

Food and mood

How can food affect mood?

Knowing what foods we should and shouldn't be eating can be really confusing, especially when it feels like the advice changes regularly. However, evidence suggests that as well as affecting our physical health, what we eat may also affect the way we feel.

Improving your diet may help to:

- improve your mood
- give you more energy
- help you think more clearly.

Eating regularly

If your blood sugar drops you might feel tired, irritable and depressed. Eating regularly and choosing foods that release energy slowly will help to keep your sugar levels steady.

Slow-release energy foods include: pasta, rice, oats, wholegrain bread and cereals, nuts and seeds.

Quick tips:

- Eating breakfast gets the day off to a good start.
- Instead of eating a large lunch and dinner, try eating smaller portions spaced out more regularly throughout the day.
- Avoid foods which make your blood sugar rise and fall rapidly, such as sweets, biscuits, sugary drinks, and alcohol.

Staying hydrated

If you don't drink enough fluid, you may find it difficult to concentrate or think clearly. You might also start to feel constipated (which puts no one in a good mood).

Quick tips:

- It's recommended that you drink between 6–8 glasses of fluid a day.
- Water is a cheap and healthy option.
- Tea, coffee, juices and smoothies all count towards your intake (but be aware that these may also contain caffeine or sugar).

Getting your 5 a day

Vegetables and fruit contain a lot of the minerals, vitamins and fibre we need to keep us physically and mentally healthy.

Eating a variety of different coloured fruits and vegetables every day means you'll get a good range of nutrients.

Quick tips:

- Fresh, frozen, tinned, dried and juiced (one glass) fruits and vegetables all count towards your 5 a day.
- As a general rule, one portion is about a handful, small bowl or a small glass.
- For ideas on how to get your 5 a day, visit [NHS Choices](#).

Looking after your gut

Sometimes your gut can reflect how you are feeling emotionally. If you're stressed or anxious this can make your gut slow down or speed up. For healthy digestion you need to have plenty of fibre, fluid and exercise regularly.

Healthy gut foods include: fruits, vegetables and wholegrains, beans, pulses, live yoghurt and other probiotics.

Quick tips:

- It might take your gut time to get used to a new eating pattern, so make changes slowly to give yourself time to adjust.
- If you're feeling stressed and you think it is affecting your gut, try some [relaxation techniques](#) or breathing exercises.

Getting enough protein

Protein contains amino acids, which make up the chemicals your brain needs to regulate your thoughts and feelings. It also helps keep you feeling fuller for longer.

Protein is in: lean meat, fish, eggs, cheese, legumes (peas, beans and lentils), soya products, nuts and seeds.

Quick tip:

Whatever your diet, why not do some research into other foods that contain protein, and find something new to try? For ideas on healthy recipes, visit [NHS Choices](#).

Managing caffeine

Caffeine is a stimulant, which means it will give you a quick burst of energy, but then may make you feel anxious and depressed, disturb your sleep (especially if you have it before bed), or give you withdrawal symptoms if you stop suddenly.

Caffeine is in: tea, coffee, chocolate, cola and other manufactured energy drinks.

Quick tips:

- If you drink tea, coffee or cola, try switching to decaffeinated versions.
- You might feel noticeably better quite quickly if you drink less caffeine or avoid it altogether.

Eating the right fats

Your brain needs fatty acids (such as omega-3 and -6) to keep it working well. So rather than avoiding all fats, it's important to eat the right ones.

Healthy fats are found in: oily fish, poultry, nuts (especially walnuts and almonds), olive and sunflower oils, seeds (such as sunflower and pumpkin), avocados, milk, yoghurt, cheese and eggs.

Quick tip:

- Try to avoid anything which lists 'trans fats' or 'partially hydrogenated oils' in the list of ingredients (such as some shop-bought cakes and biscuits). They can be tempting when you're feeling low, but this kind of fat isn't good for your mood or your physical health in the long run.

anaging medication

Some foods can be dangerous to eat if you're taking certain medications. For example:

- **If you're taking an MAOI** (a kind of [antidepressant](#)) you should avoid eating anything which has been fermented, spoiled pickled, smoked, cured, hung, dried or matured. This is because when food is exposed to the air, a substance called tyramine rises to high levels, and the interaction between tyramine and the MAOI can be very dangerous. You may also want to avoid foods and drinks containing caffeine such as chocolate, tea and coffee as these can also contain tyramine.
- **If you're taking [lithium](#)**, you will need to be very careful about the amount of salty foods and liquid in your diet. This is because suddenly changing the amount of salt and fluid in your body can affect your lithium level, and if your lithium level becomes too high it can be very dangerous.
- **If you're taking an anti-anxiety medication** such as [buspirone](#) you may need to avoid drinking grapefruit juice or eating grapefruit. This is because grapefruit can affect the way that enzymes break down medications, which can cause too much or too little of the drug to be absorbed in to your blood.

Before prescribing you any medication, your doctor should fully explain any possible risks or side effects, so you can make an informed decision. If you are currently taking medication and are unsure or worried about what foods and drinks to avoid, it might help to speak to your GP or ask at your local pharmacy. (See our pages on [psychiatric medications](#) for more information.)

For more information how to avoid interactions between food, drink and medication, see the American [Food and Drug Administration information on drug and food interactions](#).

For more information about healthy eating and how food can affect your mood, visit [the British Dietetic Association](#) website to read their range of food fact sheets.