in the gut. In the relatively new field of [nutritional psychiatry](#) we help patients understand how gut health and diet can positively or negatively affect their mood. When someone is prescribed an antidepressant such as a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI), the most common side effects are gut-related, and many people temporarily experience nausea, diarrhea, or gastrointestinal problems. There is anatomical and physiologic two-way communication between the gut and brain via the vagus nerve. The gut-brain axis offers us an understanding of the connection between diet and disease, including depression and anxiety.

Diet and Depression

A [recent study](#) suggests that eating a healthy, balanced diet such as the Mediterranean diet and avoiding inflammation-producing foods may be protective against depression. [Another study](#) outlines an Antidepressant Food Scale, which lists 12 antidepressant nutrients related to the prevention and treatment of depression. Some of the foods containing these nutrients are oysters, mussels, salmon, watercress, spinach, romaine lettuce, cauliflower, and strawberries. A better diet can help, but it's only one part of treatment. It's important to note that just like you cannot exercise out of a bad diet, you also cannot eat your way out of feeling depressed or anxious.

Suggestions for a Healthier Gut and Improved Mood

Eat whole foods and avoid packaged or processed foods, which are high in unwanted food additives and preservatives that disrupt the healthy bacteria in the gut.

Instead of vegetable or fruit juice, consider increasing your intake of fresh fruits and vegetables.

Eat enough fiber and include whole grains and legumes in your diet.

Include probiotic-rich foods such as plain yogurt without added sugars.

Adding fermented foods such as kefir (unsweetened), sauerkraut, or kimchi can be helpful to maintain a healthy gut.

Eat a **balance of seafoods** and lean poultry, and less red meat each week.

Add a range of colorful fresh fruits and vegetables to your diet, and consider choosing certain organic produce.

(full article: <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/gut-feelings-how-food-affects-your-mood-2018120715548>)

5 HEART-HEALTHY FOODS
REDUCE YOUR RISK OF HEART DISEASE, CANCER, AND HIGH CHOLESTEROL WITH THESE FIVE FOODS

BROWN RICE
FREEZES WELL
GLUTEN-FREE
STUFF IN VEGGIES AND BAKE
HIGH IN FIBER, EASY TO DIGEST

SPINACH
EAT RAW FOR MORE VITAMINS
TRY IN A SMOOTHIE
WASH THOROUGHLY
LOWERS CHOLESTEROL, HIGH IN IRON

SWEET POTATO
STORE IN DRY, COOL PLACE
ROAST FOR MORE SWEETNESS
BOIL FOR MASHED SWEET POTATOES
GOOD SOURCE OF VITAMIN C, HIGH IN FIBER

WALNUTS
TOAST FOR MORE FRAGRANCE
CAN BE USED IN PESTOS
TRY WALNUT OIL FOR DRESSINGS
HIGH IN OMEGA-3, HIGH IN PROTEIN

SALMON
ENHANCE WITH LEMON
COOK UNTIL MEDIUM-FIRM
BAKE IN PARCHMENT FOR A TENDER BITE
LOWERS BLOOD PRESSURE, LOW CARB

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In case of an Emergency:

- 911 For Immediate Support
- Ventura County Crisis Team (866) 998-2243 – (24 hours)

5 Things To Do When The Holidays Aren't Exactly Uplifting

1. Say "No" if you feel overwhelmed.
2. Be kind to your wallet.
3. Know when to end unwanted conversations.
4. Honor those who have passed on.
5. Don't be alone if you don't want to.

Full article found at <https://www.mhanational.org/blog/5-things-do-when-holidays-arent-exactly-uplifting>

Preparing for the Holidays During COVID-19

For many people, the holiday season will look different this year. Often, the last few months of the year are busy with parties and visiting family and friends. But due to COVID-19, things like traveling and gathering in large groups may not be possible.

Many people have lost loved ones and will be missing someone's presence during the festivities, and even more have lost their jobs and are dealing with financial stress. Others, like healthcare workers, may be working overtime and unable to take as much time off around the holidays as they usually can. It can be hard to cope with these kinds of changes, especially if certain holidays are the only time you see some of your loved ones.

If you live with a mental health condition, you may have an especially difficult time with the uncertainty and the change of plans this year. Many people with mental health conditions find consistency important in their recovery, especially during times of high stress - like both the pandemic and the holiday season. A sudden shift in tradition may have you feeling an extreme loss of control on top of disappointment.

Change is difficult for most people, especially when you didn't ask for or even expect these changes. But that doesn't mean that the holidays are destined to be a disappointment this year. There are plenty of ways to cope with the tough feelings you're having while still enjoying the holidays:

Identify how you're feeling.

Figuring out your emotions about the upcoming holidays can make things feel less overwhelming. Most people are feeling a lot of different ways at once right now, which is hard for our brains to process and understand. This year has been a difficult year for many reasons. That means that some of your distress is likely related to things other than the holidays. It is completely normal for you to be feeling a bit more emotional than usual right now. Take some time to sort through your emotions in whatever way is most productive for you - you can journal, talk to a friend, or just spend some quiet time alone thinking. Once you have a better idea of the specific feelings you're experiencing, you can start making plans to cope with them.

Acknowledge what you've lost.

While the holidays are mainly about thankfulness and celebration, this can also be a really hard time of year, even during normal circumstances. If you're missing a loved one, think of ways to honor them during your festivities. If you've lost a job or had to drop out of school, take the time to recognize the challenges that came with that. Even if you haven't lost anything concrete, we've all lost our sense of normalcy this year – it's okay to grieve that during this time.

Full article found at <https://mhanational.org/preparing-holidays-during-covid-19>