



# Healthy Diet: Eating with Mental Health in Mind



#mhmonth2014

**Y**ou've probably heard the expression, "you are what you eat," but what exactly does that mean? Put simply, food is fuel, and the kinds of foods and drinks you consume determine the types of nutrients in your system and impact how well your mind and body are able to function.

## Drinks

**avoid** Sugary drinks and excessive amounts of caffeine. Sugary drinks have empty calories and damage tooth enamel. Caffeine dehydrates you. Studies show that even mild dehydration can cause fatigue, difficulty concentrating, and mood changes<sup>1</sup>, in addition to physical effects like thirst, decreased or dark urine, dry skin, headache, dizziness and/or constipation.

**try to** Drink at least 8 glasses of water a day (about 2 liters) to prevent dehydration. If you feel like you need some caffeine, limit it to one cup of coffee, or try tea. Tea has lower amounts of caffeine than coffee and has lots of antioxidants-chemicals found in plants that protect body tissues and prevent cell damage.

## Breakfast

**avoid** Skipping breakfast. Breakfast is needed to fuel your body (including your brain) after going without food during sleep and also jump starts your metabolism for the day. Skipping meals leads to fatigue and feelings of "brain fog."

**try to** Incorporate a healthy breakfast into your routine. If you're tight on time in the mornings, grab a whole grain granola bar, yogurt and a piece of fruit to get you off to a good start.

## Lunch and Dinner

**avoid** High-fat dairy, and fried, refined and sugary foods, which have little nutritional value. In addition to contributing to weight gain, and conditions like diabetes, research shows that a diet that consists primarily of these kinds of foods significantly increases risk of depression.<sup>2</sup>

**try to** Eat a diet that relies on fruits, vegetables, nuts, whole grains, fish and unsaturated fats (like olive oil). People who follow this kind of diet are up to 30% less likely to develop depression than people who eat lots of meat and dairy products.<sup>3</sup>

## Tips for the Grocery Store

- Try to concentrate your shopping on the perimeter of the grocery store where the fresh, refrigerated and frozen foods are, rather than in the center aisles where foods like chips, cookies and candy can be tempting.
- If fresh veggies tend to expire before you get a chance to eat them, buy frozen ones instead. Stores carry an assortment of steam-in-bag vegetables that keep well in the freezer and cook in the microwave in a matter of minutes.
- Choose whole grain pastas, breads, cereals, granola bars and snacks instead of those made with white flour. Whole grains are a good source of fiber, which promotes digestive health, and also provide folate (or folic acid).



More than  
**60%**

of American adults are  
either obese or overweight.<sup>9</sup>



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## Mind and Body Boosting Nutrients

### Folate (Folic Acid, Vitamin B9)

Increased intake of folate is associated with a lower risk of depression.<sup>4</sup>

Folate is especially important for pregnant women, but everyone needs folic acid for production of cells. It is especially important for healthy hair, skin, nails, eyes, liver and red blood cell production.

Leafy green vegetables like spinach and kale, fruits, nuts, beans and whole grains have high amounts of folate, or folic acid.

### Vitamin D

Rates of depression are higher in people with Vitamin D deficiency compared to people who have adequate levels of vitamin D.<sup>5</sup> Lack of Vitamin D is thought to play a role in Seasonal Affective Disorder, which is depression that commonly starts in the fall, lasts through winter and subsides in the sunnier spring and summer months.

Vitamin D is needed to help the body absorb calcium for strong teeth and bones, and the health of muscles and the immune system. Vitamin D deficiency is associated with heart disease and increased risk of heart attacks.<sup>6</sup>

Most foods do not naturally have Vitamin D, but many are “Vitamin D fortified.” Fatty fish like salmon and tuna have the most naturally occurring Vitamin D. Other foods like milk, orange juice and breakfast cereals have Vitamin D added.

Our bodies also produce Vitamin D as a result of being in the sun. Five to thirty minutes of sun exposure twice a week generally produces enough Vitamin D, with lighter-skinned people requiring less time than those with darker skin.<sup>7</sup> Time in the sun beyond the suggested amounts above requires use of sunscreen to prevent skin damage and reduce risk of skin cancer. Vitamin D supplements may be used in fall and winter months.



### Omega-3 Fatty Acids

Some studies suggest that omega-3s may be helpful in the treatment of depression and seem to have a mood-stabilizing effect. Omega-3 essential fatty acids may also help boost the effectiveness of conventional antidepressants and help young people with ADHD.

Omega-3 fatty acids are thought to be important in reducing inflammation, the primary cause of conditions like arthritis and asthma, and play a role in heart health by reducing triglycerides (blood fats). They may also reduce risk for certain kinds of cancer.<sup>8</sup>

Oily fish (salmon, trout, mackerel, anchovies and sardines) are the most highly recommended sources of omega-3 fatty acids, and the American Heart Association suggests eating these types of fish at least twice a week. Omega-3s can also be found in walnuts, flax (or flaxseed oil), olive oil, fresh basil and dark green leafy vegetables.



### Sources

<sup>1</sup>Nauert, R. (2012). Dehydration Influences Mood, Cognition. Psych Central. Retrieved on March 12, 2014, from <http://psychcentral.com/news/2012/02/20/dehydration-influences-mood-cognition/35037.html>

<sup>2</sup>Akbaraly TN, Brunner EJ, Ferrie JE, Marmot MG, Kivimaki M, Singh-Manoux A. Dietary pattern and depressive symptoms in middle age. *Br J Psychiatry*. 2009;195:408-413.

<sup>3</sup>Sánchez-Villegas A, Delgado-Rodríguez M, Alonso A, et al. Association of the Mediterranean dietary pattern with the incidence of depression: the Seguimiento Universidad de Navarra/University of Navarra follow-up (SUN) cohort. *Arch Gen Psychiatry*. 2009;66:1090-1098.

<sup>4</sup>University of Eastern Finland. (2013, September 16). Diet is associated with risk of depression. ScienceDaily. Retrieved March 5, 2014 from [www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2013/09/130916103530.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2013/09/130916103530.htm)

<sup>5</sup>Anglin R, Samaan Z, Walter S et al. Vitamin D deficiency and depression in adults: systematic review and meta-analysis. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 2013.

<sup>6</sup>Giovannucci E, Liu Y, Hollis BW, Rimm EB. 25-Hydroxyvitamin D and Risk of Myocardial Infarction in Men: A Prospective Study. *Arch Intern Med*. 2008;168(11):1174-1180. doi:10.1001/archinte.168.11.1174.

<sup>7</sup>Holick MF. Vitamin D deficiency. *N Engl J Med* 2007;357:266-81.

<sup>8</sup><http://umm.edu/health/medical/altmed/supplement/omega3-fatty-acids>

<sup>9</sup>Flegal KM, Carroll MD, Kit BK, Ogden CL. Prevalence of obesity and trends in the distribution of body mass index among US adults, 1999-2010. *JAMA*. 2012;307:491-7.