Nutrition for Mental Health

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Think about it. Your brain is always "on." It takes care of your thoughts and movements, your breathing and heartbeat, your senses — it works hard 24/7, even while you're asleep. This means your brain requires a constant supply of fuel. Put simply, what you eat directly affects the structure and function of your brain and, ultimately, your mood.

Like an expensive car, your brain functions best when it gets only premium fuel. Eating high-quality foods that contain lots of vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants nourishes the brain and protects it from oxidative stress — the "waste" (free radicals) produced when the body uses oxygen, which can damage cells. Unfortunately, just like an expensive car, your brain can be damaged if you ingest anything other than premium fuel. Diets high in refined sugars, for example, are harmful to the brain. In addition to worsening your body's regulation of insulin, they also promote inflammation and oxidative stress. Multiple studies have found a correlation between a diet high in refined sugars and impaired brain function — and even a worsening of symptoms of mood disorders, such as depression.

The field of nutritional psychiatry is finding there are many consequences and correlations between not only what you eat, how you feel, and how you ultimately behave, but also the kinds of bacteria that live in your gut.

How the foods you eat affect your mental health

Serotonin is a neurotransmitter that helps regulate sleep and appetite, mediate moods, and inhibit pain. Since about 95% of your serotonin is produced in your gastrointestinal tract, and your gastrointestinal tract is lined with a hundred million nerve cells, or neurons, it makes sense that the inner workings of your digestive system don't just help you digest food, but also guide your emotions. What's more, the function of these neurons — and the production of neurotransmitters like serotonin — is highly influenced by the billions of "good" bacteria that make up your intestinal microbiome. These bacteria play an essential role in your health. They protect the lining of your intestines and ensure they provide a strong barrier against toxins and "bad" bacteria; they limit inflammation; they improve how well you absorb nutrients from your food; and they activate neural pathways that travel directly between the gut and the brain.

Studies have compared "traditional" diets, like the Mediterranean diet and the traditional Japanese diet, to a typical "Western" diet and have shown that the risk of depression is 25% to 35% lower in those who eat a traditional diet. Scientists account for this difference because these traditional diets tend to be high in vegetables, fruits, unprocessed grains, and fish and seafood, and to contain only modest amounts of lean meats and dairy. They are also void of processed and refined foods and sugars, which are staples of the "Western" dietary pattern. In addition, many of these unprocessed foods are fermented, and therefore act as natural

probiotics. Good bacteria not only influence what your gut digests and absorbs, but also affect the degree of inflammation throughout your body, as well as your mood and energy level.

Dietary and Lifestyle Intervention

Eliminate Inflammatory Foods

- Gluten containing grains (wheat, barley, and rye), high fat dairy, and refined sugars.

Include fermented Foods

- Probiotics, fermented vegetables (sauerkraut and kimchi, kefir and yogurt, kombucha)

Include Prebiotics

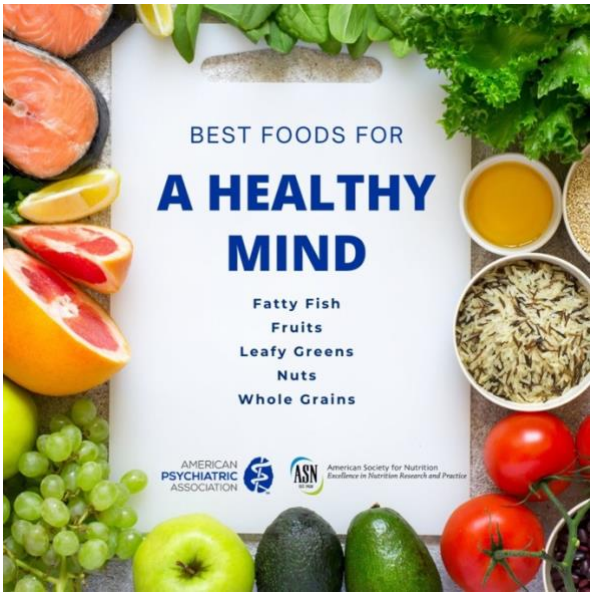
- Non-digestible fibrous carbohydrates
    - inulin: asparagus, garlic, Jerusalem artichoke, jicama, onion
    - arabinogalactans: carrots, leeks, radishes, tomatoes, turmeric
    - resistant starches: cooked beans/legumes, sweet potato, yam, pumpkin, potato, cooked rice

Consume Healthy fats

- omega- fatty acids : avocado, EVOO, flaxseed, hemp, nuts and seeds, fatty fish

Manage Stress

- relaxation techniques you enjoy such as meditation yoga
- regular physical activity
- talking to a mental health professional
- get adequate sleep



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Simple Salad to Boost Your Mood:
Easy Tuna Cakes with Greens & Lemon Dressing

Ingredients

- ½ cup rinsed no-salt-added canned white beans
- 1 large egg, lightly beaten
- 3 teaspoons Dijon mustard, divided
- 1 teaspoon lemon zest
- 1 teaspoon dried dill
- 1 teaspoon dried mint
- ½ teaspoon dried tarragon
- 2 (5 ounce) cans wild albacore tuna packed in oil, drained
- ¾ cup Gluten Free breadcrumbs (can also use oats or ground almonds)
- 6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- 3 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon honey
- ½ teaspoon ground pepper
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1 (5 ounce) package spring mix salad greens

Directions

1. Coarsely mash beans with a fork or potato masher in a large bowl. Stir in egg, 2 teaspoons mustard, lemon zest, dill, mint and tarragon. Flake tuna into chunks; gently fold into the bean mixture. Sprinkle panko over the mixture; gently fold in until well combined. Form the mixture into 4 (1-inch-thick) patties.
2. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium heat. Swirl to coat the pan. Cook the patties until golden brown on both sides, about 3 minutes per side.
3. Whisk lemon juice, honey, pepper, salt and the remaining 1 teaspoon mustard and 5 tablespoons oil in a small bowl. Divide greens among 4 plates; top each with a tuna cake and drizzle evenly with dressing.

Nutrition Facts (per serving) recipe make 4 servings

Calories	400
Fat	27g
Carbs	19g
Protein	21g