

# Foods to Boost Your Mood

While often overlooked, diet can have a big impact on our mood and mental wellness. This is because our brains and our stomachs are connected through our nervous system, chemicals, gut microbes, and other complex processes. What you eat gives your body the “building blocks” it needs to help you feel at your best. Use this handout for general information on foods that may benefit your mental wellness.

## Mood-boosting vitamins & nutrients:

**Protein:** Broken down by the body to make mood-boosting neurotransmitters, fuel energy levels, and build/repair cells.

**B vitamins:** Help maintain healthy cells and tissues, impact energy production, and help produce neurotransmitters like norepinephrine, serotonin, and dopamine.

**Magnesium:** Helps our brains function optimally, regulates our mood, and helps our muscles relax.

**Antioxidants:** Neutralizes the free radicals (unstable molecules) that can cause harmful inflammation in the body. Also repairs our DNA and maintains healthy cells.

**Healthy fats:** Help the body absorb the nutrients we consume and supplies energy to the brain and body.

**Fiber:** Promotes digestive process and contributes to healthy bacteria in your gut. These bacteria help lower inflammation and boost immunity, among other benefits.




**Prebiotics:** A type of fermentable plant fiber that “feeds” the “good” bacteria living in your gut.








**Probiotics:** Live “good” bacteria cultures that are ingested. Natural sources are found in fermented foods.






## Keep in mind:

- **Everyone has different nutritional needs** that may impact what you can/should eat. Medical conditions, medications, and food allergies and sensitivities should be discussed with a doctor before starting new foods.
- **Be cautious with vitamin/mineral supplements.** Some can be harmful if taken in large or inappropriate amounts for your body. Discuss with a healthcare professional before starting any kind of supplement.
- **Never assume you have a nutrient deficiency** unless confirmed by a healthcare professional.
- **Diet alone is not a treatment plan for mental health disorders.** If you are struggling with a mental health condition (depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, etc.) a mental health professional is your best resource for developing a comprehensive treatment plan.
- **A care team** of professionals who are familiar with your specific needs can help develop the most effective diet plan for you:
  - Healthcare professional (e.g., primary care physician)
  - Mental health professional
  - Nutritionist/dietitian

Use the guide below to mark some of your favorite foods (or those you'd like to try) and compare their nutrient content. Consider how you might mix and match foods from different categories into a full meal that contains most major mood-boosting nutrients. Look for the green leaf icon for especially nutritious options!

Like/ Try?	Food	Protein	B- vitamins	Magnesium	Anti- oxidants	Healthy fats	Fiber	Prebiotics	Probiotics
<b>Fruits</b>									
<input type="checkbox"/>	Apples		•		•		•	•	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Avocados 	•	•	•	•	•	•		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Bananas		•	•	•		•	•	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Bell peppers		•		•		•		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Blueberries		•		•		•	•	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Coconut	•		•	•	•			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Grapes (red)		•		•				
<input type="checkbox"/>	Kiwifruit			•	•		•	•	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Lemons		•		•		•		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Oranges		•		•		•		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pineapple		•		•		•	•	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Raspberries			•	•		•		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Strawberries		•		•		•		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Tomatoes				•		•		
<b>Vegetables</b>									
<input type="checkbox"/>	Asparagus	•	•		•			•	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Broccoli	•	•		•		•		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Brussels sprouts	•	•		•		•		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cabbage		•		•		•	•	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cauliflower		•	•	•		•		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Carrots				•		•		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Corn	•		•	•				
<input type="checkbox"/>	Chard			•	•		•		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Garlic		•		•			•	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Green peas 	•	•	•	•		•	•	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Kale	•		•	•		•		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Kimchi		•		•				•
<input type="checkbox"/>	Leeks		•		•		•	•	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mushrooms	•		•	•		•	•	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Onions		•		•		•	•	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Potatoes	•		•	•		•	•	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Romaine lettuce		•	•	•				
<input type="checkbox"/>	Spinach 	•	•	•	•		•		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sweet potatoes		•		•		•	•	

