

Food and mood

Explore the relationship between what you eat and how you feel. Improving your diet can help give you: • positive feelings • clearer thinking • more energy • calmer moods • reduce emotional eating



HOW REGULARLY DO YOU EAT?

If your blood sugar drops you might feel tired, irritable and depressed. You need to eat regularly to keep your sugar level steady, and choose foods that release energy slowly.

Slow-release energy foods include: protein foods, nuts and seeds, oats and wholegrains.

- Eating breakfast gets the day off to a good start.
- Instead of eating a large lunch and dinner, try eating smaller portions spaced out more regularly throughout the day.
- Avoid foods which make your blood sugar rise and fall rapidly, such as sugary snacks, sugary drinks, and alcohol.



DO YOU GET YOUR 5 A DAY?

Vegetables and fruit contain a lot of the minerals, vitamins and fibre we need to keep us physically and mentally healthy.

- Eating a variety of different coloured fruits and vegetables every day means you'll get a good range of nutrients – several portions of the same type of food won't be so good for you.
- Tomatoes, mushrooms and bananas all contain high levels of potassium which is essential for your whole nervous system, including your brain.
- Try eating some vegetables raw, as cooking can destroy some vitamins.
- You can learn more about healthy portion sizes at [nhs.uk/Change4Life](https://www.nhs.uk/Change4Life)



DO YOU KEEP YOURSELF HYDRATED?

If you don't drink enough water, you may find it difficult to concentrate or think clearly. Good drinks include: water, herbal or green tea, or diluted fruit juice.

- You need at least two pints of fluid daily to stay hydrated – some water is in your food, but you need to drink the rest.
- Water, lower fat milk and sugar-free drinks including tea and coffee all count, alcohol and sugary drinks don't count.

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ARE YOU EATING THE RIGHT FATS?

Your brain needs fatty oils (such as omega-3 and -6) to keep it working well. So rather than avoiding all fats, it's important to eat the right ones.

Good fats are in: oily fish, poultry, nuts (especially walnuts and almonds), olive and sunflower oils, seeds (such as sunflower and pumpkin), avocados, milk, yoghurt, cheese and eggs.

- Try to avoid anything which lists 'trans fats' or 'partially hydrogenated oils' in the list of ingredients (such as some shop-bought cakes and biscuits). They can be tempting when you're feeling low, but this kind of fat is bad for your mood and your physical health in the long run.



ARE YOU GETTING ENOUGH PROTEIN?

Protein contains amino acids, which make up the chemicals your brain needs to regulate your thoughts and feelings. It also helps control your blood sugar levels.

Protein is in: lean meat, fish, eggs, cheese, legumes (peas, beans and lentils), soya products, nuts and seeds.

- If you eat meat, choose the best quality meat you can afford. Higher welfare meat is much better for you than meat from factory-farmed animals because it has more nutrients and less fat.
- Whatever your diet, why not do some research into other foods contain that protein, and find something new to try?



ARE YOU HAVING TOO MUCH CAFFEINE?

Caffeine is a stimulant. Having too much can make you feel anxious and depressed, disturb your sleep (especially if you have it last thing at night), or give you withdrawal symptoms if you stop suddenly.

Caffeine is in: tea, coffee, chocolate, cola and other manufactured energy drinks.

- You might feel noticeably better quite quickly if you drink less caffeine or avoid it altogether.



HOW'S YOUR GUT FEELING?

Your state of mind is closely connected to your gut, not just because of your physical comfort, but also because your gut uses many of the same chemicals as your brain, and communicates with it.

Healthy gut foods include: fibre (in fruits, vegetables and wholegrains), and live yoghurt which contains probiotics.

- It might take your gut time to get used to a new eating pattern, so make changes slowly to give yourself time to adjust.

