



GOOD MOOD FOODS

Although there is not enough evidence to say which foods can influence mood, we do know that there are certain vitamins and minerals, which if deficient, can affect mood. Eating patterns and fluid intake can also have an influence on mood. This fact sheet explores the key points to help prevent tiredness and positively influence mood.

Regular Meals

One of the most important factors is to have regular meals, including breakfast. Breakfast can help provide energy and focus to help start your day. Regular meals will help you sustain energy levels and reduce the risk of your blood sugar levels dropping. However it is important to complement this with a healthy diet.

Healthy Eating

Healthy eating is about getting the balance right with the right foods, portions and proportions. Avoid highly processed food as much as possible, as these are often rich in refined sugar, fat and salt making you feel more tired which can lower mood. Aim to include foods from the four main food groups as follows:

- **Fruit and Vegetables – Folate, B vitamins, lethargy and low mood.** These are a rich source of vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and fibre. Fibre can help you feel fuller for longer and potentially reduce the temptation to snack on sugary foods. Green vegetables and citrus fruit are rich sources of folate. If you are low or deficient in folate, there is an increased chance of feeling depressed. Green vegetables, beans and peas are also rich sources of all B-vitamins. B-vitamins help your body process energy, a lack of these can make you feel lethargic and have a low mood.
- **Starchy Foods – glucose, tiredness and loss of focus and concentration.** This food group is rich in carbohydrate. Carbohydrate foods eventually convert to glucose which is the main energy source for the brain and muscles. Not having enough glucose can make you feel weak, tired and lose concentration. Aim for the whole grain varieties as these are high in fibre which provides more sustained, long lasting energy similar to that of vegetables, plus these are richer in minerals, particularly B-vitamins needed for energy. Whole grains include quinoa, rye, brown rice, oats, buckwheat, corn and spelt.
- **Meat, fish, eggs, nuts, seeds and pulses (beans, chickpeas and lentils) – nerve and brain function.** Rich sources of protein and iron. Iron is needed to carry oxygen around the body; if inadequate, you are more likely to feel tired and weak all the time. These foods are also a good source of B-vitamin needed for energy. Oily fish is a particularly rich source of Omega-3 which is notably good for nerve and brain function. Aim to have at least one portion a week. If you do not eat fish, walnuts and flaxseed are good alternatives.
- **Milk and dairy foods – tryptophan and serotonin.** This group is also a rich source of protein and B-vitamins. In addition, this group is rich in tryptophan (brown rice, chicken and fish are also rich sources). This is a protein used to make serotonin, a chemical messenger in the brain related to mood. If these foods rich in tryptophan are combined with a carbohydrate source, this may increase serotonin in the brain.

Fluid and alcohol – even mild dehydration can increase tiredness and decrease mood.

Mild dehydration can affect our mood. Symptoms of dehydration include lack of energy and feeling light-headed. Aim for at least approximately 1.6 - 2 litres of fluid a day, which is around 6-8 glasses a day in the UK climate and maybe more during the summer months. Water is the best choice. Aim to avoid sugary soft and fizzy drinks that are high in added sugars and calories, which although may provide a temporary source of energy (and empty calories), they are more likely to make you feel less energetic later. Caffeine is found mainly in coffee, tea, cola and chocolate and can act as a temporary stimulant. Energy drinks are also often high in caffeine and other stimulants plus additives and sugar; therefore try to limit or cut these down gradually if you drink these. Although caffeine can act as an initial 'pick me up' it can make you feel tired later and even disrupt your sleep.

A moderate amount of caffeine is around 400mg a day, equivalent to four cups of coffee. Aim not to have more than this, particularly in the afternoon as this may affect your sleeping pattern. Pregnant women should limit their caffeine intake to no more than 200mg a day.

Alcohol increases urine output and drinking too much can lead to becoming dehydrated. Keep alcohol consumption within the recommended limits - no more than 14 units per week for both men and women spread over at least 3 days with at least 2 consecutive alcohol free days. Also aim to drink some water in addition, especially if it is hot.

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