

# Nutrition and mental health

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We know that a healthy diet can help with weight loss and chronic diseases like diabetes, but did you know that eating right can positively affect how we think and feel? May is Mental Health Awareness month, which focuses our attention to our emotional, psychological and social well-being. Evidence suggests that good nutrition is essential for our mental health and that a number of mental health conditions, such as depression and anxiety, may be influenced by dietary factors. Consider these nutrient rich foods below for a mood booster.



## Plant Based Foods

Plant based foods, also known as complex carbohydrates, are found in fruits, vegetables, whole grains and starches. These foods are rich in antioxidants, and essential vitamins and minerals. Antioxidants are naturally occurring compounds that extinguish free radicals in our body, and are known to reduce inflammation. Examples of high antioxidant foods include carotenoids (yellow, orange, and red colored fruits and vegetables), folic acid (dark leafy greens), vitamin C (fruits and vegetables) and lycopene (tomatoes), which have been related to lower risks of depression.

**Tip:** Add a serving of fruits and vegetables to your meals, and eat a wide range of colors. Prepare foods with antioxidant spices, such as turmeric, ginger, cinnamon and saffron for added health benefits.

## Omega 3 Fatty Acids

Omega 3 fatty acids are associated with a decreased risk of mild to moderate depression in some people. Emerging research suggests taking omega 3 fatty acids as an adjunct therapy for mood disorders, ranging from major depression to bipolar disorder and schizophrenia.

**Tip:** Eat foods rich in omega 3 fatty acids, including fatty fish, walnuts, seeds, soybean oil and canola oil. Try adding walnuts to your salads or morning oatmeal, or eat fish two times per week to reap these benefits. Talk to your doctor if you're considering omega 3 supplements.

## Prebiotics and Probiotics

Prebiotics are found in plant rich foods and are responsible for feeding the probiotic bacteria in your gut. Known as the microbiome, these bacteria influence your central nervous system and may affect how we think and feel. Individuals may also benefit from the high fiber found in these gut-friendly foods.

**Tip:** Eat your share of probiotics from yogurt, fermented vegetables like kimchi and sauerkraut, kefir, miso and tempeh. Incorporate prebiotic foods into your meals such as onions, bananas, soybeans, asparagus, whole wheat bread and artichokes.

**A healthy diet can play a supportive role in overall mental health treatment. Talk to your doctor about depression and other mental health issues. To discuss your individual diet, make an appointment with Crystal Kwan, registered dietitian at (626) 397-5600 at extension 6.**