

# Eat Your Way to Wellness

The best foods to lift your mood and boost your immunity

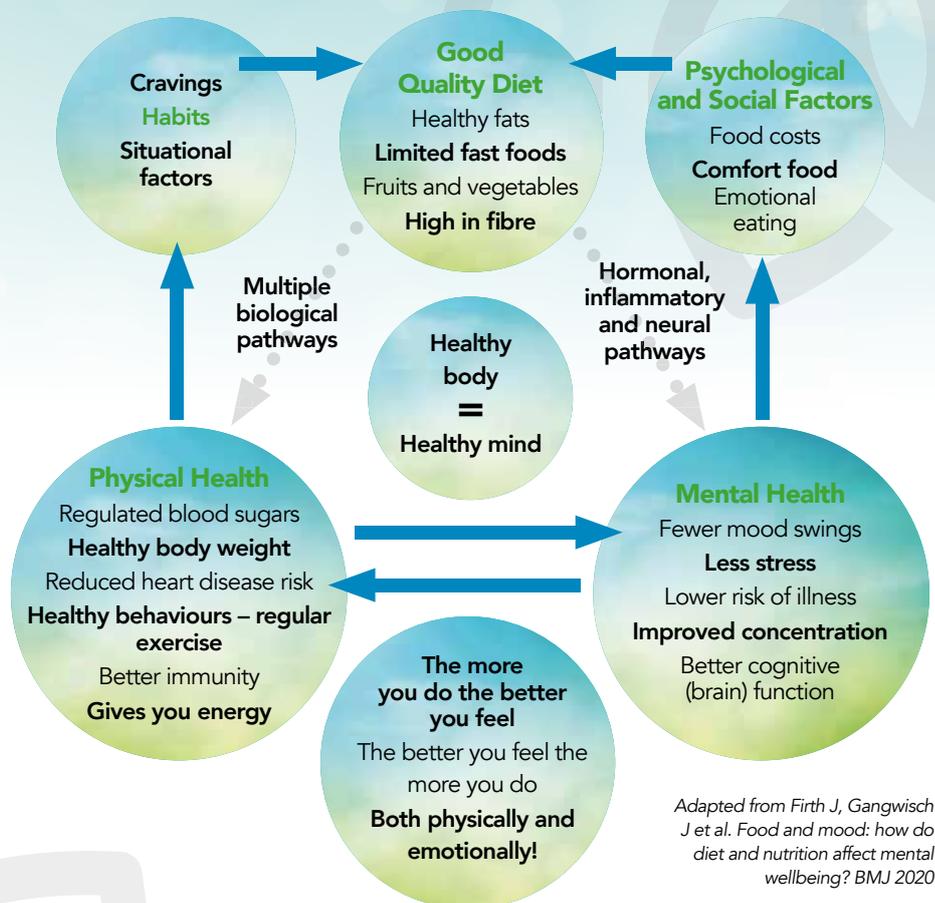
These can all become a vicious cycle, fighting with and against each other. A poor diet exacerbates stress, anxiety, depression and lack of sleep leading to poor health (both mentally and physically). In the same way when you are feeling down or overwhelmed so often you make bad dietary choices. A poor diet doesn't support your heart and muscles when trying to be physically active. Where physical activity should benefit your body and mood and help maintain a good weight which in turns feeds into feel good emotions – it needs the right 'fuel' to do so.

## BOOST YOUR MOOD

Does what you eat matter for your mental health? Accumulating data suggests that this may indeed be the case and that diet and nutrition are not only critical for human physiology and body composition, but also have significant effects on mood and mental wellbeing. Although the determining factors of mental health are complex, increasing evidence indicates a strong connection between a poor diet and the exacerbation of mood disorders, including anxiety and depression, as well as other neuropsychiatric conditions.

Research has shown that sticking to a healthy or Mediterranean style diet – high consumption of fruits, vegetables, nuts, and legumes; moderate consumption of poultry, eggs, and dairy products; and only occasional consumption of red meat – is associated with a reduced risk of depression. It's not fully understood how these all interconnect.

Alterations in food choices or preferences in response to your temporary psychological state – such as 'comfort foods' in times of low mood, or changes in appetite from stress – are common human experiences. In addition, relationships between nutrition and longstanding mental illness are compounded by barriers to maintaining a healthy diet. These barriers disproportionality affect people with mental illness and include financial and environmental constraints to accessing a healthy diet, and even the effects on



*Adapted from Firth J, Gangwisch J et al. Food and mood: how do diet and nutrition affect mental wellbeing? BMJ 2020*

appetite of medication either increasing it or suppressing it.

## BOOST YOUR IMMUNITY

Enhancing immunity is a thriving topic in the nutraceutical market today. Nutritionists agree that a poor diet is a huge contributing factor to people becoming susceptible to illness. Poor diet can not only impact your physical health but your mental wellness too. Eating well may help you avoid getting ill, and prevent endless trips to the doctor or pharmacy. There are many supplements one can buy with varying degrees of efficacy and price! However, being mindful of what you eat can provide you with all the support you need for a healthy immune system.

### Vitamin C

Vitamin C tops the list of immune boosters. There has been more research about the

immune-boosting effects of vitamin C than perhaps any other nutrient. Vitamin C is available naturally in many fruits and vegetables.

Unlike most animals that produce their own vitamin C, the human body does not synthesise it. Vitamin C has substantial antiviral and antibacterial benefits, though it's known for its protective aspects in creating host resistance. The most abundant vitamin C foods are guava, papaya, strawberries, kiwi, cantaloupe, orange and grapefruit.