Like/ Try?	Food	Protein	B- vitamins	Magnesium	Anti- oxidants	Healthy fats	Fiber	Prebiotics	Probiotics
<b>Animal-based proteins</b>									
<input type="checkbox"/>	Chicken	●	●						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Eggs 	●	●		●	●			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Turkey	●	●						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Lamb	●	●						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Lean beef	●	●		●				
<input type="checkbox"/>	Lean pork	●	●						
<b>Seafood</b>									
<input type="checkbox"/>	Anchovies	●	●			●			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cod	●	●			●			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Crab	●	●			●			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Lobster	●	●			●			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mackerel	●	●	●		●			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mahi mahi	●	●	●		●			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Salmon 	●	●	●	●	●			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Shrimp	●	●		●				
<input type="checkbox"/>	Tilapia	●	●						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Tuna	●	●			●			
<b>Dairy</b>									
<input type="checkbox"/>	Butter		●						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cheese	●	●						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cottage cheese 	●	●	●					●
<input type="checkbox"/>	Greek yogurt	●	●						●
<input type="checkbox"/>	Kefir 	●	●	●					●
<input type="checkbox"/>	Whole milk	●	●	●					
<b>Plant-based proteins</b>									
<input type="checkbox"/>	Beans  (black, pinto, kidney...)	●	●	●	●		●	●	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Chickpeas 	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Edamame	●	●	●	●				
<input type="checkbox"/>	Lentils	●	●	●	●		●	●	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Quinoa	●	●	●	●		●		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Tofu	●		●			●		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Tempeh	●		●					●
<b>Beverages</b>									
<input type="checkbox"/>	Coffee			●	●				
<input type="checkbox"/>	Green tea				●				
<input type="checkbox"/>	Kombucha 		●		●				●

Like/ Try?	Food	Protein	B- vitamins	Magnesium	Anti- oxidants	Healthy fats	Fiber	Prebiotics	Probiotics
<b>Grains/</b>									
<input type="checkbox"/>	Air-popped Popcorn		•		•		•		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Barley (hulled)		•	•			•	•	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Brown rice 	•	•	•	•		•		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Buckwheat	•	•	•			•	•	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Farro	•		•			•		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Oats/oatmeal 	•	•	•	•		•	•	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pasta (enriched)		•						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sourdough bread		•	•	•			•	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sprouted grain bread	•	•		•		•		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Tortillas (flour)		•	•					
<input type="checkbox"/>	Tortillas (corn)			•			•		
<input type="checkbox"/>	White rice		•						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Whole wheat (cereal, breads)	•	•		•		•	•	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Wild rice	•	•		•		•		
<b>Nuts/seeds (unsalted)</b>									
<input type="checkbox"/>	Almonds	•		•	•	•	•		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cashews	•		•	•	•	•		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Chia seeds		•	•	•	•	•		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Flaxseed	•	•	•		•	•	•	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Hemp seeds	•		•		•			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Nut butters	•		•	•	•	•		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Peanuts 	•	•	•	•	•	•		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pecans			•	•	•	•		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pistachios	•	•		•	•	•		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pumpkin seeds	•		•	•	•			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sunflower seeds	•	•		•	•			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Walnuts 	•	•	•	•	•	•		
<b>Other foods</b>									
<input type="checkbox"/>	Avocado oil				•	•			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cumin				•				
<input type="checkbox"/>	Dark chocolate			•	•		•		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Miso	•							•
<input type="checkbox"/>	Olive oil				•	•			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Oregano			•	•		•		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Turmeric 		•		•	•	•		

## Tips for making mood-boosting food choices

- **Prepare nutrient-rich snacks in bulk** to have throughout the week. Roasted chickpeas, boiled edamame, or boiled eggs are easy and can be prepped ahead of time. If food prep is a hassle, try a handful of unsalted nuts or spoonful of nut butter to give you the same “boost.”
- **Food preparation matters** to get the most of your food choices. Baking, roasting, boiling, or steaming are generally better at retaining nutrients than frying. Use plant-based cooking oils at moderate temperatures when sautéing. Keep the nutrient-dense parts of the food that are often thrown away. Examples include potato skins, fish skin, and egg yolks.
- **Incorporate healthy foods into foods you enjoy already** to make the change less disruptive. Add nuts to popcorn; greens to soups, pastas, or eggs; fruit to oatmeal or yogurt; veggies to jarred pasta sauce.
- **Take advantage of meal prep shortcuts** to make healthy foods an easy choice. Some ideas:
  - Add pre-cooked rotisserie chicken or canned tuna to a bagged salad kit
  - Make a stir fry with frozen veggies and instant brown rice or quinoa
  - Use canned veggies, beans, and tomatoes to make a healthy chili. Don't forget the spices!
  - Toss pre-cut veggies in olive oil and spices and roast in the oven
- **Be smart with substitutions** that allow you to enjoy foods you love... but in a healthy way!
  - Go for brown rice instead of white rice
  - Try lettuce wraps instead of tortillas for wraps, tacos
  - Swap Greek yogurt for sour cream or mayo
  - Try fish steaks (salmon, tuna, etc.) for beef steaks
  - Make easy oil- and vinegar-based salad dressings instead of cream-based
- **Avoid boredom** by trying new or unfamiliar foods. This also diversifies your gut biome! Fermented foods like kefir, kimchi, miso, and kombucha are healthy probiotics that can now be found in many grocery stores. Try a few and see what sticks!

