



DIET AND MENTAL HEALTH

What you put in your body can have a significant impact on your mental well-being. This is the case for everyone. It can affect our ability to focus, remember, sleep, get up, feel energised. For people struggling with their mental health already, what we consume can increase or prolong issues or can help to reduce them. This leaflet gives some simple guides as to the impact of diet on mental health.

There is a link between what we eat, brain function and how we feel. Eating well can help you feel better. Here's a few key things to consider:

- Drops in blood sugar can make you feel tired and irritable – we can all relate to feeling 'hangry'! If you already struggle with low mood or anxiety your appetite might not be great but it is important to eat regularly even if you can only manage a little bit
- Some foods are better than others for keeping blood sugar steady – where you can, eat slow release sources of sugar like wholegrain foods, nuts and seeds and brown rice and pasta. Processed sugar, white bread, rice and pasta will be faster release and lead to a spike in blood sugar following by a dip which will affect your mood and energy
- For your brain to have the right chemicals to support its function and regulate mood it needs protein, healthy fats and the nutrients from fruits and vegetables
- Try to eat five fruit or veg a day, include some olive or rapeseed oil, nuts and seeds, avocados or oily fish. Focus on protein coming from peas, beans, lentils, fish, eggs, cheese (in moderation), lean meat and soya. Avoid processed food because it often contains trans fats that can adversely affect brain function including memory



- Stay hydrated. Even mild dehydration can affect your mood, energy level and ability to concentrate. Aim for around six to eight glasses (about 1.5 – 2 litres) of fluid per day. Drink little and often.

It's not necessarily about changing your whole diet just trying to introduce some small changes that help.

Caffeine

Caffeine is found in coffee, tea, cola, energy drinks and chocolate. Be aware of how caffeine can affect your mood. It's a stimulant so it increases the activity of your nervous system.

If you are someone who can feel anxious, that usually suggests that your nervous system is working at a higher level because in some way it thinks there is a threat (this could be around exams, relationships with other people, something in your past). Adding caffeine on top of this will make your nervous system even more active. It may increase physical feelings of anxiety, increase anxious thinking and spiralling. It can make your body and brain busier. Also, as it is a stimulant it will interfere with sleep if you drink it close to bedtime.

What to do

- If you feel you need support with your mental health please contact Wellbeing advice and guidance on 0151 795 1000, advice@liverpool.ac.uk.well.
- Well being support including healthy eating and emotional health is available through the My Healthy Advantage App
- Wellness tips and advice are available through the Active Campus App

Written and developed in collaboration with The Counselling Service and Sport Liverpool

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Sources of help at the university:
The Counselling Service
Well Being Advice and Guidance
Brownlow Student Practice

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