

Edinburgh Community Food discuss 'Food and Mood'

Article contributed by Edinburgh Community Food

Just like our other organs, our brains need a variety of nutrients to stay healthy and function properly. What's good for a healthy body is also good for a healthy mind! Eating a nutritious, balanced diet is essential for good health as it gives us the energy we require to keep our bodies working happily, it allows for growth and repair of our tissues and it gives us the best protection against the risk of diseases. Likewise, eating a balanced diet also keeps our brains working at their best and a growing body of research suggests that a healthy diet may protect our mental health. On the other hand, a poor diet will make any mental health issues worse.

So, how best can we improve our mood through our diet? Eating regular meals throughout the day is key. This allows us to maintain our blood sugar levels so that we can avoid energy spikes. These spikes are detrimental to our mood and can cause us to crave foods that are high in sugar and fat. Missing meals – in particular breakfast – will lead to low blood sugar levels and irritability, poor concentration and fatigue. Many of us enjoy a mid-morning or afternoon snack so we can try replacing crisps, chocolate or a biscuit with nuts and seeds, fruit with natural yoghurt or a dip like hummus with vegetable sticks. These will help keep our blood sugar levels stable as well as our mood.

Carbohydrates are our bodies' primary source of fuel and can be broken down into two categories, refined carbohydrates and complex carbohydrates. Our diet should include mainly filling complex carbohydrates as they're broken down more slowly by the body, giving us a steady release of energy and helping to keep our mood stable. On the other hand, refined carbohydrates

are digested and absorbed quickly into the bloodstream which leads to fluctuations in blood sugar levels and results in us feeling tired and craving more after a short period of time. There is evidence that refined carbs may also lead to weight gain and diabetes. It's therefore best if we eat as few refined carbohydrates as possible.

Types of carbohydrates

Refined Carbohydrates sugar, white varieties of pasta, bread and rice, cakes and biscuits

Complex Carbohydrates wholegrain varieties of pasta, rice and bread; oats

Try to include a small amount of good quality protein at each meal as all our mood hormones are made from protein. Also, research suggests that tryptophan, an amino acid found in protein, may be important in influencing mood. Foods that contain protein and tryptophan include: fish, eggs, meat, cheese, nuts, lentils, and meat substitutes such as soya or Quorn.

Ensuring that we include the essential fatty acid omega 3 in our diet may also have a positive impact on mood. Omega 3 is essential because it can't be made by the body and needs to be supplied from the diet. Studies have linked omega 3 to helping improve the mood of people who have depression, concentration issues and a poor memory. Good sources of omega 3 include: oily fish such as sardines, mackerel and pilchards, oils like olive, canola and walnut, plus nuts, seeds and the traditional cod liver oil.

It's also important to ensure that our bodies and mind are kept well hydrated. We should all be aiming to drink 1.5 – 2 litres of fluid each day (roughly 6-8 glasses). While not drinking enough fluid can lead to headaches and a lack of concentration, it also depends on the types of fluid we consume. A high intake of tea, coffee and – especially – fizzy juice or energy drinks can be detrimental to our mood as they

are often high in caffeine and sugar. As a stimulant, caffeine can also increase blood pressure, anxiety and sleep disturbances. Drinks that are high in sugar will also contribute to playing havoc with our blood sugar levels. Alcohol has a depressant effect on the brain and can rapidly worsen mood so aim to limit alcohol consumption to within the recommended government guidelines to avoid this.

We're best to stick to water for optimal hydration. If this seems a little unappealing then try adding fruit such as lemon, lime, strawberries or a slice of orange to your water to give it more flavour. Other ways to up your fluid intake include herbal teas or sparkling water.

Submitted by [Stephanie Scott](#)

