

# UNDERSTANDING NUTRITION, DEPRESSION, AND MENTAL ILLNESSES



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## NOURISHING BODIES, BRAINS AND MINDS

Nutrition and mental health go hand in hand. There are even specific foods that have been shown to improve mood. Some antidepressants and anti-anxiety medication can increase appetite and cravings and sometimes you'll turn to foods that are more processed or have more sugar when you're feeling these varying emotions. Some people may lose appetite due to mental health issues and then some people might feel an increased appetite due to them, so there are different spectrums of how it can affect someone nutritionally. There are also several studies showing a link between certain diets and their impact on mental health. Depression is not just biochemically or emotionally affecting people, it can also cause different food patterns and that's where nutrition plays a role. If you're feeling depressed you might end up having a poor appetite, skipping meals, or wanting to eat more meals and more sweet foods. This is just showing that nutritional factors are mixed in with human cognition behavior and emotions.

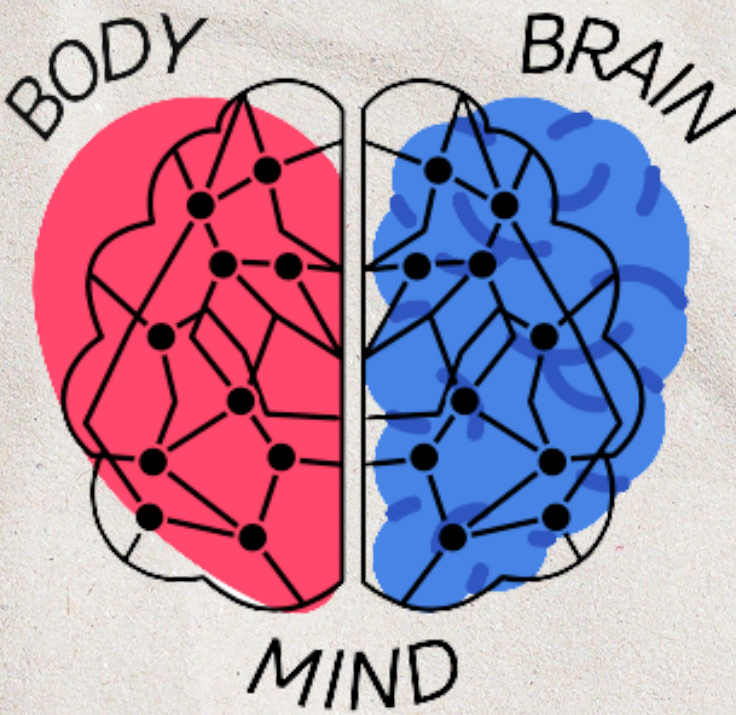
## MYTHS & FACTS

### MYTHS

- Groups of food are objectively "bad" or unhealthy
- Antidepressants always cure depression
- It only happens if you've experienced a sad situation
- You'll have to be on antidepressants for the rest of your life

### FACTS

- Mental health problems have nothing to do with being lazy and weak
- Depression comes in many forms
- Nearly 50% of people diagnosed with depression are also diagnosed with an anxiety disorder



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## WHAT RESEARCH IS SAYING

Depression is a disorder and there are different symptoms involved including an increased sadness and anxiety, loss of appetite, a depressed mood, and then losing pleasure in certain activities that you liked before. Depression can lead to deficiencies in neurotransmitters like serotonin and dopamine, and amino acids tryptophan and tyrosine. These have all shown to be helpful in treating many mood disorders. When you take tryptophan on an empty stomach it can be converted into serotonin, which can help with your sleep and calmness, which can restore your serotonin levels to lead to less depression that's formed by the serotonin deficiency. Many of the neurotransmitters in our brain are made from amino acids, when there is a lack of amino acids there isn't enough synthesis of the respective neurotransmitters which can be associated with low mood and aggression. It has also been observed that people with depression can have lower blood folate levels and these lower levels have been shown to be a strong predictor posing factor of poor outcome with antidepressant therapy.

In addition to consuming enough nutrients, it is important to eat an assorted selection of foods. Increasing amounts of research are being done on how the gut microbiome affects mental health, and the results suggest that the composition of bacteria types that exist in the intestine can affect overall mood and well-being. By adding color and diversity in your diet, you can impact your microbiome in a positive way; feeding the "good" bacteria and in turn reducing the "bad" bacteria. There are several ways to do this, but it involves a mix of optimal nutrition, sleep, active lifestyle choices, and stress management. While researchers agree that these are all crucial factors in promoting good mental health, many times additional treatment like therapy or pharmaceuticals are needed for more severe mental illnesses.

In conclusion, looking at how mental health and nutrition are related can open people's eyes to how depression can really impact one's health all around. It makes a lot of sense once you read more about it and look deeper about how everything is affecting something else. Once you're depressed sometimes your diet can get worse and then once your diet gets worse it can make you feel even worse, it seems like an ongoing occurrence if it's not stopped or helped.

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## HOW TO HOLISTICALLY PROMOTE MENTAL WELLBEING



### NUTRITION

- Probiotics and prebiotics
- Omega-3 fatty acids
- Vitamin D, vitamin B12, and folate
- Magnesium, zinc, calcium, and iron
- Limited added sugar and refined carbohydrate intake
- Increased fruits and vegetables
- More diversity in the diet
- Components of the Mediterranean diet and prototypic diets

### LIFESTYLE

- 150 minutes of moderate exercise per week
- 7-9 hours of sleep each night
- Cease smoking and unnecessary drug use
- Actively manage stress, try one stress-reducing technique per day