

Nutrition & Mental Health

Your nutrition plays an important role in your mood and energy. Research shows that poor eating habits and certain vitamin or mineral deficiencies can contribute to depression and mood swings. While there's no "perfect" diet for mental health, eating balanced meals can help your mind and body work better together.

Healthy eating is not about perfection. It's about making small, steady changes that give your body the building blocks it needs to support your well-being.

Getting started

Changing eating habits takes time and patience. Even small improvements can help you feel better emotionally and physically.

Begin by looking at what and how you eat and when. Keeping a **food diary** can help you see patterns between your meals and how you feel throughout the day. This simple tool can help you notice which food boosts your energy and which may make you feel worse.

Eat better to feel better

Here are simple ways to support your mood through food:

- **Cut back on high-sugar and high-fat foods.** Fast food and junk food can make your mood dip after short bursts of energy.
- **Choose complex carbohydrates** like whole grains, fruits, and vegetables. These foods digest slowly and help keep your energy and mood steady.

- **Avoid processed foods**, including processed sugars (such as candy, cookies, and soda) and refined grains (like white bread or pasta). They may give a quick “lift” that fades fast and leads to cravings.
- **Add key nutrients for mood support.** Vitamins B6, B12, folate (also known as folic acid), vitamin D, and omega-3 fatty acids have all been linked to improved mental health.
- **Limit caffeine and alcohol.** Coffee, soda, and alcohol can temporarily change your mood or energy, but often lead to a “crash” later.
- **Stay hydrated.** Drinking plenty of water helps your body and brain function more efficiently.

Build a mindful eating routine

How you eat matters as much as what you eat. Try these steps:

1. **Listen to your body.** Eat when you feel physically hungry and stop before you feel full.
2. **Watch portion sizes.** Both overeating and undereating can affect your emotional balance.
3. **Eat regularly.** Skipping meals (especially breakfast) can lower your energy and mood.
4. **Plan ahead.** Keep healthy snacks on hand to avoid grabbing sugary or processed foods when you’re stressed or tired.

For more mental health educational resources, visit depressioncenter.org/toolkit.

This document provides general educational information developed by the Eisenberg Family Depression Center. It is not a substitute for professional medical advice. Please consult your health care provider if you have questions about your health or treatment options.