

# WHAT SHOULD I EAT FOR MENTAL HEALTH?!

Discover how food can affect your mood and cognitive capacity.

## FIRST, WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?

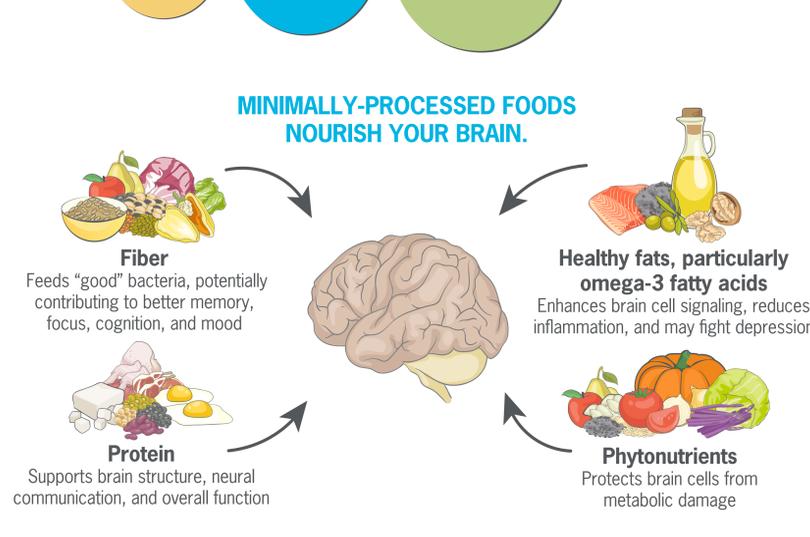
When you're mentally and emotionally healthy, you have the ability to...

- Learn, remember, and think clearly
- Cope with change, setbacks, and uncertainty
- Form and maintain supportive relationships
- Solve problems and make decisions
- Regulate emotions and express them in a healthy manner
- Tap into creativity and awareness—and grow from these insights

## USE THESE STEPS TO IMPROVE HOW YOU THINK AND FEEL

### 1 FOCUS ON YOUR OVERALL DIETARY PATTERN.

Consistently eating a wide variety of minimally-processed foods influences mental and emotional health much more than consuming any specific nutrient or superfood.



### TO EAT FOR MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH, USE A CONTINUUM APPROACH.

EAT MORE	EAT SOME	EAT LESS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Colorful fruits and veggies</li> <li>Fatty fish and eggs</li> <li>Whole grains</li> <li>Legumes</li> <li>Potatoes and sweet potatoes</li> <li>Tofu and tempeh</li> <li>Lean meat and poultry, insects</li> <li>Greek yogurt and cottage cheese (plain, cultured)</li> <li>Nuts, seeds, and olives</li> <li>EVOO, avocado, or walnut oils</li> <li>Water, plain (still, sparkling)</li> <li>Coffee, plain</li> <li>Tea, plain (especially green, white, and black)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uncultured cottage cheese</li> <li>Medium-lean meats</li> <li>Meat jerky</li> <li>Refined lean meat (e.g. sausage)</li> <li>Protein powder</li> <li>Refined grains (e.g. white rice, white bread, instant oats)</li> <li>Flavored yogurt</li> <li>Dark chocolate</li> <li>Cheese, fresh</li> <li>Milk</li> <li>Vegetable juices</li> <li>Unsweetened plant milks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sweets</li> <li>Chips</li> <li>Fried foods</li> <li>Processed deli meats</li> <li>High-fat meats</li> <li>Plant-based meats</li> <li>Sugar</li> <li>Margarine and butter</li> <li>Processed cheese</li> <li>Hydrogenated oils and trans fats</li> <li>Fat rich foods with 10+ g sugar</li> <li>Soda</li> <li>Sweetened plant milks</li> <li>Heavily sweetened /creamed coffee / tea</li> </ul>

### WHAT ABOUT SUPPLEMENTS?

A wide range of substances may boost the effects of a healthy dietary pattern, especially if you are deficient. Make sure to talk to your doctor about the pros and cons.



### 2 DON'T TRY TO BE PERFECT.

As dietary restriction goes up, so can emotional-health related problems like food obsession, anxiety, and disordered eating.



### HERE'S HOW TO FIND YOUR NUTRITIONAL SWEET SPOT.

If you're currently here → Try aiming here



### 3 PAY ATTENTION TO HOW AND WHERE YOU EAT.

Your environment, eating companions, and thoughts can affect your mental wellbeing as powerfully as what's on your plate.

**Reduce anxiety with a leisurely eating pace.**

- Breathe deeply before digging in
- Slow down and savor what you're eating
- Eat in a calm, uplifting environment
- Reduce distractions that trigger anger, anxiety, sadness, and tension

**Explore positive social connections.**

- Dine with people who help you laugh, relax, and feel loved
- Consider sharing meals with others, for example, by cooking for a friend
- Connect with your culture by trying your family's recipes and heritage cuisine

**Talk to yourself as you would talk to a dear friend.**

- Be kind and compassionate with yourself
- Consider what helps you truly enjoy this experience
- Express gratitude or appreciation in a way that suits you, for example by saying grace or noticing abundance

### 4 CONDUCT EXPERIMENTS TO DISCOVER WHAT WORKS BEST FOR YOU.

No one piece of guidance benefits all people in all situations all the time.

#### FOR SOME PEOPLE...

Family dinner generates more stress than happiness.

Highly-refined foods (in moderation) lift mood and help them cope.

Focusing too much on whole foods triggers anxiety.

To create an approach that works for YOU, experiment with a range of options.

#### STEP 1. PICK ONE EXPERIMENT FROM THE CHART BELOW.

- Eat one extra veggie serving a day.
- Eat slowly, seeing how long you can make the meal last.
- Create a serene dining experience.
- Eat with people who make you laugh.
- Ditch screens and other distractions.
- Take a new supplement.
- Eat or enjoy a drink outside.
- Eat like you're doing a wine tasting: sniff and savor.
- Before digging in, ask yourself, "What do I really, really want right now?"
- Set the table and sit to eat. Use those nice dishes.
- Eat one extra serving of protein per day.
- Take a deep breath and consciously relax your whole body between bites.
- Put on your favorite music.
- Try a new recipe and congratulate yourself no matter how it turns out.
- Teach someone else (like your kid) a cooking skill. Have fun while you do it.
- Enjoy a small amount of something high quality and/or special.
- Consider your culture's food traditions, and try a dish that honors your family's background.
- Pick up a hobby during the times you'd normally eat emotionally or from stress.
- Try eating only when you're physically hungry.
- Try the opposite of what you normally do.

**Don't see an experiment for you?** Design your own challenge based on your food preferences, lifestyle, and values.

#### STEP 2: AFTER TRYING SOMETHING NEW FOR SEVERAL DAYS, CONSIDER THESE QUESTIONS.



If you feel better, consider keeping that practice in place. If worse, it may not be for you.

#### STEP 3: KEEP TRACK OF YOUR RESULTS.

Keep experimenting—adding some strategies, ditching others—until you create a personalized nutritional approach.

Use the table below to keep notes.

Experiments	Results
1. _____	1. _____
2. _____	2. _____
3. _____	3. _____