

FOOD FOR THE BRAIN

Championing optimum nutrition for the mind

What is the link between nutrition and depression? Hear from expert Deborah Colson

Worldwide 1 in 20 are currently diagnosed with depression and it is estimated that over the next 5 years [depression will be the second leading cause of ill health and premature death.](#)

Originating from Latin the word 'depress' means 'press down', leading to the medical term 'depression' which refers to low mood, feeling down, dejected and despondent. To some people it is a throwaway term for experiencing a bad day in the office, or an emotional state after a row with a close friend; for others it is a hugely detrimental mental health illness that controls their every waking moment and effects how they live their lives for long periods of time, often years.

Increasingly new evidence supports what Food for the Brain campaigns for - that nutrition can have a direct impact on our mental health, in particular how our brain performs, and specifically how what we eat can help our brain to produce the nutrients necessary for optimum mood and reducing mental health issues, such as depression.

But what is the link between nutrition and depression? How does what you eat effect your mood? Foods contain nutrients such as healthy fats, vitamins and minerals. These, amongst others, are the building blocks of neurotransmitters and hormones that affect every biological process in the body and brain. They are the basis of our biochemistry, so if you have been told your depression is due to a 'biochemical imbalance' it could be that you have an imbalance in nutrients.



The [Brain Bio Centre, Food for the Brain's not-for-profit nutritional therapy clinic](#) supports those with mental health issues, including depression. Over the last 12 years Nutritional Therapist Deborah Colson MSc DipION has supported hundreds of clients suffering with depressive disorders (for example clinical, postpartum and major depression). Here she shares with you some information we hope you find of benefit:

What is meant by your gut is our second brain?

The gut is our window to the world – as we consume bits of our environment (food), the gut is constantly sampling this environment and communicating with the brain. Also, we have billions of bacteria in our gut (10 times more bacteria than cells in our entire body) and there is a constant and direct two-way communication between this gut population and our brain.

What is the best nutrient you can take to support depression/mood?

There is no single nutrient which acts as an antidepressant – no 'pill for an ill' so to speak. For most people there are a number of nutritional factors which are most important for them to support a balanced emotional state and this will vary from person to person. However, key nutrients for most people are the healthy essential fats, such as omega-3, the minerals magnesium and zinc, vitamin D and the B vitamins.

If you would recommend one change to the diet what would this be?

Probably the most important change that most people should be making to their diet to support their mental health is to cut out sugar and refined carbohydrates. And increase their intake of nutrient-rich vegetables – sorry, that's two!

If there was one biochemical test to take to support depression/mood which you would you consider most beneficial?

At the Brain Bio Centre for most people we use [a test called the Nutritional Status Panel](#). It gives a comprehensive assessment of nutrient levels, including essential fats, vitamins, folate, minerals, phytonutrients, antioxidants, and homocysteine. From analysis of this test we can get a clear idea of any imbalances and deficiencies.

Is it better to invest money in diet, testing or supplements?

A nutritious diet is fundamental to good mental health and does not have to be expensive – there really are ways to eat healthily on a limited budget. Whether tests or supplements are a higher priority is difficult to say as this will depend on the individual. The most important thing is that you take the right supplements and tests for you so that you are not wasting your money.

Can you support depression with nutritional therapy whilst taking medication?

Nutritional therapy works very well alongside medication. In fact, it may help medication work better and with fewer side-effects, or enable a lower dose to be used (with the prescribing doctor's agreement of course).

Sarah is a case in point. She first came to the Brain Bio Centre in February 2015. Sarah had suffered with depression for years and was keen to reduce her medication due to concerns of side effects. In testing biochemical imbalances and nutritional deficiencies we identified that Sarah had several food intolerances, low levels of the neurotransmitter serotonin and deficiencies in a number of nutrients, including vitamin D and the mineral zinc.

By following the bespoke supplement programme and dietary advice recommended by her nutritional therapist, Sarah experienced a significant change to her mood, her depression had lifted, she was no longer anxious and "could now move on with her life".

Deborah Colson MSc DipION has been specialising in nutritional support for mental health and neurological disorders since 2002. Deborah is co-author of The Alzheimer's Prevention Plan, Optimum Nutrition for Your Child and Optimum Nutrition for your Child's Mind.

