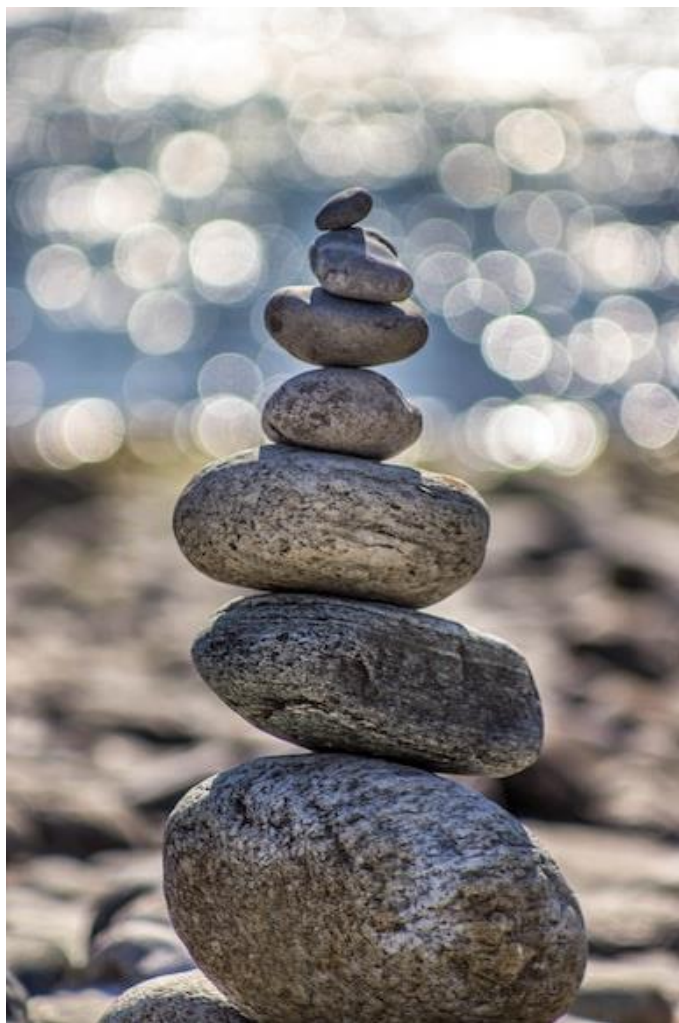


Foods to support mental health and wellbeing



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A diet packed full of diverse nutrient rich foods supports a positive impact on one's mood. A wide variety of vegetables, grains, legumes, nuts, seeds, fungi, sea vegetables and for those that wish, a small amount of food of animal origin will help support mental health and wellbeing. As well as ensuring we eat the best foods to support our brain, it is also important to know what to avoid.

WHAT TO AVOID

Ultra-processed foods (mass produced breads, cereals, pastries, sugary drinks, fried snacks) are linked to obesity, brain damage and a higher risk of Alzheimer's disease. Eating processed meats regularly has also been linked to lower memory scores, inflammation and accelerated cognitive decline. 1.2

Refined carbohydrates like white flour instead of wholemeal flour removes important nutrients that your body needs. It also gives these foods a higher glycemic load, meaning they are likely to raise your blood sugar levels quickly. Studies show that meals with a high glycemic load can impair memory. Research has found that a diet high in refined carbohydrates can over time be detrimental to various brain systems and overall brain health. 3.

Sugar studies have repeatedly shown clear links between high sugar diets and inflammation of the brain. Too much sugar can damage the hippocampus, impairing memory and learning. 4.

Artificial sweeteners are ubiquitous in food and beverages. Some research has found a possible connection between consuming artificially sweetened beverages and a greater risk of stroke and dementia. Aspartame, in particular, is made up of chemicals that can cross the blood-brain barrier and disrupt neurotransmitter production. In addition, one study found that consuming large amounts of aspartame (commonly found in sugar-free products) daily led to a higher rate of depression, more irritability and poorer mental performance. 5.

high omega 6 diet can promote inflammatory conditions in the brain

The key to protecting brain is to consume omega-6 and omega-3 fatty acids in a ratio of about 3:1. Research has discovered that a diet with a skewed ratio of omega-6 to omega 3 poses a greater risk of dementia, particularly Alzheimer's disease. ⁶ In the west the ratio is closer to 20:1.

