

Can Food Relieve Anxiety and Depression Better than Meds or Therapy?

If you are one of the 109 million Americans being treated for anxiety, depression, or PTSD, with a lot of hard work, you may eventually feel a measure of agency in the healing process. Despite your newfound empowerment, it will still be a difficult path, often leaving you feeling like a bumper car, bouncing off one unexpected jolt to the next, with many cycles of relapse and recovery. You may begin to ask, "Is there a more holistic approach to treatment?" We know sleep plays a vital role, but can food play as important a role in improving mental health? And if so, why isn't the link between food and mental health given a higher priority? It is obvious that patients, doctors, and therapists are all trying to guide the treatment boat on the same sea of misinformation, so the absence of empirical data regarding food's role does not lie with the front-line practitioners. Rather, there may be an effort afoot to suppress the impact diet and nutrition, i.e., nutritional psychology, can play in recovery, but by whom? Big pharma? The medical industry?

What are the Most Common Symptoms of Anxiety, Depression, or PTSD?

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), there are 40 million adults in the U.S., or about 18% of the population, who struggle with anxiety and depression. PTSD, the kissing cousin to anxiety, differs only in the way it occurs, typically in association with a traumatic event. Anxiety, on the other hand, is more likely to occur over a longer period and can encompass a wider range of considerations. Women, interestingly, suffer from mental health issues twice as much as men. To make matters worse, according to WHO, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a nearly 30% increase in this disorder worldwide.

Although there are various anxiety disorders that include phobias, social or general disconnect, and panic, they generally fall under two categories: major depressive disorder, which lasts for weeks, or persistent depressive disorder, which occurs almost daily for at least two years. Both types are categorized under the heading of mental illness. Symptoms include tremors, increased heart rate, chest tightness, rapid breathing, and racing thoughts. More advanced signs include excessive worry, restlessness, fatigue, difficulty concentrating, irritability, muscle tension, sleep disturbances, and social discomfort.

There are significant differences in those who report struggling with mental health problems. Whites make up 61% of the sufferers, Hispanics 18%, African Americans 13%, and Asians 6%, according to the American Psychiatric Association. It is currently unknown how much of these disparities are due to a lack of access to mental health, poor reporting, bias in the healthcare system, or cultural resistance among those affected.

Does Poor Nutrition Play a Role in the Downward Spiral?

According to a peer-reviewed journal, experts confirm that diet has a major impact on mental health and well-being. These experts are cautious because of the scant body of research linking these two factors. But you and I already know that. We know that poor nutrition plays a role in our mood and can lead to anxiety, fear, or even depression. We can also feel the improvement in our bodies when we feel lighter from a diet of healthy vegetables.

The challenge is that while food can affect how you feel, the way you feel can also affect the foods you choose. And if you are in a state where your mind is not getting the right information or the right support, you'll feel trapped in a negative feedback loop. In fact, small-scale research has shown that stressed eaters are more likely to reach for sweet, high-fat, high-energy foods than unstressed or unemotional eaters. People who suffer from ADP soothe themselves in a variety of non-uplifting ways. Some turn to drugs, others to alcohol, but those who turn to food have a special challenge because they must indulge in their vice several times a day. Each of these indulgences can

feel like a relapse risk, and shame triggers a cascade of other emotions like irritability, resignation, or despair. Eating relapse can even trigger a range of physical feelings of anxiety, such as headaches, muscle tension, nausea, or dizziness.

Why Don't Doctors Consider Food When Treating ADP?

Many doctors do consider food when treating ADP, specifically in the context of eating disorders such as binge eating or anorexia. There are strong relationships between binge eating disorders and mental health self-soothing. What can go wrong is when sufferers categorize problems with eating as a character flaw that only serves to perpetuate the damage and slow recovery. If this is the case, a chain analysis can help you figure out what conditions, such as lack of money, lack of time, unhealthy work/home environments, and certainly your state of mind, are playing a role in your mental hell.

It's worth pointing out again that there simply are not many peer-reviewed studies linking nutritional psychotherapy to mental health treatment. One would imagine that if there were evidence that food choices were equivalent or even better than medications in treating mental health, the profit-driven companies in our pharmaceutical and healthcare systems would have little motivation to bring this to the forefront.

What are the Negative Effects of Poor Nutrition on Society?

A 2010 study published in the American Journal of Psychiatry examined the dietary habits of 1,000 women between the ages of 20 and 93. The women who ate a traditional diet of vegetables, fruits, fish, meat, and whole grains suffered less depression. In contrast, those who ate a Western diet that included more sugar, grains, fried and processed foods lacking vitamins and minerals, fats, and fiber had greater problems with their mood and were more prone to anxiety.

Poor body image or low self-esteem also leads to a variety of coping strategies such as retail therapy, fad dieting, lack of exercise, and unhealthy relationships. Prominent psychologist Shirley W. Kaplan of the American Nutrition Association points out that poor nutrition impairs brain function, leading to foggy thinking, mood swings, and confusion.

How do the Right Foods Affect Brain Health?

