

Nutrition Therapy for Depression



A nutritious diet can be crucial for keeping your body and mind healthy.

The food you consume directly impacts your mental health, and adjusting your diet can be one of the most effective ways of improving your mental health.

In this article, we're going to look at the Mediterranean diet, which has been shown to help decrease the symptoms of depression. We're also going to look at the nutrient deficiencies that aggravate your mental health, as well as foods and natural enhancers you can consume to boost your mental well-being—all in time for Thanksgiving. Treat yourself this holiday season.

A Diet to Help Decrease the Symptoms of Depression

Evidence suggests that a healthy diet rich in fruits and vegetables and low in highly processed foods can help reduce depression symptoms.

A randomized controlled trial found that a group of young adults who followed the Mediterranean for three weeks saw their depression score drop from "moderate" to "normal" and reported lower anxiety and tension levels.

Researchers used several questionnaires to assess participants' mental health, including one that asked how frequently they'd experienced symptoms of depression in the previous week.

The depression scores of the participants in the control group who didn't change their diets stayed the same. The control group consumed various refined carbohydrates, processed foods, and sugary meals and drinks; their depression severity scores remained in the "moderate" range.

Let's have a look at the Mediterranean diet and what it consists of:

- **Vegetables:** Broccoli, kale, onions, tomatoes, cauliflower, carrots, spinach, Brussels sprouts, cucumbers, sweet potatoes, and turnips.
- **Fruits:** Apples, oranges, pears, strawberries, bananas, grapes, dates, figs, melons, and peaches.
- **Nuts & seeds:** Cashews, walnuts, macadamia nuts, hazelnuts, almonds, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, almond butter, and peanut butter.
- **Herbs & spices:** Cinnamon, pepper, garlic, basil, nutmeg, mint, rosemary, sage.
- **Whole grains:** Brown rice, rye, barley, oats, corn, buckwheat, whole wheat bread, and pasta.
- **Fish:** Shrimp, oysters, clams, salmon, mussels, sardines, trout, tuna, mackerel, crab.
- **Healthy fats:** Extra virgin olive oil, olives, avocados, and avocado oil.
- **Legumes:** Lentils, pulses, peanuts, beans, peas, and chickpeas.
- **Poultry:** Turkey, chicken, duck.
- **Eggs:** Chicken, quail & duck eggs.
- **Dairy:** Milk, cheese, yogurt.

Though there is no single Mediterranean diet, this eating pattern is often high in nutritious plant foods and low in animal foods, emphasizing fish and seafood.

We recommend including starchy carbohydrates, protein, veggies, or salad at each meal. Try to eat less processed or pre-packaged foods and more of the foods on this list to get a wide range of vitamins and minerals.

Also, ensure you drink enough fluids (six to eight glasses of non-caffeinated liquids) to stay hydrated and help your brain function optimally.

Nutrient Deficiency

Nutrition is essential in regulating our psychological and emotional well-being. Shortages in critical vitamins and minerals can impair optimal brain functioning while raising stress and anxiety.

The good news is that by including particular foods and supplements in our diets, we can address most of the common nutritional deficiencies.

Let's look at some of the most frequent dietary deficiencies associated with depression:

- **Iron:** Iron deficiency is extremely frequent, particularly in young women, children, and vegetarians. It can induce anemia, weariness, a compromised immune system, and cognitive impairment.
- **Magnesium:** Magnesium shortage is widespread in Western countries, with insufficient consumption linked to various health problems and disorders.
- **Iodine:** Iodine is a mineral required for appropriate thyroid function and thyroid hormone synthesis. One of the most frequent nutrient deficits, affecting roughly a third of the world's population, is iodine insufficiency.
- **Vitamin D:** Vitamin D is a fat-soluble vitamin that acts like a steroid hormone in your body. A lack of vitamin D can cause bone density loss, which can contribute to osteoporosis and fractures and lead to other diseases.
- **Calcium:** Low calcium consumption is widespread, particularly among women of all ages and elderly persons. Calcium shortage is characterized by an increased risk of osteoporosis later in life.
- **Vitamin B12:** Vitamin B12 insufficiency is relatively frequent, particularly among vegetarians, vegans, and the elderly. Every cell in your body requires B12 to operate properly, yet your body cannot make it. As a result, you must obtain it through food or supplements. The most prevalent symptoms are blood issues, poor brain function, and high homocysteine levels.
- **Vitamin A:** Many impoverished countries suffer from vitamin A deficiency. It has the potential to induce blindness and eye damage, as well as depress immunological function and increase mortality in women and children.

Foods That Are Natural Antidepressants

There are many foods that are high in vitamins and minerals that are beneficial to our health, particularly our mental health. Consider some foods below that are known for their involvement in raising happy hormones:

- **Chia seeds:** Chia seeds are high in omega-3 fatty acids, amino acids, iron, and B vitamins, all of which are essential for cognitive function. These tiny seeds promote proper neurotransmitter activity and aid in the production of serotonin in the body, which keeps you in a good mood and reduces the symptoms of depression.
- **Yogurt:** Dr. Alban Gaultier of the University of Virginia School of Medicine discovered that probiotic bacteria present in yogurt could improve depression symptoms. Stress causes the loss of bacteria, resulting in depression symptoms in mice. Replenishing the bacteria in the stomach alleviates such symptoms.
- **Sweet potatoes:** According to D'Ambrosio, sweet potatoes are high in the antioxidant beta-carotene. This aids in preventing brain cell destruction, which can have a negative impact on mental health. She adds that it can also help reduce oxidative stress on DNA, which has been related to depression, anxiety, and schizophrenia.

