



# Boost YOUR MOOD

FOOD & LIFESTYLE UPGRADES TO LIFT YOUR SPIRITS



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If we want to address the factors that contribute to low mood, anxiety & depression sustainably, it needs to be addressed from several perspectives. First, we need to understand what the causes of low mood/ depression are, as many factors can trigger the biochemical changes that make you feel miserable. These factors could include anything ranging from over-work, trauma and negative thought patterns to lack of exercise, hormonal changes or diet.

Let's start with diet first. We know that our food has a big impact on our physical health, but it might not be as well known how it could also impact our mood and the way we feel. Modern science has helped us understand why food is impacting our mood as well as which foods we should be eating more (or less) of to boost our mood and support our mental health in the best way possible. In this guide, we'll show you how to start supporting your mood through diet and lifestyle changes. There are many practical things you can change today to start out with this journey.







# Food

**What we eat makes all  
the difference**

Blood sugar balance and eating plenty of wholesome, natural foods are key when it comes to supporting our mental health. There is a very direct link between loss of blood sugar balance and stress, anxiety and even depression and up to 50% of low mood can be because of blood sugar imbalances. Balancing your blood sugar levels will not only improve your mood but will create more energy and help you get to your body's ideal weight (which is an instant mood & self-worth booster in itself).

Blood sugar balance is crucial because all carbohydrates are broken down into glucose and our brains run mostly on glucose, so an uneven supply would naturally result in changes in the brain.



In the same way that eating well can positively influence mood, making poor food choices can have the opposite effect. Research by a team in New York, showed that young adults under 30 who ate fast food more than three times a week scored higher when it came to levels of mental distress. The same researchers found that those who ate meat fewer than three times a week had more mental health problems (potentially as the amino acid tryptophan found in meat is the pre-cursor to the feel-good chemical serotonin). Eating lots of refined carbohydrates are also linked with depression because these foods not only supply very little in the way of nutrients but also use up the mood-enhancing B vitamins.





# What should I eat?

- Eating slow-releasing carbohydrates keeps your blood sugar level even and minimises mood-altering blood sugar dips.
- Eating sufficient protein gives you an optimum supply of essential amino acids. Make sure to have some form of protein with every meal and snack.
- Eat whole, unprocessed food, high in soluble fibre.
- Mood-boosting foods high in vitamin B (nuts, seeds, beans and green leafy vegetables) should be included as they are good for mental stability.
- Foods containing high amounts of essential omega-3 fats and vitamin D can also help to boost your mood.
- Include a serving of each of the following foods in your diet every day: fish (especially oily fish such as salmon, mackerel, herring, kippers, sardines, tuna) or free-range eggs/ free-range chicken; nuts, seeds and beans, especially flaxseed, pumpkin seeds & almonds; all berries, cherries, plums, apples and pears; green vegetables: broccoli, asparagus, peas, artichoke, kale, cabbage, watercress & rocket.
- Make sure to include many whole foods rich in magnesium and zinc (as deficiencies have been linked to depression) in your diet. Zinc-rich foods include fish, crab, oysters, dark meat or poultry, .nuts, seeds and pulses. Magnesium is also found in oat bran, nuts, seeds and green leafy vegetables.





## What should I avoid?

- Avoid sugar in its many disguises as well as carbohydrates that break down into sugar fast.
- Avoid foods that are high in hydrogenated, processed fats or damaged fats, such as sausages, fried foods and junk food.
- Reduce wheat and milk as they are some of the most common contributors to food intolerances and altered moods.
- Limit or avoid caffeinated drinks (stick to no more than 1 coffee or 2 weak teas a day).
- Limit or avoid alcohol (no more than 3 small glasses of wine, half-pints of beer or measures of spirit a week – and not all on the same night). After the initial sugar rush has subsided, it acts as a depressant. It also depletes the body of essential fatty acids and B vitamins (which are crucial for neurotransmitter production).





# ESSENTIAL

# fats

## Key to your Mood & Brain Function

Omega-3 fats should make up a big part of our diets, as they are key players in our mood and brain function. The dry weight of the brain is made up of 60% fat, so it makes sense that we would need a daily intake of them. The higher your blood levels of omega-3 fats, the higher your levels of the feel-good neurotransmitter serotonin are likely to be. This is because Omega-3 fats help build receptor sites as well as improve their function.

EPA, DPA and DHA – certain long-chain omega-3 fats – build and rebuild your brain, and are part of the equation for happiness. There is a lot of research showing that this is indeed the case.



Good quality double-blind controlled trials have shown that giving fish oils rich in omega-3s to people with depression showed significant improvement, even more so in some cases than were reported for anti-depressant drugs. Most studies on anti-depressant drugs report more or less a 15% reduction in depression ratings, while three studies on omega-3s reported an average reduction of 50% and that is without any side effects.

