

EATING FOR A HEALTHY, HAPPY BRAIN

What you eat, as well as how much you exercise, can affect the way your brain functions. Here are some tips for fuelling your body and your mind for a healthier, happier future.



People who suffer from diabetes, heart disease or metabolic syndrome are more likely to experience higher levels of depressive symptoms than those without these conditions.

In fact, for those who are obese or have metabolic syndrome, the risk of depression is 30 to 60 per cent higher than for healthy people of the same age.

Consider this: depression is closely related to the level of inflammation in the body, and depressive symptoms are dramatically increased in people who eat less nutritious food and eat more non-nutritive food.

It makes sense, therefore, that nutritious foods that put the body in a less stressed state could promote a reduction in depressive symptoms.

So, what are these foods?

The Mediterranean way

The strongest evidence for reduced inflammation and lower depression risk is found in the Mediterranean pattern of eating. This involves lots of vegetables (around 400g a day), fruit (at least 3 pieces a day), legumes (450g a week), fish (350g a week), low fat dairy choices, nuts (1 handful a day), and olive oil (around 4 tablespoons a day, preferably uncooked).

We often get bogged down in the details of the tiny amounts of the wrong foods we eat - but high-fat high-sugar food can be enjoyed in moderation. As long as you choose nourishing foods - like those consumed in a Mediterranean diet - for 80 per cent of the time, then you'll be eating in a manner consistent with reduced rates of depression.

Use this checklist to gauge whether you are eating in a healthy

Mediterranean way. The aim is to achieve a score over 9, with each tick giving a score of 1.

Mediterranean Eating checklist

- 4 or more tablespoons (1 tablespoon = 135g) of olive oil/day (including that used in sauces, salads, meals eaten away from home, etc)
- 2 or more servings of vegetables/day
- 2 or more pieces of fruit/day
- 1 serving of red meat or sausages/day
- 1 serving of animal fat/day
- 1 cup (1 cup = 100 mL) of sugar-sweetened beverages/day
- 7 or more servings of red wine/week
- 60g or more of legumes/day
- 50g or more fish/day (350g/week)
- Fewer than 2 commercial pastries/week
- A serve of nuts/day
- 2 or more servings/week of a dish with a traditional sauce of tomatoes, garlic, onion and leeks sauteed in olive oil