

Katherine Horstmann Nutrition

Boosting low mood with food

1. Balance your blood sugar levels

Balance your blood sugar levels by eating at regular times and minimising your sugar intake. Eat protein with every meal. When blood sugar levels spike, they also come crashing down causing effects on mood. Protein contains amino acids that help build neurotransmitters that are essential for mood.

- Eggs, chicken, lentils, natural yoghurt, pumpkin seeds.

2. Keep an eye on your iron levels

If you feel intense fatigue and washed out, get your GP to check your iron levels. If you have heavy periods or are vegetarian / vegan, you are at greater risk. Even if you are not anaemic, maximise iron rich foods to help energy levels and mood.

- Soybeans, lentils, spinach, sesame seeds, beef liver, apricots, oysters

3. Boost tryptophan rich foods

We need various 'essential' amino acids that the body doesn't produce, so we need to get them via diet - one of these are tryptophan which is particularly important because it's a pre-cursor to serotonin (a neurotransmitter involved in pleasure and happiness).

- Maximise tryptophan rich foods to increase conversion and availability of serotonin e.g. eggs, soy foods (organic), spirulina, cheese, seeds, beans, pulses, red meat.

4. Eat healthy fats

Hopefully the 'fat makes you fat' myth has been dispelled by now. We need to avoid saturated and trans fats but our brain is largely made up of fat and we need 'good' fats to make our hormones. Studies have shown that Omega 3 levels (an essential fatty acid) is often lower in those who experience depression.

- Small oily fish twice a week like sardines, mackerel, anchovies, salmon, herring (tinned is fine) and olive oil, avocado, walnuts, seeds, flax seeds.
- If you don't like oily fish, Bare Biology's omega 3 supplements are amazing quality - www.barebiology.com

5. Look after your gut

There is strong connection between our gut bacteria and our brain. Our Vagus nerve links our gut and our central nervous system. Optimise the good bacteria (prebiotic and probiotic foods) and discourage the bad bacteria (go easy on the alcohol, avoid processed foods, limit sugar etc). Some of your neurotransmitters (particularly serotonin) are produced in your gut so any kind of dysbiosis hinders this. Signs of dysbiosis are flatulence, constipation, diarrhoea, bloating etc.

- Focus on foods that maintain healthy and diverse gut flora, particularly prebiotic and probiotic foods (leeks, onions, yoghurt) as well as fermented foods (kefir, kombucha and kimchi). Variety is key!

6. Eat a Mediterranean style diet

This diet has a lot of solid evidence for its efficacy in boosting mental health due to its anti-inflammatory nature (high in healthy fats, fruit and vegetables and low in refined carbohydrates, red and processed meat).

- Vegetables, fruits, pulses, nuts and seeds, fish, chicken and eggs.

7. Choline rich foods

Choline is very important for cognitive function in general, especially memory, but also anxiety.

- Beef, eggs, soybeans chicken, shiitake mushrooms.

8. Support hormone balance

Dark green leafy vegetables are your friends (high in folate and B vitamins) and cruciferous vegetables are very important for hormonal balance.

- Cruciferous vegetables contain a compound that helps get rid of excess or used Oestrogen from our body (kale, cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower).
- Foods high in fibre (beans, peas, lentils, dark green leafy veg) help prevent constipation and support the excretion of hormones from the body (preventing them being recycled).

9. Cut out or cut down on foods that are more inflammatory to the body

Serotonin levels can be impacted by elevated inflammation in the body and studies have shown higher inflammation markers in those with depression.

- Replace high levels of alcohol, processed food and take aways (high in saturated fats, sugar, salt and preservatives), with home cooked food wherever possible.
- If you are experiencing IBS type symptoms, pay attention to what foods trigger this reaction to identify any food allergies or intolerances.

10. Vitamin D

Apart from its many benefits for the immune system and many other bodily systems, vitamin D levels can significantly improve depression.

- Consider supplementing, especially in the winter months
- Get at least 30 minutes of natural sunlight each day (weather permitting)!
- Eat vitamin D rich foods - salmon, sardines, eggs, shiitake mushrooms