Make sure to include more food sources of omega-3 into your diet, which includes oily fish (salmon, trout, mackerel, sardines, cod, tuna, halibut), walnuts, chia seeds and flaxseed. If you are vegetarian or vegan, consider taking an omega-3 supplement (e.g. DHA from seaweed). Most plant sources of omega-3 do not contain the long-chain fatty acids mentioned above. Although the body can make those from short-chain omega-3s (like the ones found in nuts and seeds), conversion is poor and therefore, will make it difficult for you to get enough omega-3s in that way; so it's best to take an Omega 3 supplement too.







# Exercise

**A key part in beating  
the blues**

Some studies, in which people exercised for 30 to 60 minutes, 3 to 5 times a week, found a drop of around 5 points in their Hamilton Rating Scale (depression assessment scale) – more than double what you’d expect from anti-depressants alone. If you are feeling down and demotivated, it’s not easy to get started on exercise: but the benefits are worth it. Exercise increases blood flow to the brain and raises levels of the brain chemicals serotonin and dopamine which make us feel good and help create a sense of motivation. Moving our bodies also helps us to sleep, because it can “burn off ” any excess adrenaline. It further also helps us to balance blood sugar levels and to lose weight and that, in turn, improves our mood, self-confidence and motivation.

When you get started, aim for 20 minutes of exercise five days a week, preferably outdoors; being outdoors has the added benefit of even more serotonin being released. This is because natural light stimulates serotonin.





# Sleep

**Good Sleep & Good Mood  
Goes Hand-in-Hand**

Lack of sleep has a big effect on how you feel, and finding out how to sleep through the night and wake up refreshed, could be the missing piece in getting you to feel a whole lot better.

The amino acid tryptophan is not only the raw material for serotonin (the feel-good hormone) but also for melatonin (a brain chemical that helps you sleep by controlling the sleep/wake cycle). Therefore, if you want to improve the quality and quantity of your sleep, it's important to make sure you get enough of the building block that makes serotonin. That building block is called tryptophan (an amino acid present in most protein-rich foods like chicken, cheese, tuna, tofu, eggs, nuts, seeds and milk). The conversion from tryptophan to serotonin, though, requires folic acid, vitamin B6, vitamin C and zinc.



Foods that promote serotonin include beef, broccoli, cashews, chicken, chickpeas, cauliflower, peppers, kale, kiwi, lamb, oranges, parsley, pumpkin seeds, pineapple, salmon, spinach, turkey and tuna.

The key is to eat a variety of foods to make sure you provide your body with everything it needs to create enough serotonin and melatonin for a balanced, well-rested body. A diet that does not include adequate amounts of these foods will not promote optimal brain functioning in order to stabilise mood.



# But What If I Can't Sleep?

- Try to go to bed at the same time every day, your body thrives on routine.
- Keep the temperature in your bedroom comfortable; not too hot, nor too cold.
- Use your bed for sleep and relaxation only, not for watching TV or being on your phone. This will help you switch off.
- Keep the bedroom completely dark, so you're not disturbed by light, which your brain detects even when your eyes are closed. Eye masks can be useful in this regard.
- Spend time outdoors to soak up the sun. This will help to get your sleep/wake cycle in tip-top shape.
- Take some gentle exercise every day as there is evidence that regular exercise improves restful sleep (this includes both stretching and aerobic exercise). A brisk walk would tick both boxes.
- Make an effort to relax for at least 15 minutes before going to bed by taking a warm bath or doing some form of meditation.
- Consider getting a traditional alarm clock so your smartphone can stay out of the bedroom. Better still, work out how much sleep you need by going to bed earlier until you find that you wake up naturally before your alarm.





# LIFESTYLE *Considerations*

## Try the following lifestyle tweaks to get your mood back on track:

- Set realistic goals & break large tasks into small ones.
- Confide in someone, talking through our concerns reduces anxiety and puts things into perspective helping us to switch off.
- Watch funny TV programmes or read uplifting books.
- Do more of the things which make you feel good. This could be going for a walk, taking a long hot bath, playing with a pet, chatting to a friend - whatever lifts your spirits naturally.
- See more of your friends and family.
- Avoid people/situations that make you feel bad.
- Use positive thinking. Start becoming aware of your negative thoughts. Write them down and change them - so that they are at least neutral. Then when a negative thought comes into your head, replace it with the new one. This will stop the downward spiral of negative thoughts.
- Create a few positive affirmations and practise them each day. It is like planting a seed and repetition is the key to it growing.
- If you are depressed rather than struggling with a low mood, seek the support of a counsellor/psychotherapist to help you work through the psychological challenges.



# In summary...

Start with the easiest, most do-able changes and build up from there. Remember that feeling better consistently will take time and commitment to introducing new habits that will better support your mental wellbeing. However, many of these habits and behaviours can have an immediate positive impact on your mood so take 1 or 2 and try them out, then see what difference they make to you. As soon as you begin to see positive changes you will feel inspired to do more. You will soon recognise how much we can do to boost our own mood naturally. Good luck.

## Need help to change your habits?

Change can sometimes be hard as our lives are often so busy, with many different barriers and challenges that get in the way of us prioritising our health.

Consider working with a Health Coach who can help you overcome these barriers, create time to make positive changes and support you to create a new set of lifestyle habits that will improve all areas of your health, including your mood.

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