

EMOTIONAL HEALTH: EATING FOR EMOTIONAL BALANCE

It seems the saying “you are what you eat” is true when it comes to food and mood. What we eat affects all the cells in our body including brain cells (neurons), which are linked to our emotions and mood. Science is just beginning to understand exactly how the foods we eat affect our mood. This month we’ll talk about healthy brain-boosting foods to include in your diet and brain-busting foods to avoid.

BRAIN BOOSTERS

Get Real

Eat real foods as close to their original form as possible—mostly plain fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts, seeds, lean meats or seafood, plain milk products, or foods made from these ingredients. These foods are naturally rich in protective vitamins, minerals, fiber, essential fats, protein, and antioxidant-rich phytonutrients. Eating whole, unprocessed foods like those found in the Mediterranean diet or the DASH (Dietary Approached to Stop Hypertension) diet will help you keep your body healthy and your brain in balance.

Go Fishing

The omega-3 fatty acids in fish, like salmon, mackerel, tuna, rainbow trout, and sardines, as well as walnuts, flaxseed, canola oil, and chia seeds help reduce inflammation in artery walls and keep blood flowing to your brain.

Pick Produce

Fruits and vegetables are filled with brain-boosting vitamins, minerals, phytochemicals, and antioxidants. Colorful berries, such as blueberries and raspberries, are especially rich in protective phytonutrient antioxidants.

Feed Your Gut

Trillions of good bacteria live in your gut. They help keep your immune system healthy and reduce inflammation in the brain. These good bacteria also make serotonin and dopamine, which are known as the “feel-good chemicals.” Fuel your gut with healthy probiotic foods like yogurt with active live cultures, and fermented foods such as sauerkraut, miso, and kefir. You will be rewarded with improved mood and energy levels, and decreased levels of stress and anxiety.



Break Your Fast

Studies show that eating breakfast improves memory, increases energy, and boosts your mood throughout the day. Avoid skipping meals—eating a healthy meal or snack every 3 to 4 hours keeps you going strong all day long.



BRAIN BUSTERS

Americans have changed their dietary habits more during the past 100 years than all of humanity did during the previous 100,000 years. Industrial-scale food processing and marketing are responsible for this dramatic shift. Highly processed “junk” foods that are high in saturated fat, trans-fat, simple sugars, and refined carbohydrates can cause inflammation all over the body, impairing brain function and worsening mood. What’s more, eating these foods regularly may actually *shrink* the area of your brain responsible for learning and memory!

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For support from a registered nurse or wellness coach or to ask questions, please call a Blues On CallSM health coach at **1-888-BLUE-428**.

Log in to the member website listed on the back of your member ID card.

- Click on the **Wellness** tab.
- Click on **Additional Resources** on the left.
- Click on **Health Topics** under **WebMD health information** to search health topics or use the medical encyclopedia to review health issues

This article does not provide medical advice. It is intended for informational purposes only. It is not a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Consult your physician before participating in activities described in this article.

Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association. 11/16