



Food Determines How We Feel and Heal

“Food is not just what we get on a plate; it’s everything that affects us – relationships, spirituality, physical fitness, etc.” - Tracy Sippelle

What types of foods are best for both mental and physical health? How do these foods work in our brains to strengthen our mental health?

I am a true believer that food determines how we feel and heal (my health coaching practice’s tag line) after becoming a follower of Dr. Joel Fuhrman, who has done extensive research on plant-based diets. Fuhrman has written several books on the topic, including *Super Immunity* and *Eat to Live*. His premise is that if people eat a diet consisting mainly of plants, they will live longer and cancer free, feel better physically and mentally. Plant based foods, especially leafy greens, are loaded with vitamins and nutrients and are devoid of sugar, which exists in almost all processed foods that line our grocery store shelves. Some of my favorite foods to help with mental focus, and emotional and physical well being are:

Avocados – Avocados are one of my first picks when fighting the melancholy blues because they are rich in tryptophan and folate (one of the B vitamins) and are loaded with omega 3’s, an important fatty acid that fights inflammation in the body and helps regulate our brains, neurotransmitters. In order for one’s body to manufacture serotonin (a monoamine neurotransmitter that is biochemically derived from tryptophan and found in the gastrointestinal tract and central nervous system and considered by experts to be a mood stabilizer), it needs plenty of tryptophan, a natural amino acid. Many studies are showing that lowering levels of tryptophan corresponds with a drop in serotonin levels, which can impair memory and cause depressive mood disorders. Another added benefit? Eating a half of an avocado at breakfast or lunch may help make you feel full for the rest of the afternoon, curbing your desire to reach for unhealthy snacks during the day. So, the next time you have a sandwich, include plenty of avocado slices. Or for breakfast, include a few slices on your whole grain toast.

Beans – Beans are a great substitute for meat because they have a high protein content, but do not present the health risks of eating red meat, consumption of which can lead to cardiovascular disease and possibly cancer. Beans are a great weight loss food and are great for your mood because they help stabilize blood sugar levels. So, next time you want a burger, try a bean burger; with all the right fixings, they can be more delicious than your beef burger, and your body will thank you!

Cruciferous Vegetables – Many cruciferous vegetables, such as broccoli, cauliflower, and brussels sprouts, are excellent sources of some B vitamins and contain choline. Choline has shown in studies to boost cognitive function and improve learning.



Nuts/Seeds – Nuts and seeds contain tryptophan. Extensive studies show that eating a small handful of unsalted nuts a day can cut your risk of cancer, cardiovascular disease, and asthma (sunflower seeds). They are an excellent source of fiber and contain omega-3 fatty acids, are anti-inflammatory. My favorite nuts to eat in a diet by sprinkling a few on a tossed salad at dinner. Nuts make an excellent snack, too. Just grab a zip lock bag and make your own trail mix by mixing together raisins and an assortment of sunflower seeds and almonds.

Salmon – Salmon and its look-alike Arctic Char are loaded with omega 3’s and also contain that essential amino acid, tryptophan.

Turmeric – Turmeric is a spice that contains anti-inflammatory properties. Curcumin, the main ingredient in the spice, is starting to show promise in the treatment of various neurological diseases or conditions, such as Alzheimer’s. In some studies, turmeric has been shown to have a calming effect and has shown to help improve memory and stimulate the production of new brain cells. Some small studies even show that turmeric is as effective as Prozac for people with major depressive disorder.

Spinach – Popeye definitely had it right when he said, “Eat your spinach.” Besides being loaded with antioxidants and nutrients to help us maintain stable blood sugar and help prevent cancer, spinach is a great mood stabilizer. This leafy green can make us happier because it, too, has tryptophan, which helps increase our serotonin levels. It’s easy to include a little spinach in our children’s diets by adding it to a slice of thin crust pizza or a sandwich.

