



# Dietary Tips for Better Mental Health

Here are a few food-based approaches for improving mood.

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- ❑ Reduce processed and refined carbohydrates and eat more whole grains, fruits, and vegetables. These healthy carbohydrates are important for reducing anxiety, as they increase serotonin levels in the brain, which allows one to feel calmer. Examples include:
  - Apples, pears, blueberries, and strawberries
  - Brown rice, oats, whole wheat pasta, and beans
  - Broccoli, cauliflower, spinach, and cabbage
- ❑ Don't skip meals. As blood sugar levels fall, stress hormones are released to make emergency fuel for the body. This can lead to jitteriness, irritability, and feeling anxious. It is very important to maintain a stable blood sugar by eating a combination of lean protein, healthy fats, and complex carbohydrates every three to four hours. Some examples include:
  - A slice of whole grain bread with peanut butter
  - Low-fat yogurt with sliced apple and 1 Tbsp of walnuts
  - Whole grain pita bread with hummus and carrot sticks
  - Fish with brown rice and steamed veggies
- ❑ Increase your intake of omega-3 fatty acids, which are important for mental health.
  - Add fish 2 times per week to your diet and nuts and seeds everyday.
- ❑ Avoid caffeine. This alkaloid, found in coffee, tea, chocolate, many sodas and even certain medications, produces an effect similar to the stress response in our bodies. As little as two servings per day can cause jitteriness and worsen anxiety.
  - Substitute decaf for caffeinated coffee or tea.
  - Choose herbal teas that don't contain any caffeine.
  - Drink water and/or flavored water to stay hydrated.
- ❑ Reduce your alcohol intake. While small amounts of alcohol can be good for your heart, too much can aggravate depression and also deplete your body of important vitamins and minerals.
- ❑ Ensure adequate magnesium intake. Studies suggest that low magnesium can trigger anxiety and depressive symptoms.
  - Almonds, cashews, and other nuts are a great source of magnesium.
  - Green vegetables, such as soybeans and spinach, are also good sources of magnesium.
- ❑ Ask your clinician if should have your vitamin B12 and vitamin D levels checked. Deficiencies in these vitamins can increase the risk of depression and you might need to take a supplement. Otherwise:
  - Get 10 minutes of sun 2–3 times per week, exposing 25% of your skin without sunscreen to increase vitamin D levels.