

Scientists find food to improve our mood

29th December 2025



A new study indicates that a diet rich in ultra-processed foods and refined carbohydrates may increase the risk of depression and other mental health conditions. The research has been published in the Journal of the Academy of

Nutrition and Dietetics. Kristin Kirkpatrick, a nutritional psychologist and registered dietitian, said there is "a tremendous amount of high-quality data linking food to beneficial (or worsening) mental health outcomes". Ms Kirkpatrick advised people to reduce the amount of sugary and low-fibre food they eat to lessen the chances of developing mood disorders. She wrote: "Limits should be made on sugar, refined grains, ultra-processed foods, and alcohol."

Ms Kirkpatrick also advised people to increase their intake of high-fibre and fermented foods. She said the plant-based Mediterranean diet has been shown to be effective in reducing depression. She said the diet included "omega-3 fatty acids, colourful plants like berries, extra virgin olive oil, leafy greens, and lean sources of protein". She added that the diet "has been shown to assist with both depression and anxiety". Related research from Professor Felice Jacka at Deakin University in Australia corroborated Ms Kirkpatrick's findings. Dr Jacka said fermented, probiotic foods may influence brain-related biology and lead to more positive moods and enhanced learning.

Sources: womansworld.com / aol.com / smh.com

Writing

You are what you eat. Discuss.

Chat

Talk about these words from the article.

diet / ultra-processed food / carbohydrates / depression / psychologist / mood / sugar / fermented food / depression / berries / olive oil / anxiety / greens / biology / learning

True / False

- 1) The article says refined carbohydrates are good for us. T / F
- 2) A study said ultra-processed foods can increase the risk of depression. T / F
- 3) A nutritionist said there is very little data on food and mental health. T / F
- 4) The nutritionist said we should cut out all sugar and refined grains. T / F
- 5) The nutritionist said we should eat more fermented foods. T / F
- 6) Plant-based diets are not effective in reducing depression. T / F
- 7) Eating more omega-3 fatty acids is good for our mental health. T / F
- 8) Fermented foods may help us to learn things. T / F

Synonym Match

(The words in **bold** are from the news article.)

- | | |
|----------------------|---------------|
| 1. indicates | a. help |
| 2. risk | b. issued |
| 3. published | c. reduce |
| 4. tremendous | d. urged |
| 5. lessen | e. chance |
| 6. advised | f. successful |
| 7. effective | g. non-fatty |
| 8. lean | h. shows |
| 9. assist | i. improved |
| 10. enhanced | j. very great |

Discussion – Student A

- a) How is your mood at the moment?
- b) How does food affect your mood?
- c) Do you think there is any food that makes you less happy?
- d) How do you think food affects your mental health?
- e) What do you think of sugary foods?
- f) What do you know about ultra-processed food?
- g) Would it be easy to completely change what you eat?
- h) What would you really like to eat right now?

Phrase Match

1. a diet rich
 2. increase the
 3. a tremendous amount of high-quality
 4. reduce the amount of
 5. lessen the chances of
 6. high-fibre and
 7. effective in
 8. lean sources of
 9. probiotic foods may influence
 10. enhanced
- a. sugary and low-fibre food
 - b. learning
 - c. developing mood disorders
 - d. reducing depression
 - e. data
 - f. protein
 - g. in ultra-processed foods
 - h. brain-related biology
 - i. risk of depression
 - j. fermented foods

Discussion – Student B

- a) What do you think about what you read?
- b) How moody are you?
- c) What food makes you happiest?
- d) Do you think 'you are what you eat'?
- e) What do you think of high-fibre foods?
- f) What do you think of fermented food?
- g) What foods are best for our mental health?
- h) What questions would you like to ask the researchers?

Spelling

1. asyrhroectba may increase the risk
2. a nutritional ysslhotpogic
3. a mnuedrteos amount of high-quality data
4. mental health otsceomu
5. developing mood dreorsids
6. ifreend grains
7. high-fibre and dreetnme foods
8. lean sources of iprtneo
9. depression and naxitye
10. cabrtodorreo Ms Kirkpatrick's findings
11. coibpitor foods
12. eenhndca learning

Answers – Synonym Match

1. h	2. e	3. b	4. j	5. c
6. d	7. f	8. g	9. a	10. i

Comprehension Questions

Listen to / read the news article. Answer these questions.
(Answers are on p. 27 of the 27-page PDF.)

1.	What increases the risk of depression besides ultra-processed foods?
2.	In what format has the research been published?
3.	What is Kristin Kirkpatrick's job besides being a nutritional psychologist?
4.	What did Ms Kirkpatrick say linked food to worsening mental health?
5.	What did Ms Kirkpatrick say lessened the chances of mood disorders?
6.	What did Ms Kirkpatrick urge people to increase their intake of?
7.	What plant-based diet was mentioned in the article?
8.	What oil was mentioned in the article?
9.	What kind of protein did Ms Kirkpatrick urge we eat?
10.	What can fermented, probiotic foods lead to besides positive moods?

Speaking – Processed Foods

Rank these with your partner. Put the unhealthiest at the top. Change partners often and share your rankings.

- Microwave meals
- Sugary drinks
- Hamburgers
- Packaged snacks
- Sugary cereal
- Bacon
- Potato chips
- Frozen pizza

Answers – True False

1 F	2 T	3 F	4 F	5 T	6 F	7 T	8 T
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

Answers to Phrase Match and Spelling are in the text.