

Mental Health and Diet

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Individuals with depression often fail to take care of themselves, neglecting their appearance and eating irregularly. Depressed people are especially careless about their nutrition.

The resulting poor nourishment may impede recovery. There is some evidence that the amino acid, tryptophan, a substance needed to make the neurotransmitter serotonin, can help induce sleep and play a role in treating certain types of depression.

Choline, a nutrient that is grouped with the B vitamins, has been studied in the management of depression and other psychiatric problems. For the depressed person's nutritional needs he/she should eat plenty of high-grade proteins, such as meat, liver, dairy products, eggs, fresh fish for tryptophan and choline to promote good nervous system function.

Caffeine can interfere with sleep and mood and should be cut down on. Foods and drinks containing tyramine such as bananas and bean curd, fish roe, liquid and powdered protein supplements, preserved meats should be avoided.

Our thoughts, emotions, moods and attitudes, as well as nerve and muscle functions are all centered in the brain. Positive links - foods that lift the mood are harder to find.

To calm down the patient and prevent abrupt changes in moods calming meals should be prepared containing a variety of complex carbohydrates to supply the brain with amino acids. A meal of pepper, rice and beans provides the amino acids and complex carbohydrates used to make soothing brain chemicals.

Also seafood, dark-green leafy vegetables and whole - grain breads, cereals and pasta/noodles for B-group vitamins should be eaten. Cut down on caffeine and cola and sugary foods.

Schizophrenia is a devastating mental illness characterized by hallucinations, delusions and bizarre thoughts and behaviour. For the schizophrenic, the diet should be a combination of animal protein and starchy foods to increase brain levels of tryptophan, a calming amino acid. Beverages high in caffeine, and smoking, should be avoided.

Prolonged stress, whether psychological or physical, plays havoc with digestion and nutritional needs. Certain foods can provide the extra energy or comfort needed to get through a stressful period. Extra carbohydrates, both sugars and starches are required to provide fast energy.

In addition, extra dietary protein, preferably from lean meat, fish, low-fat milk, and egg whites, is needed to help prevent muscle wasting. Vegetarians can get proteins from tofu and a combination of grains and lentils, dried beans and peas and other legumes.