



Eating for Better Mental Health

by Emma Sims, Holistic Therapist

Imagine yourself as a car and your weekly diet as the fuel. How would the engine perform bearing in mind the quality of what is powering it? Remember, a journey of 1,000 miles starts with the first step. Make one small achievable change and build on this to create lifelong habits that will improve your mental health and well-being.

Is there enough water in your tank? Your urine should be straw-coloured; darker colours indicate dehydration. Between **2.5 and 4 litres of water a day** is the recommended amount and **may help with symptoms such as headaches, confusion, irritability, dry skin, poor concentration, stiff joints and constipation.**



5+ a Day

Adding salad and vegetables to every meal may make a real difference to your mental and physical well-being. More variety – **and fibre** – feed the **good bacteria** in our gut, which helps with immunity. Vitamins and minerals are also essential to support mental health and physical well-being. **Pizza for tea? Have a big salad too. Try salad for breakfast:** scrambled eggs and bacon are delicious with spinach leaves and rocket.

B vitamins found in **green leafy vegetables, pork, chicken, eggs, and wholegrains** help with our mental health, nervous system and energy levels.

Misery Guts

You may or may not have heard of the **gut-brain axis**. Probiotics help the **state of our gut** which connects to the brain via the **vagus nerve** to help our mental health. People with anxiety and depression may experience **digestive issues, and certain “strains” of probiotics may help.** You find probiotics in foods such as **bio yoghurt, kombucha, kimchi, miso, kefir** and other “ferments”. Probiotics are also available in a capsule too or as a multivitamin.

Protein Wise

Foods such as chicken, pork, nuts and milk help boost **the natural antidepressant serotonin** in our body. Two portions of oily fish weekly give us the mood enhancer omega 3.

Sickly Sweet

Over-consumption of sugar contributes to **diabetes, high blood pressure and obesity**, and can trigger sugar highs, depression or “**hanger**”. We should have less than 30g of **any** sugary substance a day so watch out for **hidden sugar** in processed foods. **Artificial sweeteners or additives do not lead to vibrant health and you are best avoiding them. Excess sugar, childbirth, stress, and alcohol** can deplete **magnesium**. This **calming**

mineral is found in nuts and green leafy veg, helping us with anxiety and sleep.

Lack of vitamin D, the sunshine vitamin, can bring on the winter blues and low immunity. Natural sources are liver, egg yolk, oily fish, and beef, but experts frequently recommend supplementation in the UK.



Eating a **proportionally-balanced diet** with **protein** (meat, fish, eggs, pulses, nuts), vegetables and **starchy carbohydrates** (potato, rice, grains) and as freshly prepared as possible (even homegrown) is ideal. **However**, it can be challenging to do so if feeling anxious, depressed, ill or stressed. Supplements **may be of great help** so have a chat with a nutritionist, GP or pharmacist.

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Emma has written a book about self-care available through motiv8.me. Obtain more details from emmasims.co.uk.