

# Boosting mental health through food

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Our brain is a vital organ that never sleeps. It is working 24x7 without taking a single moment of rest. This means that it needs a continuous supply of fuel, which means the food we eat. What we eat, how much we eat and how often do we eat has a direct impact on our brain and its functioning.



## Food and mental wellbeing

To understand this, let's consider our brain with a car and food that we eat with fuel of a car. If the fuel added is of good quality, the car will run well; in the same way, if we eat balanced meals with right amounts of nutrients, then our brain also works well.

Eating foods that contain vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants will not only nourish the brain but will also protect it from oxidative stress - the 'waste' or free radicals which can damage brain cells.

On the contrary, if the diet is loaded with refined processed foods, containing chemicals, additives, sugars, unhealthy fats, then over a period of time the brain starts getting rusted or its cells undergo oxidative stress, inflammation which becomes the main cause of reduced mental activity leading to poor mental health.

Research indicates that diet of poor quality can increase the risk of depression, low moods, poor memory, and learning skills.

Mediterranean and Japanese diets are considered ideal diets in terms of their impact on overall well-being. Lately these diets have been suggested to act as a treatment for depression, and in some cases, to prevent it.

## How to keep the brain healthy?

Keep refuelling the brain. As said earlier, since the brain works non-stop, it needs a continuous supply of fuel and that too in the form of high quality foods. Foods like, whole grains, nuts, seeds, raw veggies, fruits, and millets bring slow and steady increase in blood sugar and work as slow energy releasing capsules, that continue fuelling the brain.

☒ Keep yourself well hydrated at all times and in all seasons - Dehydration has a negative impact on brain health. It can cause confusion, poor concentration and slowing of thinking process. Fluids like water, infused water, are the best choices along with vegetables, lentils or chicken soups. Limit intake of tea, coffee and avoid carbonated beverages, processed fruit juices or fruit drinks.

- ❑ **Make your diet rich in protein** - Proteins help to support mental health. Amino acids, the building blocks of proteins, are the major ingredients for the synthesis of neurotransmitters that regulate various mental activities, including thinking and memory. Beans, nuts, eggs, fish, dairy and meat are some of the great sources of proteins.
- ❑ **Be wary of caffeine** - Caffeine acts as a stimulant for the brain but excess can be really harmful for the brain. Also some people react more strongly to caffeine than others. Hence to keep your brain happy and not overactive, limit your intake of carbonated beverages, sports drinks, and strong coffees which are loaded with caffeine.
- ❑ **Include healthy fats** - Healthy fats that are found in nuts, seeds, fish, avocados, and vegetable oils are good sources of Omega 3 and Omega 6 fatty acids that keep the brain working well. On the contrary, processed foods contain trans fats which are truly unhealthy as they have a damaging effect on brain cells.
- ❑ **Gut healthy means brain healthy** - All foods that keep your gut healthy, that is, the ones which are rich in pre and probiotics are good for brain health also. Fruits, veggies, yoghurt, fermented foods promote gut health and brain health too.
- ❑ **Mindful eating** - Pay attention to how you feel when you eat, and what you eat. This is one of the first steps in making sure you're getting well-balanced meals and snacks. Over-eating or binge eating or eating excess sugary foods when stressed or feeling low is a sign of some underlying mental problem.