In reality, there are a number of foods that can have a positive impact on mood, organs, and brain health, and they are well known. The key to a brain-healthy diet is to reduce foods that promote inflammation and include foods that specifically fight inflammation in the body and brain. Here are some examples:

- Good carbohydrates like sweet potatoes and oatmeal stabilize blood sugar levels, are filling, and provide many nutrients.
- Organic turkey and chicken breast are cheaper and healthier options than fast food.
- Olive oil and pasture-raised butter can help reduce belly fat and the risk of heart attacks and contain anti-cancer properties.
- Ginger, a powerful antioxidant, antibacterial, anti-inflammatory, and disease-fighting ingredient, is an important part of your meals.
- The flavonoids found in berries help reduce inflammation, including brain inflammation.
- Canned foods labeled BPA-free, a chemical additive, can play a role in a healthy diet.
- Brazil nuts, almonds, and walnut mixes with rosemary make for a nice healthy snack option when prepared at home.
- Green tea has a rich history as a source of antioxidants, which are necessary to reduce inflammation.
- Magnesium-rich foods like spinach, Swiss chard, nuts, seeds, asparagus, and whole grains can have a positive impact on anxiety.
- Foods rich in zinc, such as oysters, cashews, liver, beef, and

- Habits to adopt outside of diet include drinking plenty of water, getting enough sleep, and making sure you eat adequate portions.

"What are the Social Systems that Work Against Brain Health?"

A recent quote from a pharmaceutical industry lobbyist suggests that blaming the pharmaceutical industry alone for the deficiencies in mental health care would be inaccurate and reckless. The problem of mental health treatment is complex and has vexed governments and health organizations worldwide for decades. However, some argue that lobbyists may have influenced the perception of the issue, especially considering the presence of industry insiders in top administration positions during the Trump presidency. This lack of serious action against the pharmaceutical industry led to a significant increase in prescription drug spending in 2018, with certain commonly prescribed drugs experiencing substantial price hikes. Additionally, these drug companies benefit from publicly funded research. Americans spend a substantial amount on mental health and substance abuse treatment each year, indicating the significant impact of these issues on society.

Are There Diets that are Best for Brain Health

Regarding diets for brain health, certain diet plans that focus on reducing inflammation, such as the Mediterranean diet, have been considered beneficial for individuals with serious mental illnesses like schizophrenia, major depressive disorder, and bipolar disorder. These conditions can worsen with elevated levels of inflammation, and diets rich in brain health foods have been associated with potentially reducing inflammation and improving overall health.

How Can Break Free from the Superstructure of Toxic Foods

To break free from the influence of toxic foods, it is essential to recognize the unconscious patterns of consumption in modern lifestyles. Fewer people are preparing meals and eating together with their families, which can negatively impact mental health. Research suggests that eating in a social setting and sharing meals fosters a sense of well-being and provides a support system. Building awareness around meal preparation and being mindful of the food choices made for loved ones can contribute to healthier eating habits.

What are Some Lifestyle Recommendations

Changing one's lifestyle to impact mental health positively involves various aspects. Recommendations include regular exercise, sufficient sleep, following a low-inflammatory diet, engaging in mental activity, and participating in social interactions. Incorporating techniques like deep breathing during panic attacks or depression, practicing mindfulness to acknowledge one's current state without judgment, and accepting that some feelings and sensations may not be changed are also beneficial. Adopting new habits like refraining from fad diets, avoiding skipping meals, practicing mindfulness, staying hydrated, trying yoga, increasing fiber intake, decluttering the kitchen, exercising regularly, eating breakfast daily, getting enough sleep, maintaining a food and mood diary, seeking support, increasing protein intake, planning meals, and avoiding alcohol, caffeine, overlooked food sensitivities, and procrastination can contribute to a healthier lifestyle.

The cost of brain-healthy eating depends on how one measures food quantity versus nutrient intake. While poor meals may seem less expensive due to factors like storage, transportation, and marketing, the actual cost difference is not significant. A healthy meal plan may incur an additional expense annually for individuals and families. However, these numbers do not account for the potential cost savings in terms of reduced medical care and improved well-being.

The effects of food psychotherapy on the brain can be felt relatively quickly. The foods we consume directly impact the brain and mood, as neurotransmitters like serotonin, which regulate sleep, appetite, mood, and pain, are

primarily produced in the gut. The interaction between nerve cells and neurons in the gut influences beneficial bacteria in the gastric microbiome, potentially leading to noticeable effects on mood, sleep, and mental agility.

Is Brain-Healthy Eating Costly

When measuring success in mental health improvement, it should not solely rely on how one feels. It's important to observe an increase in personal control over events, people, concentration, pain, and overall well-being. Progress can be seen in having more control over one's life, engaging in activities that were previously challenging, experiencing decreased joint pain and brain fog, increased emotional resilience, improved cognitive abilities, and reduced emotional heaviness. The healing process can be structured into phases, including documenting and radical acceptance, self-education and practice, and consistent self-love and forgiveness.

Improving mental health involves a holistic approach, and it is advisable to consult with a doctor if symptoms of anxiety and depression persist. While medication and therapy may be recommended, considering one's own diet and creating a nutrition plan that supports anti-inflammation and overall well-being can also be beneficial.