

Thrive 365

Dragonfly: Impact Education



Did you know?

What you eat is as important for your mental health as it is for your physical health. Saint Augustine is famously paraphrased as saying, 'You are what you eat'. Of course, he was making reference to what we consume spiritually, and it is important to think carefully about what feeds us spiritually, emotionally, and mentally...but did you know that how we nourish ourselves with actual food can also have an impact on our mental health? Dr Andrew McCulloch, a former Chief Executive at The Mental Health Foundation, said that "nutrition should become a mainstream, everyday component of mental health care"[1].

1 Mindful eating

Quite often our feelings of 'hunger' are emotional rather than physical and can cause us to comfort eat foods high in sugar and fat or overeat. This can result in us feeling out of control which in turn adds to unpleasant emotions, leading to a vicious cycle which can be upsetting and distressing.

Try noticing the times when you are not physically hungry but you want to eat; have a pre-decided 'go-to' feel good technique that you use instead. This can be a quick walk, listening to your favourite song, a hot cuppa, or calling a friend or loved one for a quick chat.

2 Stress eating

Palm oil hit the press a few years ago when Orangutans' habitats were being decimated to harvest it. However, it's also bad for our brains because it stops the body converting other foods into nutrients the brain needs... and not getting these nutrients results in poor mental health [2]. Check the palm oil content in your bread, crisps, chocolate, biscuits, cooking oil and margarine.

It's also worth knowing that sustained stress can cause you to crave the types of fatty and sugary foods that contain palm oil. They cause sharp rises in blood sugar, followed by a big dip...which leads you to crave more fatty and sugary foods! Choose snacks in advance (e.g. nuts) and eat little and often if it's a stressful time.

3 Brain food

Look out for foods that contain B vitamins, vitamin C and magnesium. They are all foods that can sustain you physically and mentally during a stressful time (there's more on this in the online library).

Last, but not least - although more research needs to be done, many studies have shown a statistically significant link between polyphenols in the diet and reduced rates of depression; polyphenols have also been shown to improve the effectiveness of antidepressants[3]. They can be found in foods such as apples, onions, dark chocolate, whole grains, seeds, berries, beans, turmeric, and chilli peppers.

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References:

[1] <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/blog/feeding-my-mind>

[2] <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/food-for-thought-mental-health-nutrition-briefing-march-2017.pdf>

[3] <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7231605/>