



# Food for the brain

Mental health may seem like it's all about thoughts and feelings, but your diet plays a role in how your brain functions. Your food choices may contribute to declining mental health. On the flip side, a quality diet may help manage mental health struggles. For optimal mental health, what you eat matters.



## GOOD NUTRITION HELPS

A wealth of research supports the benefits of a whole-food, plant-based diet for optimal health. This applies to mental health, too. When you choose a plant-based diet, your brain works at its best. A quality diet:

- Provides necessary nutrients for normal brain function
- Supports the health of the gut microbiome, which connects to the brain and influences mood
- Promotes resilience to stress
- Provides consistent energy to feel alert and productive
- Supplies essential nutrients to produce hormones and neurotransmitters that influence how you feel

## POOR NUTRITION CAN HURT

The average Western diet is high in saturated fats, added sugars, and processed foods. These foods negatively impact your health and, over time, increase your risk of chronic diseases, including mental health conditions. Too much poor-quality food and too little nutritious food is bad for your brain. Poor diet:

- Promotes a chronic inflammatory state in the body
- Contributes to oxidative stress in the brain
- Worsens mood disorders
- Disrupts the balance of mood-boosting hormones
- Increases appetite and food cravings



## GOOD NUTRITION FOR YOUR BRAIN

In a plant-based diet, fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, seeds, beans, and lentils should form the base of your meals. Lean animal foods such as chicken, fish, eggs, and low-fat dairy provide healthy protein in small portions.

### Try these tips to eat well for your brain:

- Begin your day with a high-fiber bowl of oatmeal or other whole grain with fruit.
- Snack on raw vegetables, fruit, or a small handful of nuts or seeds.
- Choose healthy oils when cooking, such as olive and avocado oil.
- Limit sugary beverages and choose plain or flavored water most often.
- Add dark leafy greens to salads, soups, smoothies, and entrees for a boost of nutrients.