### Probiotics

The live cultures found in yogurt, particularly species of *Lactobacillus* and *Bifidobacterium*, may be beneficial in enhancing immunity. Having a healthy supply of gut flora increases a person's white blood cell production and activity. They may also boost immunity while

taking antibiotics, and they supply added protection to those who may have a compromised immune system. Probiotic rich foods are yogurt, kefir, select cheeses and milk, sauerkraut, kim chi and tempeh.

### Bone Broth

Chicken soup isn't just good for the soul. There is a reason it is prescribed by doctors and mothers all over the world when you're feeling under the weather. All bone broths – beef, chicken, fish, lamb and more – are nutrient-dense, easy to digest, rich in flavour and boost healing.

The long slow simmering of a protein causes the bones and ligaments to release healing compounds like collagen, proline, glycine and glutamine that have the power to transform your health. The list of immune-boosting benefits from bone broth are long, including gut health (essential seeing as 80% of the immune systems function is in the gut), cell metabolism and repair, detoxifying, promotes probiotic balance and regenerates damaged cells.

### High Fibre Grains

Oats and barley in particular contain beta-glucan, a type of fibre with antimicrobial and antioxidant capabilities. They enhance resistance to various fungal, bacterial and viral diseases. Beta-glucan is also found in protective amounts in shiitake and maitake mushrooms. Beta-glucan enhances immunity, similarly to echinacea and astragalus root. Beta-glucan binds to white blood cells and activates anti-infection activity.

### Vitamin E

Vitamin E has been studied for its production of natural killer and B-cells, the cells that produce antibodies that destroy bacteria. The highest vitamin E foods are green leafy vegetables, sunflower seeds, almonds and blueberries.

### Zinc

Zinc is a mineral that increases the production of white blood cells. Always include zinc from food sources rather than in a supplement form. As little as 15 to 25 milligrams a day will help to support immune function. Some of the top zinc foods are oyster, crab, grass-fed beef as well as beans, chickpeas and nuts.

### Omega-3 Fatty Acids

Omega-3 fats reduce inflammation, increasing airflow and protect the lungs from colds and respiratory infections. The omega-3 fatty acids in ground flaxseed and fish (such as salmon, tuna, sole, flounder, sardines, herring and mackerel) act as immune boosters by increasing the activity of phagocytes, the white blood cells that destroy bacteria. Other omega-3 rich foods are tofu, edamame and walnuts.

### Beta-Carotene

The antioxidant beta-carotene has been studied to increase the number of natural killer T-cells in our immune system. Beta-carotene is a powerful antioxidant that mops up excess free radicals that can accelerate illness recovery. This nutrient is found in carrots and sweet potatoes.

### Garlic

Garlic is known for its antibacterial, antiviral, antifungal and immune-boosting effects. Garlic stimulates the production of white blood cells and increases the efficiency of antibody production. The immune-boosting properties of garlic seem to be due to its sulphur-containing compounds. Garlic can also act as an antioxidant that reduces the build-up of free radicals in the bloodstream.

### Mushrooms

Mushrooms are antioxidant-rich and very high in selenium. Selenium has been studied to reduce the risk of developing severe flu. Mushrooms are also recognized for their antiviral, antibacterial, and anti-tumour effects. White button mushrooms, in particular, have noticeably greater immune-boosting effects than other mushrooms such as, oyster and shiitake.

### Tea

The amino acid responsible for immune-boosting components in tea is L-theanine. It is abundant in both black and green tea. Many already know to drink green tea to help fight disease, new research is also including white tea, for its strong ability to destroy the organisms that cause disease.

### FOODS TO AVOID

Not only should you boost your intake of certain nutrients, but there are certain things you should avoid to stay healthy this season, especially in excessive amounts!

### Sugar

Eating or drinking too much refined sugar can reduce the ability of white blood cells to kill germs. The immune-suppressing effect of sugar starts immediately after ingestion and may strengthen throughout the day. Excessive refined sugar intake can reduce the responsiveness of your immune cells and lower your immune defence.

### Alcohol

Excessive alcohol intake can harm the body's immune system. Alcohol ingestion deprives the body of protective nutrients, leaving it susceptible to invaders. High doses of alcohol suppress the production of white blood cells and inhibits the action of natural killer cells (a type of white blood cell). Damage to the immune system increases in proportion to the quantity of alcohol consumed. Amounts of alcohol that are enough to cause intoxication are also enough to suppress immunity.

### Processed Food

Foods that contain synthetic colours, dyes, artificial sweeteners, flavours and texturizers can decrease your immunity and be a factor in increasing your body's susceptibility to cold and flu viruses.

### Weight Gain

Being overweight by even 10 pounds (or 5kg) may also suppress the immune system. Excessive weight may affect the ability of white blood cells to multiply and produce antibodies. Since the excessive consumption of fats and calories can lessen your immune system, it is important to shape your daily intake in such a way that you can become satisfied without overeating.

To stay healthy physically and mentally, year round, eat a diet that contains a variety of fruits and vegetables. These foods ensure that you get the bioflavonoids needed to boost the immune system. Emphasize certified organic foods which are free from pesticides, heavy metals, and residues. These are among the most immune-damaging molecules we can ingest. Where possible drink filtered water to avoid these same immune-suppressing factors that are found in most tap water.

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