

Depression and Nutrition

Alison Cowell



This fact sheet offers generic advice on depression but everyone is different. It is therefore beneficial to have a personal health and nutrition assessment to get specific advice that takes account of all your health issues and ensure that there is no conflict between your food, medication or supplements.

Food

Include:

- fresh fish - at least 3 times a week to boost your zinc and omega-3 intake. Tuna, salmon and snapper contain the highest levels tryptophan which will help lift your mood.
- plenty of fresh fruit – eating a banana before bed time will help you sleep
- pork, chicken and turkey contain tryptophan which will help your mood and your energy
- seeds and nuts (Brazil nuts and walnuts are best for depression)
- watercress in your salads
- honey (a little in a hot drink before bedtime can promote restful sleep)

Exclude:

- alcohol
- caffeine
- processed foods (i.e. lots of additives, preservatives and colourings)
- high sugary foods such as biscuits, doughnuts, syrup

Limit intake of:

- fast foods and take-aways.
- wheat products - wheat contains gluten which has been linked to depression and anxiety which is likely to be associated to an intolerance.

I highly recommend a food intolerance test if your mood/anxiety has been ongoing for some time. Whilst gluten is a common culprit, you can be intolerant to **any** food.

Supplements

Most people suffering from depression and/or anxiety are deficient in **B vitamins, magnesium and omega-3**. Over farmed soils are very deficient in magnesium and selenium so supplementation is often required to ensure sufficient intake.

The following can have beneficial results on mood, anxiety and sleep. Choose from:

- **Magnesium (chelated) (500mg)**
- **Zinc (30mg)**

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- **Vitamin B complex (with at least 75mg of most of the B vitamins and at least 100mcg of B12**
- **Omega-3** (There are 2 sub-types of omega-3; DHA (docosahexaenoic acid) and EPA (eicosapentaenoic acid). Choose a brand that provides at least 600 mg of each)
- **Probiotics** (look for one that contains *Helveticus*. It will be on the label)
- **Selenium (70mcg)**
- **St John's Wort (at least 300mg)** but not if already taking anti-depressant or the birth control pill
- **GABA** (gamma-Aminobutyric acid) (**500mg**)
- **5-HTP** (5-Hydroxytryptophan) (**120mg**) but not if taking an anti-depressant
- **SAM-e** (see below)

Herbs

The following herbs have been proven to help depression:

- kava kava
- lemon balm
- valerian
- ginseng and Siberian ginseng
- St John's Wort (see supplements, previous page)
- licorice root (provided you do not have high blood pressure)

The science bit!

Serotonin (the feel-good brain chemical) is produced and absorbed in the gut. This neurotransmitter aids blood flow, body temperature, breathing and digestion. If your digestive system is impaired and you have too many toxins in your system, you will not be absorbing the right levels of serotonin (or any other nutrients). It is therefore crucial to **stop smoking and eating junk food** to reduce the number of toxins in your system to improve your serotonin levels.

Our bodies only produce half of the amino acids we require. The rest, called essential amino acids, come from food or supplements. One of these essential amino acids is methionine, which breaks down in the liver to produce a sub-amino acid called S-adenosylmethionine (**SAM-e** for short!). SAM-e is known to raise levels of the brain chemicals dopamine, norepinephrine and serotonin. (Low levels are associated with depression). Whilst SAM-e is not found in food, natural food sources of methionine include **fish, nuts and eggs**.

Important note: Be warned, however, that you can have too much of a good thing. Serotonin Syndrome is a condition that arises when too much serotonin is in the body and can be caused unwittingly by taking a combination of prescribed medications, supplements and over-the-counter remedies. For example, an individual taking an anti-depressant, together with a medication for migraines, then purchases Robitussin

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(which contains dextromethorphan) for a cold, may well exceed acceptable serotonin levels. Always check with your health adviser or pharmacist before taking any new product.

For a personal consultation (face to face, online or email) please see www.alisoncowell.com