

Tools for Life – Weekly Health & Safety Meeting



Home Healthy - Home Safe

Date: March 2023

Nutrition and Mental Health

Nearly 1 in 4 Americans have some type of mental illness each year. According to the CDC depression is the leading cause of disability in the US for individuals ages 15-44. Have you heard of nutritional psychiatry? According to the New York Times it's an emerging field of psychiatry that looks at the relationship between the diet and mental wellness. Historically, nutrition research has only considered how foods affect our physical health. There are a greater number of studies that are now showing the relationship between the food we eat and our mental wellness.

Research has demonstrated that your gastro-intestinal system (your gut) is very closely connected to your brain or is called the gut-brain connection. Your gut is home to living microbes that perform functions in creating chemical messengers that regulate sleep, pain, appetite, mood, and emotion. Recent studies have shown that the risk of depression increases (80%) when you compare teens with the lowest quality diet (the western diet) to those that eat a higher-quality, whole foods diet.

What can we learn from the current knowledge on the relationship between food and our mental health? The following dietary patterns may help reduce the symptoms of depression, anxiety, and mood in general, however food or nutrition alone should not be considered a substitute for medication or other treatments for anxiety or depression.

HEALTHY OR SAFETY REMINDER: A healthy diet not only promotes physical health it also provides mental health benefits.

Depression: The Mediterranean diet, focuses on the consumption of; Fruits, vegetables, fish, nuts, legumes (peas, beans, lentils), olive oil, and dairy products. Limit the consumption of fried foods, processed meats, baked goods, and sweetened beverages. Research has proven that individuals who suffer from depressive spells may have insatiable cravings for carbohydrates, it is the brain's attempt to create dopamine spikes.

Stress and Anxiety: Focus on foods that may reduce inflammation and stress throughout the body such as fiber-rich fruits and veggies, unsaturated fats, and fermented foods (yogurt). The following may exacerbate your stress and anxiety and should be avoided, or consumption reduced; alcohol, caffeine, added sugars or food with a lot of added sugars.

Mood and mental well-being: A nutrient-dense diet. What are nutrient-dense foods? Foods that contain vitamins, minerals, protein, fiber, and health fats in relation to calories, and be either high or low calorie. Typically, fresh food (unprocessed) is nutrient dense such as veggies, fruits, nuts, seeds, beans, fatty fish, and eggs.

Discussion Points/Quiz Questions:

1. What is nutritional psychiatry?
2. How is your gut connected to your brain?
3. What would be a nutrient-dense food?