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# Healthy Eating for a Healthy Brain

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Did you know that what you eat directly affects the structure and function of your brain and ultimately, your mood? May is Mental Health Awareness Month, and we are highlighting how food contributes to our mental health, and shows how a sound diet can help treat and prevent a wide range of health issues.

[Research](#) shows that a dietary pattern characterized by a high intake of fruit, vegetables, whole grains, fish, and olive oil is associated with a decreased risk of depression. A diet characterized by a high consumption of red and processed meat, refined grains, sweets, and high-fat dairy products is [linked to an increased risk of depression](#).

A healthy diet is directly associated with a healthy brain, which offers emotional benefits, such as self-awareness and better emotional regulation for a better quality of life. A healthy brain also offers cognitive benefits, like better memory, higher levels of creativity, improved problem-solving skills, and clearer thinking.

Eating patterns that offer you flexibility are easier to adopt in the long term. Start incorporating some of the following foods into your eating regimen to help your mental health. Focus on choosing the foods that appeal most to you from each of the categories. Remember, there is not one “superfood.”

## Healthy Foods for a Healthy Brain

- **Leafy greens:** Spinach, kale, watercress, collards, arugula, beet greens, chard, seaweed (algae). Aim for 2-3 cups of leafy greens per day and one small serving seaweed per week.
- **Rainbow of fruits and vegetables:** Tomatoes, avocados, cauliflower, broccoli, bell peppers, berries. Aim for a mix of them, 2-3 cups per day.
- **Seafood:** Sardines, oysters, mussels, salmon, cod. Experts recommend 2-4 servings per week.
- **Nuts, beans, and seeds:** Cashews, pumpkin seeds, lentils, nuts, legumes. At least ½ – 1 cup nuts and/or beans and 1 tbsp seeds per day.
- **Meat:** Choose grass fed beef, lamb, goat, chicken, liver. Find a local farm that raises animals on pasture and grass if you can. The recommended consumption (if you already eat meat) is 3 servings per week. Use the palm of your hand as a serving size.
- **Eggs:** Packed with protein, iron, B vitamins and choline (a cousin of B vitamins, linked to reducing anxiety levels). Only 70 calories

each. You can eat 5-7 eggs per week for good brain health.

- **Dairy:** Yogurt, kefir. A good reference is 3 to 5 servings of dairy (ideally fermented) per week.
- **Prebiotics and probiotics for gut health:**
  - Eat fiber from vegetables, fruits, and beans to sustain the good gut bacteria.
  - Eat fermented foods like kefir, sauerkraut, kimchi, sourdough, kombucha, yogurt, miso to add more beneficial bacteria to your gut. The recommended consumption is 3-5 servings of fermented foods per week.
- **Dark chocolate:** 70% dark chocolate. Consume dark chocolate in the form of cacao nibs, cocoa powder, or a solid dark bar. Indulge on cacao nibs or dark chocolate up to 3-5 (3oz) servings per week.

## Key Takeaway

Focus on wholesome, nutrient dense, unprocessed foods to stay healthy and happy. And remember, food is medicine!

### References:

Marc Molendijk, Patricio Molero, Felipe Ortuño Sánchez-Pedreño, Willem Van der Does, Miguel Angel Martínez-González. [Diet quality and depression risk: A systematic review and dose-response meta-analysis of prospective studies](#), Journal of Affective Disorders, Volume 226, 2018, p. 346-354

Ye Li, Mei-Rong Lv, Yan-Jin Wei, Ling Sun, Ji-Xiang Zhang, Huai-Guo Zhang, Bin Li. [Dietary patterns and depression risk: A meta-analysis](#) Psychiatry Research, Volume 253, 2017, p. 373-382

Drew Ramsey, MD. [Eat to beat depression and anxiety](#)

Uma Naido, MD. [This is your brain on food](#)

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