Reduce omega 6 by limiting processed foods, especially deep fried foods, as manufacturers use high omega 6 oils like sunflower, corn and soya bean, in their products and increase omega 3 by adding hemp-seed, linseed, chia, walnuts and more green leaves to your diet.

heavy consumption of alcohol

Drinking alcohol in moderation is not connected to the same negative brain effects as heavy drinking and binge drinking. According to a study in the British Medical Journal, having more than 14 drinks a week can put you at a higher risk of dementia, while regularly drinking less than this amount did not come with the same risk. ⁷

FOODS TO SUPPORT MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING

Each of us is unique, requiring different nutrients in varying concentrations depending on age, sex, lifestyle, genetics, culture, and ethnicity. No doubt the brain needs a whole spectrum of nutrients but the complex and energy demanding brain has a few specialised needs.

Gut-supporting foods are key for mental wellness. The foods we eat affect the diversity, quality, and quantity of healthy gut microorganisms. The gut and brain are linked via the brain-gut axis so a healthy gut microbiome can positively or negatively affect mental health. Certain foods can increase beneficial bacteria. Foods containing probiotics supply healthy bacteria, and prebiotic, soluble fibre compounds feed beneficial bacteria in the gut. Insoluble fibre does not provide food for bacteria but supports good bowel health. **Fermented vegetables and yogurt** are good sources of probiotics, **asparagus, onions and garlic** are good sources of prebiotics and insoluble fibres are found in **whole grains, nuts and legumes**.

Energising foods are vital for the brain to work well. Our brains account for only about 2 per cent of our total body weight, yet consume at least 20 per cent of our daily energy supply, which comes from the food we eat. Sustained energy comes from a steady release of glucose from complex carbohydrates such as **whole -grains, legumes and vegetables especially corn, sweet potatoes, parsnips and beetroot** which help support alertness and balance mood. Complex carbohydrates also provide fibre to support the gut.

Antioxidant foods inhibit oxidative damage to the body's cells. Damage to brain cells can affect concentration, memory, mood, and emotions. Eating a colourful array of vegetables and fruits provides different types of antioxidant vitamins, minerals and phytonutrients to inhibit damage. Great winter foods are **cabbage, kale, beetroot, pumpkin**, and summer foods include **tomatoes, artichokes, blueberries & raspberries**.

Good mood foods make a significant contribution to fighting depression and mood disorders. Diverse nutrients play a role in positive thoughts and feelings but the following are of particular importance.

Vitamin C is important for its mood lifting effect. As we are unable to synthesize or store vitamin C we need it in the diet every day. Good sources include **broccoli, lemons, bell peppers & blackcurrants**.

Magnesium found in **green leaves, legumes & dark chocolate** helps promote positivity; low levels are linked to depression.

Tryptophan, the amino acid found in **hemp, sunflower seeds & eggs** is converted in the body to the soothing neurotransmitter serotonin.

Zinc found in **hemp seeds, mushrooms & lentils** increases serotonin uptake, low levels are associated with depression.

Good fat foods are essential for a healthy brain. Your brain is composed primarily of fat and Docosahexaenoic acid (DHA), an omega 3 fatty acid, makes up on average 20% of all fat in the brain.

DHA is an essential brain food that boosts neurotransmission, supports memory & learning, reduces brain inflammation, and assists in the growth of new brain cells.

DHA can be synthesised from the essential omega 3 fatty acid alpha linolenic acid found in -

linseed, hemp, chia, dandelion greens, purslane, broccoli

DHA can be found preformed in -

fatty fish like sardines, eggs from pastured chickens and algae oil.