There are many other foods that help with stabilizing mood and protecting our bodies from cancer. Sweet potatoes, onions, and mushrooms are just a few. I try to follow Dr. Fuhrman’s G-BOMBS principle, which is to include a variety of greens (G), beans (B), onions (O), mushrooms (M), berries (B) and seeds (S) a day to help build immunity, mental focus and overall well being.



Healthy Snacks

Mixed nuts and hummus with lots of fresh cut up veggies are my favorite “go to” snacks! If I have a sweet tooth, I make a fruit smoothie with chocolate almond milk. Almond milk is loaded with protein and is dairy free. I stay away from sodas, and if I want something fizzy, I drink sparkling water with a dab of cranberry or a splash of lemon juice. There are absolutely no health benefits to drinking soda. Drinking soda, especially diet soda, is harmful to your health. Drinking water is important throughout the day, which will help prevent reaching for processed salty and sugary snacks.

What is the connection between physical and mental health?

People with depression typically have poor physical health. Because depression can often cause lethargy and isolation, depressed people tend to let their appearance go, exercise less or not at all, and have a decreased appetite or an increased urge to grab more unhealthy foods for that quick pick me up, which can impact weight and overall health. The inverse is true, too: People who have chronic health issues can become depressed and lonely. It is proven that though it may be difficult to get out the door and exercise when struggling with depression, one is more likely to combat it by getting outdoors. Natural vitamin D from the sun has been proven to reduce depressive symptoms in individuals. People who take control of their overall health and control lifelong health conditions by including exercise, making social connections, and eating a heavy plant based diet have more vitality and are less depressed.

Advice for People who Eat on the Run or in the Car

Don't do it. Make the time to sit, cherish family or friend time, and savor your meal. Sitting in a car while eating and driving is not only dangerous because it distracts you from your task at hand, but it also does not allow for proper digestion. When we eat on the run, we tend to visit the “drive through,” fast food restaurants that sell foods heavily laden with fat and sugar. Taking the time to sit with friends and family while eating is not only good for digestion, but it also allows us to talk, build friendships, and share. While my kids were growing up, we used family dinner time to play a game called, “High and Low.” We would go around the table and each of us sitting around the table would describe a high to his or her day (maybe someone got an A on an assignment he or she was trying to achieve or he or she improved in a school competition) and then

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Active over the years in charitable organizations focused on hospitalized children, mental health and gardening. Tracy was the original founder of Make a Child Smile, Inc., which funds hospitals to provide emotional support to families with hospitalized children and is now part of Child Life Services at Hackensack University Medical Center. Tracy serves as President of Sippelle Charitable Corp., which focuses primarily on education; the foundation's most

notable achievement is funding a secular girls' boarding school in Morocco. With her youngest child in college, Tracy has decided to share her knowledge and experience with nutrition, fitness and life through a new business as a health coach and writer (www.benefitwithtracy.com). She has studied with New York's Institute for Integrative Nutrition, trained in more than 100 dietary theories and studied a variety of practical lifestyle coaching methods. Tracy is currently taking classes on the nutritarian diet and she is a devout follower of nutrition researcher Dr. Joel Fuhrman. She became a certified fitness trainer through the International Sports Sciences Association last year and is also a certified Girls on the Run running coach. Tracy serves on the Princeton YMCA Board of Trustees and is responsible for helping organize its yearly 5k runs. She graduated from Hamilton College with honors with a degree in philosophy.

we'd each give a low, such as not making the Varsity team or hearing something terrible in the news. This game opened the door for healthy conversation and often put perspective on some of those lows. The added plus to family dinners? According to a few studies, eating family meals at least several times a week has shown to lower a teen's risk of engaging in smoking, drinking, and drug abuse.

Exercise helps us mentally as well as physically.

Exercise such as running or jogging just may be the best-kept health secret today! Along with a healthy diet, it releases stress, reduces anxiety, helps clear your mind, increases blood flow, improves your energy, helps with weight loss, and enhances your mood. Exercise is not only good to build physical strength, but is also a natural anti-depressant.

*For more information on my philosophy, go to my website:
www.benefitwithtracy.com*