



The Leading Voice of Nutrition *in Australia*



Mood and Food

- Choosing healthy foods may help you to feel well and happy.
- A balanced wholesome diet may help to prevent and improve symptoms of depression and anxiety.
- A diet rich in processed foods with added salt, sugars and fats may lead to poor mental health & exacerbate symptoms of depression and anxiety.
- A healthy diet doesn't need to be hard work. Keeping convenient, healthy foods on hand can make it easier to make healthy food choices every day.

How food can lift your mood

A well-balanced diet means that your body will have all the nutrients it needs for good health, including good mental health. However, a healthy diet is about more than just nutrients.

Studies that show a link between diet and mental health have found associations with whole dietary patterns, not just specific foods or nutrients. That means that there is no superfood for mental health; rather, it is important to eat a balanced diet.

The diets that seem to provide the most benefit for mental health are those that are considered to be 'traditional diets'. These include the Mediterranean diet, Norwegian diet, and Japanese diet. Some components of these diets that may be important for mental health include:

- **Healthy fats** like the ones found in fish and extra virgin olive oil. These fats have been shown to be important for our blood vessels and our brain and may have an important anti-inflammatory effect that helps to prevent depression.

- **Wholegrains** such as brown bread, rice and pasta. These fibre-rich foods can promote the growth of good gut bacteria that may have a positive effect on mental health.
- **Fruit and vegetables.** These colourful components of the diet contain a wealth of important nutrients including antioxidants that help to prevent cell damage.
- **Fermented foods** like yoghurt can also help to encourage the growth of good gut bacteria that positively impact on mental health.
- **Nuts, seeds and legumes.** These powerhouses of the diet are good sources of plant-based protein, healthy fats and fibre.
- And don't forget your liquid intake: **water** will keep you hydrated and help you to feel more alert and productive.

How food can lower your mood

Studies show that a Western diet, or one that is higher in processed foods with plenty of added salt, sugar and fat, can be more likely to lead to symptoms of depression and anxiety.

To keep feeling at your best, reach for some healthy convenience foods:

- a bowl of cereal with low-fat milk
- plain yoghurt topped with fruit and nuts or oats
- wholegrain toast with peanut butter or avocado
- wholegrain biscuits with hummus.

If you are finding meal preparation to be too difficult or time consuming, try the following tips to create healthy meals for yourself every day of the week:

- Cook in bulk and freeze leftover portions in single-serve size containers ready to just heat and eat.
- Shop and cook with a friend. Spending time with others can also be great for improving your mood.
- Consider a food swap. Trade extra portions of meals that you have cooked with a friend in a similar situation.
- Keep plenty of convenient meal options on hand. Frozen vegetables are fantastic as they keep for ages and don't require any chopping. Tinned fish and canned beans are convenient sources of protein that you can use to top toast or stir into pasta or rice.

Benefits of seeing an APD

Food plays a key role in our physical and mental health and wellbeing. We all have different health challenges so there is no 'one size fits all' approach when it comes to food and nutrition. **Accredited Practising Dietitians** (APDs) provide personalised nutrition advice and support. [Find out more about choosing an APD.](#)

Beetroot, farro and honeyed walnut super salad

Ingredients

- 1 ½ cups farro
- 2 large beetroots
- 2 large carrots
- 1 cup red cabbage (1/6 small cabbage)
- 1 cup flat-leaf parsley, roughly chopped
- 2 tbsp sesame seeds
- 1 cup walnuts
- 1 tbsp honey
- ½ cup ricotta cheese, reduced fat

Dressing

- 1 tbsp honey

Method

1. Place the farro in a large saucepan and cover with 4 cups of cold water. Bring to the boil and simmer for 35 minutes, or until all the water is absorbed and the grains are tender. Drain well and set aside in a refrigerator. (You can do this step the day before to cut preparation time in half!)
2. Add sesame seeds to a small fry pan and toss on low-medium heat until golden brown. Set aside in a small bowl.
3. Use the same fry pan to toast walnuts lightly for about two minutes on low-medium heat. Add 1 tbsp honey and toss to coat until the honey begins to bubble and the nuts become dark and caramelised. Remove from the heat and arrange the walnuts flat on a plate to cool.
4. Peel and grate beetroots and carrot and set aside in separate bowls. Keeping them separate until the salad is ready to serve helps preserve the bright orange of the carrots – otherwise they will be stained pink!
5. Finely chop red cabbage. Roughly chop parsley and mint. Add cabbage and herbs to bowl containing grated carrot.
6. In a small jar, add the juice of 1 lemon, 1 tbsp of honey and the extra virgin olive oil. Shake to combine and add 1 tbsp of cold water to thin. Shake the dressing once more before serving.
7. Break apart the honeyed walnuts. Toss the farro, carrot, cabbage, herbs and walnuts to combine. Gently fold through beetroot.
8. Top with crumbled ricotta cheese and toasted sesame seeds.
9. Dress with shaken lemon-honey dressing just before serving.



Juice of 1 lemon

1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil

1 tbsp cold water

Recipe courtesy of Allison Grech, APD. For more recipes, please visit the [Dietitians Australia Smart Eating for a Healthier You recipe webpage.](#)