### Learn more

#### Center for Nutritional Psychology:

[www.nutritional-psychology.org](http://www.nutritional-psychology.org)

Learn what the research says about food and mental health and wellness.

#### NutritionFacts.org: [nutritionfacts.org](http://nutritionfacts.org)

Explore articles, podcasts, live webcasts, and the video library to learn about the science of healthy eating.

#### MyPlate.gov: [www.myplate.gov](http://www.myplate.gov)

Learn the basics of a healthy meal plan for your age, sex, and more. Find healthy and budget-friendly recipes.

### Tools and resources

#### Cronometer: [cronometer.com](http://cronometer.com)

Enter your favorite recipes or foods you eat daily to calculate your nutrient intake and see trends over time.

#### Eat This, Not That!: [www.eatthis.com](http://www.eatthis.com)

Find tips from dietitians and nutritionists on cooking methods, healthy choices at restaurants, healthy recipes, and more!

#### SuperCook: [www.supercook.com](http://www.supercook.com)

Use the site or mobile app to generate recipes from ingredients you already have in your fridge or pantry.

#### Yummly: [www.yummly.com](http://www.yummly.com)

Find healthy recipes based on your preferences and nutritional needs. Sort by cuisine, course, diet, or ingredients.

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# Making Healthy Habits

How, what, and when we eat become habits over time that are hard to change. It can be a slow process, but healthy choices can become a habit, too! Here are a few tips:

**Gather intel.** Keep track of what you eat and how you feel. Learn how specific foods impact you physically and mentally. This can inform your meal plans moving forward.  
**Example:** Try a food journal or mood-tracking app to see long-term impacts (see example below right).

**Start small.** Try just one or two small changes at first. Too many changes all at once can derail you before you even get started. Keep at it for a period of time and move to the next change when it becomes routine.  
**Example:** Commit to a side of vegetables with dinner daily.

**Make it easy.** Healthy choices are easier to make when they're readily available and easy to implement. Keep them in a convenient place to catch your attention.  
**Example:** Have pre-cut veggies (celery, carrots, etc.) in easy view to grab when you're looking for a quick snack.

**Keep it simple.** Think of it in terms of categories, like "fruits," "vegetables," "grains," etc. Try to get one or two from each category every day.  
**Example:** Have a piece of fruit with breakfast; a side of veggies with lunch; a grain side dish with dinner.

**Make it enjoyable.** It's easier to put a habit into regular practice if you like what you're doing! Notice flavors that appeal to you. Experiment with different cuisines or preparation methods.  
**Example:** Search online for new, interesting recipes using ingredients you know you enjoy. Try a new one each week.

**Enlist support.** Get family members or friends "on board" with your goal. Hold each other accountable.

**Example:** Include children on meal preparation with lots of healthy ingredients so they become invested in the process.

**Track your progress.** A simple "yes" or "no" checklist works nicely. Completing your daily goal, even on something small, gives you a "win" and keeps you motivated.

**Example:** Use a mobile app to help track of your successes and see patterns when you struggle (see ideas below).

**Be patient.** Habits don't form overnight! Slip ups will happen, especially at first. Don't let them derail your entire goal. Just re-commit when you are able.

**Example:** A busy week or disruption may throw you off track, but you can start again when your routines resume.

## Technology tools

**Daylio:** [daylio.net](https://daylio.net)

Make it easy to track your mood and daily activities with this mobile app.

**Habitica:** [habitica.com](https://habitica.com)

"Gamify" your goals with this mobile app. Track your habits/goals and earn rewards.

**Moodfit:** [www.getmoodfit.com](https://www.getmoodfit.com)

This mobile app helps you track your mood, nutrition, and more. Also includes techniques to lighten a low mood.

**StickK:** [www.stickk.com](https://www.stickk.com)

Put your money where your mouth is! This mobile app holds you accountable through a financial "Commitment Contract."