

EAP Newsletter

AUGUST 24

This month, we explore the connection between what we eat and how we feel, and the impact it can have on our mental health.

How does the food you eat affect your mental health?

Serotonin (brain chemical) is a neurotransmitter that plays an important role in regulating moods, sleep, appetite and inhibiting pain. **Around 95% of your serotonin is produced in your digestive system**, and travels through the vagus nerve to support the gut-brain axis.

The vagus nerve is a key component of the parasympathetic nervous system, which oversees many crucial bodily functions, including control of mood, immune response, digestion, and heart rate. It connects the gastrointestinal tract to the brain, transmitting information about the condition of internal organs to the brain via afferent fibres. **This tells us that the food we consume can play an important role in influencing our mood.**



Key points about 'food and mood'



The link between food and mood is clear: what you eat affects your mental wellbeing. In fact, a poor diet may not only be a reaction to feeling depressed, but may be one of the factors that triggers it.



If you are feeling depressed or anxious, you are more likely to want to eat more unhealthy foods (such as potato chips and takeaways) and eat fewer healthy foods (such as fresh fruit and vegetables). But eating unhealthy foods can make you feel worse.



You can improve your mental wellbeing by making changes to your diet. And luckily, the same eating habits that keep you mentally well are those that support your physical health too.



Choose a diet high in vegetables, fruits, unprocessed grains and fish, with smaller portions of lean meat and dairy – and limit those sugary, salty and processed foods.

Healthy foods that will lift your mood



Fatty Fish

Fatty fish, like salmon, are rich in omega-3 fatty acids, which may lower your risk of depression.



Dark Chocolate

Dark chocolate is rich in compounds that may increase feel-good chemicals in your brain.



Fermented Foods

Fermented foods, which include kimchi, yoghurt, kefir, kombucha, and sauerkraut, may improve gut health and mood. During the fermentation process, probiotics are created. These live microorganisms support the growth of healthy bacteria in your gut and may increase serotonin levels.



Bananas

Bananas are a great source of natural sugar, vitamin B6, and prebiotic fibre, which work together to keep your blood sugar levels and mood stable.



Oats

Oats provide fibre that can stabilise your blood sugar levels and boost your mood. They're also high in iron, which may improve mood symptoms in those with iron deficiency anemia.



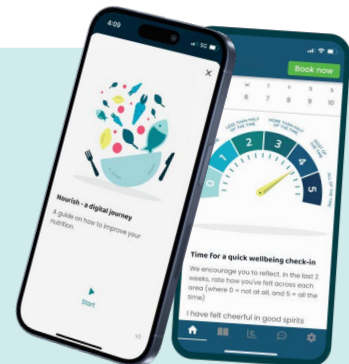
This month, we have an e-learning module all about Food and Mood. It is **available here** or **scan the QR code**.



Eat yourself healthy & happy

Download the **habithealth+** app today and prioritise your nutrition with our **'Nourish digital journey'**.

Download from the app store today.



Our team are here to help

To make an appointment with a counsellor or dietitian, book online at eapservices.co.nz, by calling **0800 327 669** or by scanning the QR code

eapservices.co.nz