

The Foods That May Lower Depression Symptoms (M)

It is not about how much of this food people eat, but how often.

People who eat fruit more frequently are less likely to report depression symptoms and overall have more positive mental health, a study finds.

In contrast, eating more savoury snacks, such as crisps, is linked to higher levels of anxiety.

The study reinforces the strong connection repeatedly found between diet and mental health.

Previous studies have found, for example, that:

- [A couple more servings](#) of fruits and vegetables per day is enough to lift your mood in only two weeks.
- [A diet rich in vegetables](#), nuts, fruits and fish could lower depression risk by up to a third.
- [An extra four portions of fruit](#) and vegetables per day can offset the impact of major life events, like divorce and unemployment.
- A healthy diet is one of the [most overlooked factors in recovering from depression](#).

Not how much, but how often

The latest conclusions come from a study in which over 400 people were surveyed about their consumption of fruit, vegetables, sweet and savoury snacks.

The results showed that it is not about how much fruit people eat, but how often.

Frequent unhealthy snacks, meanwhile, were linked to poor mental health, said Ms Nicola-Jayne Tuck, the study's first author:

“...while we did not directly examine causality here, our findings could suggest that frequently snacking on nutrient-poor savoury foods may increase everyday mental lapses, which in turn reduces psychological health.”

The beneficial effects of fruit are partly due to it often being consumed raw, said Ms Tuck:

“Both fruit and vegetables are rich in antioxidants, fibre and essential micronutrients which promote optimal brain function, but these nutrients can be lost during cooking.

As we are more likely to eat fruit raw, this could potentially explain its stronger influence on our psychological health.

Changes to snacking habits could be key, said Ms Tuck:

“It is possible that changing what we snack on could be a really simple and easy way to improve our mental wellbeing.

Overall, it’s definitely worth trying to get into the habit of reaching for the fruit bowl.”

Diet and mental health

Women’s mental health seems to be particularly sensitive to diet, [research finds](#). There is also some evidence that the [best diet for mental health changes with age](#). The mood of young people — aged between 18 and 30 — benefits from neurotransmitter precursors provided by foods like meat.

However, mature adults are in a better mood if they eat foods that boost their antioxidant levels, such as fruit.

Foods to avoid

Whatever age you are, though, one food to avoid for good mental health is sugar.

Research finds that a [high sugar intake is linked to anxiety and depression](#). Similarly, [fast foods, cake and highly processed meats are also linked to worse mental health](#).