

How following the EatWell Guide supports nutrition for mental health

Fruit & vegetables

- Fibre in fruit and vegetables feeds the “good” bacteria in your gut, helping mood and digestion
- Eating a wide variety provides vitamins, minerals, and plant nutrients needed for brain health
- Antioxidants in fruits and vegetables help protect the body’s cells and may reduce inflammation
- Fermented vegetables (like sauerkraut or kimchi) add microbes that support gut health



Starchy foods

- Carbohydrates are the brain’s main source of energy, helping you think and focus
- Fibre in wholegrains feeds “good” gut bacteria, which can affect mood and stress
- Wholegrains also provide vitamins, minerals, and plant nutrients that help keep the brain healthy



Protein foods

- Protein provides amino acids, the building blocks the brain needs to make mood-related chemicals
- Beans and pulses provide protein, fibre and plant nutrients that support gut health
- Oily fish provide essential omega-3 fats that support brain health and help reduce inflammation. Nuts and seeds provide a different omega-3 fat, which the body needs to convert to the essential omega-3's, so we need to eat more of these to get the level we need
- Processed meats often contain additives and higher levels of salt and saturated fat, which may negatively affect health



Dairy & alternatives

- Dairy foods provide protein, vitamins, and minerals that help your brain and body work properly
- Dairy alternatives also give protein and are often fortified with vitamins and minerals
- Fermented dairy products (such as yoghurt or kefir) contain helpful microbes that support gut health



Oils and spreads

- Foods high in saturated fat, sugar and salt can increase inflammation, which can affect your brain and mood
- Omega-3 fats (found in oily fish, nuts, seeds, and some oils) help protect the brain and reduce inflammation.
- Choose unsaturated oils such as olive or rapeseed oil to support heart and brain health



Foods high in fat, salt and sugar

- Snacks, cakes, fast foods, sauces, and similar foods are often high in fat, sugar, and salt, which can increase inflammation
- They usually contain little fibre, so they don’t support the “good” bacteria in your gut. They also provide very few vitamins, minerals, and plant nutrients needed for brain health
- Some contain artificial colours and additives that may affect health in certain people



Drinks

- Sugary drinks can increase inflammation, which may affect brain health and mood
- Diet drinks contain sweeteners that may affect gut bacteria in some people
- Fruit juices and smoothies are high in sugar and easy to have too much of; limit to one portion a day



Learn more

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/food-guidelines-and-food-labels/the-eatwell-guide/>

**YP
MH** The Foundation
for Young People's
Mental Health