**Eating for Mental Health**

Dietary changes can bring about changes in our brain structure (chemically and physiologically), which can lead to altered mood and behavior. The following is a list of foods and dietary practices to help regulate mood and sustain energy levels. This list is meant to be suggestive only, and should not replace the advice or recommendations of a medical professional.

**Mealtimes**

Eat small regular meals throughout the day to keep your blood sugar from rising and falling more than necessary. Five small meals are better than two or three huge meals. Choose foods that release energy slowly, like meat, fish, and whole grains. Avoid eating late at night and less than two hours before bed.

**Water**

The most vital substance for a healthy mind and body is water. It's easy to overlook drinking the recommended six to eight glasses, per day, which is a low-cost, convenient, self-help measure that can quickly change how we feel, mentally as well as physically.

**Fresh Fruit and Vegetables**

Having a minimum of five portions, daily, of fresh fruit and vegetables (organically grown, if possible) provides the nutrients needed to nourish mind and body. (One portion equals about a handful.)

**Protein**

It's also important to eat some protein foods, such as meat, fish, beans, eggs, cheese, nuts or seeds, every day. As well as providing nutrients, these eating strategies help smooth the negative effects of fluctuating blood sugar levels, which include irritability, poor concentration, fatigue, depression, and food cravings.

Essential fatty acids, particularly the omega-3 type found in oil-rich fish, such as mackerel and sardines, linseeds (flax), hemp seeds and their oils, are vital for the formation and healthy functioning of the brain. Other seeds and nuts, such as sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, brazil nuts and walnuts, also contain important 'good mood' nutrients.

**Grains**

Whole grains like oats (ex. oatmeal), corn, brown rice, barley, rye.

**Foods to avoid or limit:**

* Refined sugar (desserts, candy, cakes)
* Sugary drinks (like pop or lemonade)
* bleached flours (found in white bread or buns, cookies, pastries, etc.)
* Fatty foods
* Alcohol
* Caffeine
* Dairy (in moderation)
* Processed foods (Often high in fat or sugars/carbohydrates, and boxed or packaged, and preserved with chemicals)

Adapted from <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/prescriptions-life/200907/how-food-can-improve-your-mood-delicious-ways-prevent-depression>