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# FOCUS

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Poor diet has been linked with mental health in a number of conditions....

## THE WAY WE EAT MAY BE “MAKING US CRAZY”

Poor diet gets a hunk of the blame for rising rates of mental illness, according to new research from the UK. “Feeding Minds,” a report by the British Mental Health Foundation, describes how eating habits have devolved over the past 60 years. The recent report emphasizes the link between diet and mental health saying “the evidence indicates that food plays an important contributing role in the development, management and prevention of specific mental health problems, such as depression, schizophrenia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and Alzheimer’s disease.” Bad habits – like skipping breakfast, grabbing a fast-food burger for lunch and popping a frozen pizza into the microwave and calling it “dinner” – have become a way of life, in large part because people are busy. This kind of food may fill the stomach, but not the body’s nutritional needs. The “Feeding Minds” report found that British people now eat 34% fewer vegetables and 59% less fish than 60 years ago. Fast and processed foods are almost always low in critical brain-supporting components such as vitamins, minerals and essential fatty acids, and are

loaded with refined carbohydrates, saturated fats and additives – a recipe for irritability, mood swings and worse. Another factor is that industrial farming has altered our food at the most basic level. Changes in feed have increased body fat composition of certain animals and farmed fish we eat – as a result we now often take in a far higher ratio of omega-6 fatty acids to omega-3s, a shift that has been linked with depression as well as deficits in memory and focus. Food allergens are yet another contributor to mental health issues, including mood and attention problems. According to Russell B. Marz, ND, an assistant professor of nutrition at the National College of Natural Medicine in Portland, Oregon, the growing use of genetically modified high fructose corn syrup in many foods and beverages has been suspected not only in increasing rates of obesity and diabetes, but also serious food allergies.

### POOR DIET & MENTAL HEALTH

These changes add up to neurological challenges such as slower brain function and chronic inflammation. Poor diet has been

linked with mental health in a number of conditions...

**ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder).** Studies show that people with ADHD are low in certain types of omega-3 fatty acids, like DHA.



**Anxiety.** Nervousness and anxiety are associated with a lack of folic acid, niacinamide, pyridoxine, magnesium and calcium.

**Dementia and Alzheimer’s disease.** Research has linked Alzheimer’s with an increased level of homocysteine, an amino acid metabolite associated with decreased levels of folate, B-12, and pyridoxine.

**Depression.** Depression is linked to low fish consumption, as well as deficiencies in B vitamins, vitamin C, folic acid, magnesium, selenium and zinc.

**Irritability.** A lack of vitamin B-6 (pyridoxine), magnesium and selenium is commonly found in

## WHAT WE EAT MAY BE “MAKING US CRAZY” (continued)

people who are irritable.

### Poor memory and concentration.

Lapses in memory and concentration may be linked to a lack of B-12 and other B vitamins, omega-3 fatty acids and zinc.

**Schizophrenia.** Evidence suggests that people with this disorder have low levels of polyunsaturated fatty acids or antioxidant enzymes in the brain...and low levels of EPA (eicosapentaenoic acid).

### EAT YOUR WAY TO MIND-BODY HEALTH

With growing evidence of the link between mental health and diet, it's yet one more compelling reason, if indeed anyone still needs one, to follow a healthy diet.

Fortunately the same whole foods that nourish the body also nourish the mind. Avoid additives, preservatives and pesticides. Pesticides and other chemicals can aggravate problems like depression by impairing the absorption of vital nutrients such as pyridoxine, cautions Dr. Marz. When possible, buy free-range, antibiotic-free meat and local produce that is in season and organically grown. The fewer chemicals, the better for your health. If you purchase non-organic fruits and vegetables, wash and peel them to reduce chemical residues. Include protein in every meal. Protein is the body's source of essential amino acids, required to produce neurotransmitters such as serotonin (which stabilizes mood and promotes sleep) and dopamine (which imparts energy and mental focus). If you lack sufficient amino acids, you cannot manufacture enough of these chemicals.

Protein also helps stabilize blood glucose levels and prevent mood swings. Good sources include fish, eggs, skinless chicken and lean meats. Seafood or animal protein is the best source of vitamin B-12, but if you're over 50 you may have trouble absorbing this nutrient and require a supplement. Eat fish such as salmon or halibut two or three times a week, as they are excellent sources of the omega-3 fatty acids eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA). Seventy percent of the brain is composed of fat (if you exclude the water), making essential fatty acids (omega-3 and omega-6) a must for optimal brain function. Research from the Framingham Heart Study shows that people who ate fish more than two times a week halved their risk of Alzheimer's. Another option is to take a daily fish oil supplement of combined DHA and EPA. Go nuts. Eat a handful of nuts and/or seeds daily. Walnuts, cashews, peanuts and sunflower and pumpkin seeds are rich sources of magnesium and zinc. Walnuts, pumpkin seeds, flax and hemp seeds are also good sources of omega-3 fatty acids. One mice study showed that a diet high in almonds may lower the risk of or prevent Alzheimer's disease. Eat lots of fresh produce—five to 13 servings a day, according to US guidelines. Leafy green veggies such as spinach and kale are rich in folic acid, which supports concentration and memory...citrus fruits, peppers and strawberries are excellent sources of vitamin C...broccoli, brussel sprouts and cabbage are sources of magnesium.