FOODS OF ANIMAL ORIGIN

Toxins like mercury bio accumulate in large predatory fish like swordfish, tuna, merlin and shark. Mercury is a heavy metal that is incredibly toxic to the brain. It has all kinds of negative effects on your central nervous system, including the disruption of neurotransmitters and the stimulation of neurotoxins and can cause significant brain damage. 8 If you eat fish choose ones from lower down the food chain like sardines and herring.

Good quality protein plays a critical role in brain health helping neurotransmitters to function properly and optimising cognitive function. How an animal is reared affects the quality of its meat. Those reared in organic and biodynamic conditions have less stress, better diets, and produce nutritionally superior meat. Small amounts of meat produced this way can support mental wellbeing

Organic and free-range eggs are higher in vitamins, including vitamin D, and long-chain omega-3 fatty acids all critical for brain health

MAXIMISING NUTRITION

Soaking grains and legumes reduces levels of phytates, compounds that bind to minerals such as calcium, iron, and zinc, impairing absorption; and lectins, which can damage the gut wall.

Sprouting seeds makes valuable nutrients more accessible. Most seeds including grains and legumes but with the exception of kidney beans and the nightshade family can be sprouted .

Lacto-fermenting vegetables improve the bioavailability of nutrients and provide the gut with good bacteria. Fermented grains, legumes and dairy are also easier to digest.

RECIPES

Seasonal Harmony Bowls

SPRING

Red quinoa with asparagus, radishes & sprouted sunflower seeds

serves 2

100g red quinoa

12 asparagus spears

8 radish cut in half

bunch of chervil (or parsley) roughly chopped

handful sprouted sunflower seeds

3 tablespoons olive oil

1 tablespoon lemon juice

salt and black pepper

1 tablespoon hemp seeds

Cook the quinoa with a pinch of salt as per the instructions on the packet (generally cook the quinoa in 200 ml water for 15 mins or until all the water has absorbed).

Plunge the asparagus into boiling water for 1 minute, drain* and refresh with cold water, cut each spear into 3 pieces.

In a large bowl whisk together the olive oil & lemon juice, season well with salt and pepper.

Add the asparagus, radish, sunflower seeds and chervil (or parsley) to the bowl and very gently mix together.

Divide the quinoa between 2 bowls tip on the asparagus mix and top with hemp seeds.

*Drain through a sieve over a bowl to catch the water which you can save as a base for soup.

SUMMER

Black rice with summer vegetables and chilli-garlic hemp cream

serves 2

1 red onions, finely diced
2 cloves garlic, finely diced
1 red pepper, seeded, cut into cm dice
1 yellow pepper, seeded, cut into cm dice
4 tablespoons olive oil
tablespoon oregano leaves roughly chopped
250g cherry tomatoes cut in half
100g cooked black rice
1 courgette cut into match sticks,
10 black olives
handful mange tout cut finely lengthways
handful of torn basil leaves
2 tablespoons chopped parsley

chilli garlic hemp cream

125g shelled hemp seeds
110ml water
1 small chilli chopped
1 clove garlic chopped
1/2 teaspoon salt

To make the chilli-garlic hemp cream - blitz all the ingredients in food processor until smooth and creamy. Stores well in fridge 2/3 days.

Cook the onion, garlic & peppers in the olive oil for 5mins. Add the oregano & tomatoes. Cook for 5 mins. Add the black rice & courgettes and heat through. Stir in the mange tout, olives & basil.

Season well. Divide between 2 bowls and top with a dollop of hemp cream & chopped parsley.

