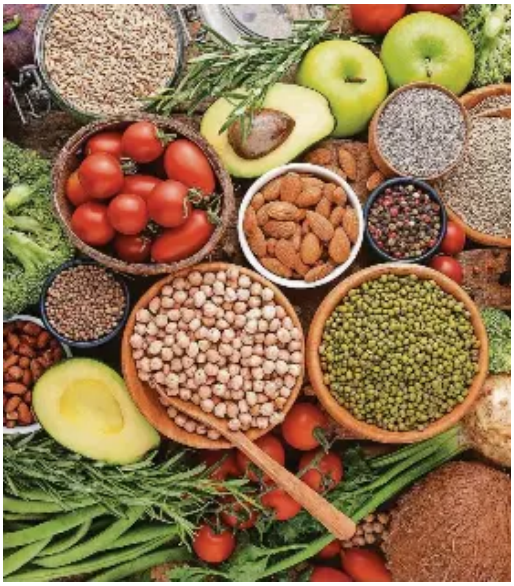
- Nutrition / Mental health

Eating healthy foods can improve your mood

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It may come as a surprise, but what we choose to eat can affect our mood, so it's important to think about what you're eating.



Fill up on antioxidants and minerals from fruits and vegetables, along with lean protein and healthy fats, and it will be easier to smile at life and your loved ones.

A 2017 analysis of studies published in the journal Psychiatry Research found that a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, lean protein, healthy fats and whole grains was associated with a decreased risk of depression.

On the flip side, comfort foods like sweets may seem like they make you feel better, but in reality, they lead to a sugar crash that can cause irritability. Limit your sugar and alcohol to lessen depression.

Here are some foods to add to your list of to-dos:

Probiotics. Preliminary evidence indicates a positive association between friendly gut bacteria (which probiotics promote) and a good mood. Add some kefir, kimchi, kombucha, sauerkraut, tempeh or yogurt.

Antioxidants. A 2012 study found that those with depression had lower levels of antioxidant vitamins A, C and E. Snack on almonds, berries, bell peppers, carrots, grapefruit, leafy greens, oranges and tea.

Tryptophan. This is an amino acid (found in turkey) that converts to serotonin, a brain chemical associated with improved mood. Serotonin is also associated with calmness, which is why some people think they relax, or even get sleepy, after eating a turkey dinner. Along with turkey, it's found in broccoli, chicken, eggs, leafy greens, mushrooms, pumpkin seeds and soybeans.

Magnesium. Studies have linked low magnesium intake to depression, especially among younger adults. Have plenty of almonds, black beans, brown rice, cashews, dark chocolate, pumpkin seeds and spinach.

Omega-3s. These good-for-you fatty acids help take the edge off and simply help us be more agreeable. They are
abundant in salmon, tuna, sardines, walnuts, flaxseeds and chia seeds.
Protein. Amino acids are the building blocks of protein, which plays a crucial role in brain function and mental health. The best sources of protein are meat, poultry, seafood, beans, chickpeas, eggs, Greek yogurt, legumes and nuts.
Q: How healthy is pumpkin?
A: Pumpkin is high in vitamin A, low in calories and high in fiber. There are 7 grams of fiber in one cup of canned pumpkin – more fiber than you get in two slices of whole-grain bread. That fiber makes you feel fuller for longer, which can help with weight loss. The
problem is with the added sugars and white flour in many pumpkin recipes. If you're going to make pumpkin bread, try substituting half the white flour with whole-wheat flour, and cut the sugar in half. Chances are you won't even notice the difference.
This column was previously released in 2023.
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