If you would like to book an appointment with Deborah, or one of the other therapists at the Brain Bio Centre please contact them on info@brainbiocentre.com, or call +44 208 332 9600. More information can be found at www.brainbiocentre.com.



Research round-up

Eating the Mediterranean way may prevent onset of depression

Although well known for its physical benefits, recent research has now identified advantages to following a Mediterranean eating pattern for our mental health, in particular identifying that the onset of depression may be prevented. Furthermore, the study which analysed over 15, 000 individuals concluded that [depression is likely to be linked to nutrient deficiencies](#).

At Food for the Brain we are firm fans of the Mediterranean diet which is abundant in fruit, vegetables, legumes, and nuts, and low in processed meats and refined carbohydrates, and have [written about its health claims in regards to cognitive health previously](#). As an introduction to this way of eating why not try our 'Recipe of the month' below!



Charity news

We are very excited to announce some great Food for the Brain events for autumn!

November 14th - Optimum Nutrition for the Mind Workshop:

Where: St Mary Abbot's Centre, London, W8 4HN

Time: 10am to 5pm

"If you get nutrition right for the brain it's right for the body." comments Patrick Holford, founder of the Institute for Optimum Nutrition and the Food for the Brain Foundation.

In this one-day workshop you'll learn everything he has learnt in 35 years exploring optimum nutrition for mental health. For more information [please visit our 'Event's page](#).

November 17th to 19th - Food Matters Live:

Where: ExCeL London, E16 1XL

Time: 10.00am to 5pm 17th and 18th, 10.00am to 4.30pm on the 19th

Food for the Brain is delighted to be hosting a stand at the renowned industry annual event Food Matters Live – a unique exhibition promoting the relationship between food, health and nutrition.

With a number of high profile guests (including the [Brain Bio Centre's Deborah Colson](#)) and other nutrition and food related conferences, seminars, exhibitors and live attractions; it is the foodie event of the year and not to be missed.

Come and visit the team at the event – we would love to meet some of our supporters! For more information and to book tickets head to the [Food Matters website](#).



Recipe of the month

Sardine & green salad with a lemon, parsley and olive oil dressing

Our recipe of the month follows the Mediterranean eating plan protocol. This autumnal salad incorporates some of the most important nutrients for mental health; including healthy fats, minerals, vitamins and antioxidants.



Ingredients (Serves 2-3):

- 300g of curly kale, 1 small bunch of flat leaf parsley
- 2 heads of little gem lettuce
- 1/2 leek (spring onions work very well too, if in season)
- 1-2 ripe avocados
- Juice of 1/2 lemon
- 2-3 cans of sardines in olive oil or brine
- 1 cup of red quinoa or lentils
- To garnish sprinkle chopped almonds, cashew nuts, pumpkin seeds and walnuts (ideally soaked in filtered water for 4 hours)

Directions:

1. Rinse the quinoa or lentils and cook as per cooking instructions. The cooking process should give you enough time to prepare the rest of the salad.
2. Wash the kale, slightly dry, tear off the leaves and place in a salad bowl. Pour the lemon juice and a pinch of sea salt over the leaves and massage in well. This helps breaking down the fibre, making the greens tenderer and easier to digest.
3. Next wash the gem lettuce and cut into strips; wash and finely slice the leeks, add to the bowl together with the gem lettuce and gently mix all together.
4. Then prepare the avocado, cut through the middle, open, remove the pip and skin, then cut through the length in the middle and thinly slice, that way you get nice similar sized pieces, add to the bowl together with the dressing and give it a good but careful mix.
5. Next prepare the fish, drain the oil or brine, remove any fish bones from the centre and tear into pieces on top of the salad.
6. Finally fold the fish under the salad mix with two wooden spoons.
7. Serve with a boiled egg, a hand full of chopped nuts and fresh parsley leaves. Bon appetite!!

[Read the full recipe, including the lemon, parsley and olive oil dressing in our 'Latest news and recipes'](#)

Recipe and image courtesy of Diana Warrings, www.irmagreen.com

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