

Eating for your Mental Health during the Winter Season

Comfort food is in abundance this time of year. So, make sure you're getting the right nutritional intake this winter season to boost your overall wellbeing. Nourishing our bodies through food is human kind's oldest form of medicine, and a healthy diet can contribute to a healthy mind. Did you know that there are certain types of food that have been proven to increase brain function, memory and a general sense of wellbeing whilst also reducing our stress and anxiety? Here are some foods that will keep you feeling energised whilst nourishing your mental health and sense of wellbeing.

OILY FISH

Fish oil is the ultimate brain food. Some oily fish contain DHA, an Omega-3 fatty acid that helps improve long and short term memory and reduce levels of anxiety. Types of oily fish include salmon, prawns and trout.

Tip: If you don't eat fish, try fish oil supplements. You can get them from your local pharmacy or supermarket.

WHOLEGRAINS (CARBS)

According to studies, wholegrains are a rich source of tryptophan, an amino acid that helps to produce serotonin (aka, the 'feel good hormone').

Serotonin assists in calming the mind, improving your mood and maintaining a steady sleep cycle.

Types of wholegrains include barley, pasta, crackers, oatmeal and for a treat, popcorn.

Tip: Try enriching your diet and mixing up the type of carbs you consume by switching from white bread to seeded or wholegrain.

FERMENTED FOODS

Fermented foods, like kimchi, sauerkraut, kefir, tempeh, kombucha, and yogurt, can give your body a dose of healthy probiotics, which are live microorganisms crucial to gut and healthy digestion.

Probiotics cause significant improvements to the digestive system and to general gut health, which researchers have linked with our mood, behaviour, energy levels, weight, food cravings, hormone balance, and overall wellness.

These foods may also reduce the risk of heart disease and aid digestion, immunity, and weight loss. It is suggested we ingest at least 2 servings of fermented food per day.

Tip: Some other options to ingest probiotics include products such as taking inner health plus (at your local pharmacy) or drinking Yakult, which you can get at your local supermarket.

BEANS

Beans and legumes such as chickpeas, lentils and kidney beans are beneficial to multiple functions of the body. Known for being the musical fruit, they are rich in fibre, antioxidants and vitamins. Beans stimulate your digestive system and contain thiamine, a vitamin essential to the production of acetylcholine, the neurotransmitter essential for memory.

Tip: Try snacking on hummus in between meals. Made from chickpeas, it will keep you fuller for longer and is easy and accessible. You'll find it near the dairy section of your supermarket.



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BERRIES

Berries such as strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, blackberries, mulberries and goji berries are packed with antioxidants. Antioxidants contribute to cell repair, a function that combats cell degeneration caused by free radicals in the human body.

Free radicals are found in pollutants such as cigarette smoke and other nasties and cause damage to nerve cells in the brain that contribute to conditions such as Parkinson's and Alzheimer's Disease.

Antioxidants have also been found to assist in improving symptoms associated with anxiety and depression.

Also, berries contain a compound called polyphenols, which have been found to improve memory, concentration and attention span. Lastly, as if we needed more reasons to love antioxidants, studies demonstrate that they reduce the visible signs of ageing.

Tip: If you have a sweet tooth, try dark chocolate covered goji, acai and blueberries. Dark chocolate is also a strong source of antioxidants.

FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

It's highly likely you already know that fruits and vegetables have a great deal of nutritional value for your body, but they also make a major positive contribution to mental health.

Over the past few decades, researchers have found compelling evidence that demonstrate that people who eat fruits and vegetables have fewer symptoms of depression, stress, and overall negativity.

They also contain vitamins and nutrients essential for helping us deal with stress. Fruits and vegetables are full of complex carbohydrates that are imperative for optimal brain health.

Complex carbohydrates behave in the opposite way to sugar. Just as sugar will cause your mood and energy levels to temporarily peak then dip, complex carbs can perk up your mood progressively over time, promoting more sustainable wellbeing.

A comparative study found that people who regularly consumed daily servings of leafy greens such as spinach, kale and broccoli had a slower rate of cognitive decline than those who didn't include significant portions of green vegetables.

Tip: Try to include five different coloured foods on your dinner plate. This will diversify the types of nutrients you are feeding your body and brain.

Converge offers 24-hour, 7 day a week counselling support. The great thing is, because we offer phone and videoconferencing facilities, we can provide that support for you, even if you're at home.

To access the EAP services, simply call **1300 687 327** to make a time to speak with one of our team.



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