- **Beans:** Although beans and depression may appear to be an odd combination, beans, lentils, and peas are all high in fiber, vitamins, and protein. They are high in essential elements such as folate. They are also high in polyphenols, an antioxidant. People who eat beans daily have a lower risk of stroke, heart attack, and other cardiovascular disorders. In addition, they had decreased incidences of cancer, diabetes, and liver disorders. Furthermore, beans can encourage healthy gut health.
- **Mushrooms:** Mushrooms can help with depression because they are high in potassium and strong in the antioxidant ergothioneine. This antioxidant reduces oxidative stress in all cells, including brain cells, which can help alleviate symptoms of sadness.
- **Salmon:** Salmon contains omega-3 fatty acids, which are essential to incorporate into your diet because low levels of omega-3s have been linked to depression. Omega-3 fatty acids may offer other advantages, including lowering the risk of developing specific heart issues and malignancies. While salmon and other kinds of seafood are high in omega-3s, they can also be obtained from vegetarian sources such as nuts and plant oils.
- **Broccoli:** Broccoli not only contains a range of minerals and vitamins, but it also has the potential to alleviate depressive symptoms. In a mouse study, researchers discovered that a broccoli-derived chemical prevented depression caused by inflammation. In particular, consuming the chemical during childhood may help prevent inflammation-related depression in adulthood.

Vitamins That Fight Depression

Even though there is no substitute for [professional medical treatment](#) from psychologists, psychiatrists, and other licensed providers, evidence suggests that natural remedies like vitamins or dietary supplements may help relieve depression symptoms.

- **B vitamins:** Depression may be linked to low levels of B-12 and other B vitamins such as B-6 and folate, as Vitamin B-12 and other B vitamins contribute to the production of brain chemicals that influence mood and other brain functions.
- **Magnesium:** Magnesium is an essential vitamin for brain health. It promotes healthy neurons and the production of neurotransmitters required by the brain for those cells to communicate messages to one another.
- **Zinc:** Zinc is another crucial vitamin that promotes brain activity, providing a link between zinc deficiency and psychiatric disorders.
- **Vitamin D:** According to a 2022 study, vitamin D supplementation improved depressive symptoms. Vitamin D can be found in orange juice, cereal, dairy products, salmon, cod liver oil, and eggs.
- **Omega-3 fatty acids:** Omega-3 fatty acids are found in fatty fish such as salmon, sardines, and mackerel. Omega-3s and their possible function in depression treatment have been studied for a long time, with inconsistent results. Also, according to a 2019 review research, omega-3 fatty acids appear to aid with depressive symptoms.

- **Antioxidants:** Antioxidants such as vitamin E, C, and beta-carotene are hypothesized to operate as secondary non-enzymatic defenses against oxidative stress and its potentially harmful effects.

Note: This information is not meant to replace the advice of a doctor or other medical professional. It is mainly for educational and informational purposes.

Mood Enhancers

There are also specific mood enhancers you can try if you want to treat your depression naturally, and while there is some evidence that these things can be beneficial, much more research is needed.

- **Rhodiola:** The botanical name for this herb is Rhodiola Rosea. A study published in Phytomedicine in 2015 suggests that Rhodiola may help ease some of the symptoms of major depressive disorder.
- **Saint John's Wort:** St. John's wort bears yellow blossoms and is considered a weed in some parts of the United States. In different parts of the world, people have used it as medicine for thousands of years. Much research has been conducted to assess the efficacy of St. John's wort. Some studies have found a benefit, whereas others have not. If you decide to use it, make sure you learn everything you can about it and consult your doctor before taking it.
- **5-HTP:** This amino acid (which stands for 5-hydroxytryptophan) is produced by your body and can be converted into serotonin. Low serotonin levels are thought to contribute to depression, which is why taking 5-HTP is seen as a natural approach to dealing with depression.

Note: Make sure you always consult a healthcare expert before starting any supplement or enhancer.

Thanksgiving Mood-Boosting Recipes

When depression strikes, it can be challenging to think clearly or eat healthily.

Especially during the holiday season, it can be tempting to indulge in unhealthy eating habits that, unfortunately, make depression symptoms worse.

With Thanksgiving soon approaching, why not try some of these healthy recipes?

1. [Chocolate Oatmeal and Nut Energy Balls](#)
2. [Coconut Spirulina Superfood Smoothie](#)
3. [Green Energy Bowl](#)

Summary

As we have seen, a healthy diet can help manage depression symptoms. However, in many cases, even a healthy diet is not a replacement for medication or professional help.

If you've tried making changes to your life to help your depression but haven't seen any improvement in your symptoms, it might be time to get help from the [Alvarado Parkway Institute](#). We have made it our goal to help people like you live full lives and reach their fullest potential.