

LIFESTYLE



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Timely Information for Personal Success

Can We Control Mental illness with Diet?

By Lorraine A. Winsey

A person's food intake affects mood, behavior, and brain function. A hungry person may feel irritable and restless, whereas a person who has just eaten a meal may feel calm and satisfied. However, what is less common is the understanding that some foods can have a lasting influence on mood and mental well-being because of the impact they have on the structure and functioning of the brain.

Diet Rarely Considered in Treatment

For mental health patients, diet is rarely, if ever, considered an issue in their treatment, regardless of whether the subject is a depressed individual seeking initial help from their doctor or a hospital inpatient receiving treatment for schizophrenia. Parents of children with behavioral problems experience this most acutely. Any suggestion by a parent that diet may be one culprit in their child's poor behavior is more often than not dismissed.

Another example involves some of the newer anti-psychotic medications that stimulate significant weight gain by many patients who take them. A patient's doctor may order tests to get a baseline of his or her glucose or cholesterol levels, but this is only for the purpose of monitoring what the drug is doing to those levels. Usually the doctor and patient do not discuss diet.

What has been perhaps the most interesting – but hardly the most surprising – outcome of nutrition and mental health studies has been the realization that the varieties of nutrients that appear to have a positive effect on brain health are the same nutrients that are known to have benefits for physical health.

Controlling Mental Illness?

So, can a good diet control mental illness? It certainly cannot cure a person who has bipolar disease, but studies demonstrate that it can help to prevent a person from having multiple episodes. Will schizophrenia go away if you eat an apple a day? Hardly. But a good diet can help keep your mind and body in a stabilized state. Unfortunately,

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How Depression Makes the World Seem Gray

Depression is often referred to as “the blues.” New research suggests it should actually be called “the grays.”

To someone who is depressed, the world can seem flat or dull. This was long thought to be purely psychological. It turns out, however, that depression may actually affect how the eyes function — altering visual perception in a way that actually makes the world look gray, according to a recent issue of the *Harvard Mental Health Letter*.

In an intriguing study, researchers placed electrodes near volunteers' eyes as they viewed a series of checkerboard patterns

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Healthy Recipe: Egg & Salmon Sandwich

INGREDIENTS:

- 1/2 teaspoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 tablespoon finely chopped red onion
- 2 large egg whites, beaten
- 1 ounce smoked salmon
- 1 slice tomato



- 1 whole-wheat English muffin, split and toasted
- 1/2 teaspoon capers, rinsed and chopped (optional)
- Pinch of salt

Nutrition bonus:
Good source of Omega-3s.

DIRECTIONS:

① Heat oil in small non-stick skillet over medium heat. Add onion and cook, stir until it softens, about 1 minute. Add egg whites, salt and capers (if using) and cook. Stir constantly, until whites are set, about 30 seconds. ② To make the sandwich, layer the egg whites, salmon and tomato on English muffin.

NUTRITIONAL INFORMATION:

- Calories per serving: 214
- Carbohydrates: 25 g.
- Protein: 19 g.
- Sodium: 670 mg.
- Fat: 5 g.
- Saturated fat: 1 g.
- Fiber: 3 g.

Remember, for confidential assistance call:



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Understanding the 'Gut-Brain' Connection

Many people experience gastrointestinal symptoms such as diarrhea, gas, cramps, heartburn, bloating, and nausea that disrupt their lifestyle. The good news is that these ailments frequently aren't caused by an illness. Rather, they are often triggered by stress or anxiety, according to the *Sensitive Gut* special health report.

There is a two-way communication system between the gut and the brain that explains why you stop eating when you're full (sensory neurons let your brain know that your stomach is distended), or conversely, why anxiety over this morning's exam ruined your appetite (the stress activated your "fight or flight" sympathetic nervous system).

This doesn't mean that GI illnesses such as reflux, irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), constipation, and others are imagined! But the GI tract is particularly sensitive to emotion, often resulting in pain and discomfort.

The gut/brain connection is particularly strong in persons with IBS. For example, stress is known to stimulate colon spasms in people with IBS. Stress reduction, relaxation training, and counseling have all helped relieve IBS symptoms in some people. ❖

Source: *Harvard Health Publications.*

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mental health has often been neglected by those working on food policy. If we don't address this matter, we may lose the means to prevent much diet-related ill health.

Good nutrition should be a part of our daily routine, just like brushing our teeth each morning. Take the time to eat well and you will reap the rewards. ❖

Lorraine A. Winsey, RN, BSN, is manager of inpatient psychiatry at Bryn Mawr Hospital. Additional source: *Main Line Health* (www.mainlinehealth.org). **Editor's note:** The articles in this insert are for educational purposes *only*, and should *not* be considered as a substitute for medical diagnosis or treatment. Moreover, the views presented in this publication are those of the authors *only*, and not that of Employee Assistance Report or Lifestyle TIPS®.

How Depression Makes the World Seem Gray

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with varying degrees of black-and-white contrast. The electrodes recorded electrical responses in the retina, the part of the eye that reacts to different wavelengths of light and then transmits electrical signals along the optic nerve. The brain then interprets these electrical signals as color, shape, and contrast.

Volunteers with major depression were much less able to detect differences in black-and-white contrasts on the checkerboards than those who weren't depressed. The most severely depressed volunteers also registered the lowest levels of activity in the retina.

The study suggests that impaired contrast perception may explain why the world seems gray when people are depressed. However, future research is necessary to replicate the findings, and to determine what other factors may contribute. ❖

Source: *Harvard Health Publications* (www.health.harvard.edu), the publishing division of Harvard Medical School.