AUTUMN

Roast pumpkin, broccoli and beetroot with hempseed pesto

serves 2

200g pumpkin cut into 2 cm pieces

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 tablespoon tamari

1 head of broccoli cut into florets

1 medium beetroot peeled & grated

1 clove garlic, very finely diced

small bunch of chives snipped

zest of a small lemon

4 handfuls of salad leaves

salt and black pepper

Hemp seed pesto

150 g shelled hemp seeds

2 cloves of garlic chopped

1 tsp salt

¼ tsp freshly ground black pepper

2 large handfuls basil leaves

200ml hemp oil

Make the pesto. Place the hemp, garlic, salt, pepper, basil and half the hemp oil in a blender and pulse a few times. Slowly add enough oil to mix to a soft paste. Store in a clean jar topped with a little oil for up to 2 weeks in the fridge.

Preheat oven to 210 C. Toss the pumpkin in 1 tablespoon olive oil. Season with salt and pepper. Place on a baking tray and roast until just golden and tender. Toss the broccoli florets in 1 tablespoon each olive oil & tamari add to the baking tray and roast the broccoli and pumpkin for a further 5 minutes then remove from the oven. Grate the beetroot and mix in the garlic, chives & lemon zest.

Divide the salad leaves between 2 bowls and add the beetroot.

Place the broccoli & butternut squash on top and finish with a generous swirl of hemp pesto.

WINTER

Puy lentils with cauliflower, yogurt & walnuts

serves 2

1 small cauliflower
1 tablespoon olive oil
1 teaspoon ground cumin
½ teaspoon salt
100g Puy lentils
2 bay leaves
twist of lemon peel
2 tablespoons olive oil
2 red onions finely chopped
1 clove garlic finely chopped
1 small chilli finely chopped
2 tablespoons thick yogurt
bunch parsley, roughly chopped
handful of walnuts roughly chopped

Preheat oven to 200C. Cut the cauliflower into florets. Slice the stems and place them all in a roasting tray. Gently massage with 1 tablespoon olive oil, cumin and salt. Roast for 10 -15 minutes until just soft and golden edged.

Cook the lentils with the bay leaves & twist of lemon peel in plenty of water until tender but do not overcook. Drain and tip into a bowl.

While the lentils are cooking gently cook the red onions and garlic in 2 tablespoons olive oil for 5 - 7 minutes. Stir in chilli and tip onto the drained lentils. Add the cauliflower and parsley and mix well. Divide between 2 bowls and top with yogurt & walnuts.

Hemp smoothie

serves 1

2 heaped tablespoon shelled hemp seeds
200 ml water
small knob ginger grated
small knob turmeric grated
handful of spinach
juice ½ lemon ^[1]_[SEP]
1 tsp raw cacao powder
teaspoon honey

Blitz all together until well blended. Pour into a glass and drink at once.

Moody muffins

220g wholemeal spelt flour
2 teaspoons baking powder
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon chia seeds
1 tablespoon chopped hazelnuts
25g 90% dark chocolate, grated
1 heaped tablespoon honey
175ml oat milk
2 teaspoons vanilla essence
5 tablespoons olive oil
2 eggs
juice and zest 1 lemon

Muffin tin lined with 12 muffin cases

Sift together the flour & baking powder and add the sugar. Mix the milk, vanilla essence, olive oil, egg, lemon juice and zest together and stir into the dry ingredients but be careful not to over mix.

Fill the muffin cases and bake in the middle of a medium hot 200°C oven for 15-20 minutes. (Gas 6 or 400°F)

Optimal human health comes from eating nutrient dense foods produced and processed in ways that maximise both the quality and quantity of nutrition.

Ecological health is integral to human health. Food grown using nature based, regenerative farming practices, manage sustainably the complex interactions between water, energy and food, thus protecting and enhancing the environment whilst producing nutritious food.

- buy organic food whenever you can
- eat seasonally
- source your food as locally as possible
- join a box scheme
- grow your own (garden, allotment or community garden)
- support food & farming campaigning organisations

References

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Daphne Lambert is an eco-nutritionist focusing on the interactions between agriculture, ecology and human nutrition.

Greencuisine Trust works to bring about a transformation in the way we eat. Through practical food experiences the Trust highlights the connections between our well-being, natural resources, the environment, and our planet.



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