In Dr. Marz's opinion, including more nutrient- and fiber-rich foods in your diet is even more important than including protein. Stay hydrated. About 50% to 65% of your body weight consists of water, which carries vital nutrients into cells and ushers waste products out. This seemingly simple advice constitutes a cornerstone of health. If you drink alcohol, do so in moderation. A study in the October 2008 issue of the *Archives of Neurology* notes that alcohol causes shrinkage of the brain. The more you drink, the more your brain shrinks. It's best to drink alcoholic beverages with your meal and choose organic red wines and unprocessed darker beers that contain higher phenolic levels. Experts generally advise against more than one alcoholic beverage for women and two for men. Of course, a good diet is not a panacea for mental problems any more than a bad diet is the sole cause. Serious disease such as depression and schizophrenia obviously require expert medical treatment. That said, diet is one piece of the puzzle, and a healthful diet is a must for optimal health overall.

Source: Russell B. Marz, ND, LAc, assistant professor of nutrition, National College of Natural Medicine, Portland, Oregon, and medical director of the Tabor Hill Clinic in Portland, Oregon.

*Note:* You can download a free copy of the “Feeding Minds” report – complete with recipes and nutritional advice – at the website of the British Mental Health Foundation, [www.mentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk).

## HABITS OF HAPPY COUPLES

Happy couples know that the real relationship begins when the honeymoon is over. Here are some reported habits of happy couples.

**Go to bed at the same time.**

Remember the beginning of your relationship, when you couldn't wait to go to bed with each other to make love? Happy couples resist the temptation to go to bed at different times even if one partner wakes up later to do things while his/her partner sleeps.

**Cultivate common interests.**

Don't minimize the importance of activities you can do together that you both enjoy. If you don't have common interests, develop them. At the same time, be sure to cultivate interests of your own. This will make you more interesting to your mate and prevent you from appearing too dependent. **Make trust and forgiveness your default mode.** When happy couples have a disagreement or an argument that they can't resolve, they default to trusting and forgiving rather than distrusting and be-

grudging. **Focus on accentuating the positive.** If you look for things that your partner does wrong, you always can find something. If you look for what he/she does right, you always can find something, too. **Hug each other as soon as you see each other after being apart for the day.**

Couples who say hello with a hug reaffirm their love for each other. **Say "I love you" and "Have a good day" every morning.** This is a great way to buy some patience and tolerance as each partner sets out each day to battle traffic jams, long lines and other annoyances. **Say "good night" every night, regardless of how you feel.** This tells your partner that regardless of how upset you are with him/her, you still want to be in the relationship. It says that what you and your partner have is bigger than any single upsetting incident. **Do a "weather" check during the day.** Call your partner at home or at work to see how his/her day is going. This is a great way to ad-

just expectations so that you're more in sync later in the day. For instance, if your partner is having an awful day, it might be unreasonable to expect him/her to be enthusiastic about something good that happened to you. **Walk hand in hand.** Happy couples are pleased to be seen together and often are in some kind of affectionate contact—hand in hand or hand on shoulder, for example. They are saying that they belong with each other. **Stick with it.** Even if these actions don't come naturally, happy couples stick with them until they do become a part of their relationship. It takes 30 days for a change in behavior to become a habit and a minimum of six months for a habit to become a way of life—and love.

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## 14 SIGNS OF AUTISM

Autism (sometimes call "classical autism") is the most common condition in a group of developmental disorders known as the Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs). Experts estimate that 3 to 6 children out of every 1,000 will have autism. Males are four times more likely to have autism than girls.

**14 Signs of Autism**

1. May avoid eye contact.
2. May prefer to be alone.
3. Echoes words or phrases.
4. Difficulty interacting with others.
5. Spins objects or self.
6. Insistence on sameness.
7. Inappropriate attachments to objects.
8. Inappropriate laughing or giggling.
9. May not want cuddling.
10. Difficulty in expressing needs; may use gestures.
11. Inappropriate response or no response to sound.
12. No real fear of dangers.
13. Apparent insensitivity to pain.
14. Sustained, unusual or repetitive play; uneven physical or verbal skills.

*April is  
National  
Autism Month*

For more information, visit the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke  
[www.ninds.nih.gov](http://www.ninds.nih.gov)



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## THE BENEFITS OF BOREDOM



Boredom's doldrums are unavoidable, yet also a primordial soup for some of life's most quintessentially human moments....

A long drive home after a frustrating day could force ruminations. A pang of homesickness at the start of a plane ride might put a journey in perspective.

"Increasingly, these empty moments are being saturated with productivity, communication, and the digital distractions offered by an ever-expanding array of slick mobile devices...."

"But are we too busy twirling through the songs on our iPods—while checking e-mail, while changing lanes on the highway—to consider whether we are giving up a good thing? We are most human when we feel dull. Lolling around in a state of restlessness is one of life's greatest luxuries—one not available to creatures that spend all their time pursuing mere survival. To be bored is to stop reacting to the external world, and to explore the internal one. It is in these times of reflection that people often discover something new,

whether it is an epiphany about a relationship or a new theory about the way the universe works. Granted, many people emerge from boredom feeling that they have accomplished nothing. But is accomplishment really the point of life? There is a strong argument that boredom—so often parodied as a glassy-eyed drooling state of nothingness—is an essential human emotion that underlies art, literature, philosophy, science, and even love."

"The Joy of Boredom"  
by Carolyn Y. Johnson,  
*The Boston Globe*