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WELLNESS

Blog

The Gut-Mood Connection: Preventing and Treating Depression with Food

Jeannie Oliver Wellness, LLC June 15, 2018

Awareness and dialogue around mental health, and depression in particular, is growing all the time. It is heartbreaking that we have lost so many gifted, wonderful people to suicide, but the silver lining is that we're actually talking about this out loud. Finally. We're realizing that while people's lives may appear idyllic on the outside, they are often suffering silently on the inside. Now imagine the impact that depression has on those who are not wealthy or famous and who may not have access to help.

As someone who struggled with depression for over a decade, I know what it's like to think of death in terms of relief and escape. I am thankful that I had access to therapy coupled with a strong faith and a single mom who taught me and showed me that there is always a way out, even if it's painful and difficult. I'm grateful that I witnessed people in my family who turned to alcohol and drugs as a means of escape and anesthesia and learned by watching them that substance abuse only made things worse. I am one of the lucky ones.

Many people don't have access to therapy or treatment and don't have a strong support system or a relationship with a higher power to lean on in the dark times. And even for those who do have these things, sometimes the pain is just too strong to break free of and they succumb to the overwhelming feeling that there is no way out. Sometimes drugs and/or alcohol are involved, and sometimes they're not.

Depression is a complex problem and its causes can be both numerous and mysterious. To say it is simply due to diet or can easily be fixed with nutrition would be silly and short-sighted. However, more and more studies are showing that the impact of diet and gut health in preventing and treating depression are profound, and for some, dietary changes can mean the difference between life and death. Changing my diet made a huge difference for me and it helped give me the strength (both emotional and physically) to break free of depression.

Only recently has the medical community started to recognize and understand the connection between food and mood, and the data is really exciting! According to [this study](#), our gut microbiota is linked to anxiety, depression, and even schizophrenia, and a poor diet is a risk factor for these conditions. Supporting a healthy gut microbiome with a healthy diet of unprocessed foods and probiotic foods and/or supplementation is not only beneficial in preventing and treating depression, but can be as effective as anti-depressant medications.

Serotonin is a neurotransmitter responsible for regulating our moods, sleep, and appetite and it also inhibits pain. A lack of serotonin has long been blamed as the cause of depression, and this is often the case. However, we're learning that the lack of serotonin can be a symptom of chronic inflammation and inadequate gut flora. We now know that 95% of serotonin is produced in the gut, and that the presence of enough beneficial bacteria is essential for proper serotonin production. So if we have a history of antibiotic use or were not exposed to enough bacteria in birth or childhood, we may not produce enough serotonin.

Another interesting factor is inflammation which is measure by testing C-reactive protein levels. In [one study](#) that followed C-reactive protein levels in over 1000 women for several years, they discovered that the onset of depression was triggered by increased inflammation (higher C-reactive protein). A poor diet and inflammatory foods have been linked to increased C-reactive protein and mood disorders, so getting away from processed, high sugar foods is crucial.

The take home here is that by eating an anti-inflammatory diet and including probiotic foods or taking probiotic supplements, you can help prevent and/or decrease anxiety and depression. Do your best to eat whole foods including plenty of vegetables and moderate amounts of clean animal protein (pasture-raised, organic, wild caught, etc.) and limit or avoid processed foods and high glycemic/high sugar foods. Adding in some fermented veggies such as sauerkraut or kimchi that contain live cultures and possibly taking a probiotic supplement is also important. These foods can be expensive and aren't always accessible, but local food banks and non-profits such as [Got Green](#), [FoodJustice.org](#), and [others](#) are working to make fresh, real food more accessible to low-income and marginalized communities.

If you need support in this area or want to learn more about the food-mood connection and what you can do to feel happier and healthier, I'm here to help. Don't suffer in silence! If you're struggling with depression, I understand what you're going through and I'm living proof that you can be free of it. Click [here](#) to book a free Coffee Talk session and we can talk confidentially about your concerns. I won't try to sell you on working with me unless ongoing support is what you're looking for.

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Boost Immunity and Nurture Your Gut with Probiotics

Jeannie Oliver Wellness, LLC July 13, 2017

Listen to your gut. And make sure to protect it. A balanced gastrointestinal system plays a critical role in defending your body against illness. An imbalance in gastrointestinal (GI) flora can create health issues and is typically the result of poor diet, stress, use of antibiotics, illness and food allergies.

You can help balance your GI flora by eating probiotic rich naturally fermented foods like sauerkraut, kimchi and kefir, and/or by taking a high quality probiotic supplement. Probiotics are live, microbial food ingredients similar to the health-enhancing microorganisms found in the gut. Well-researched health benefits show taking a probiotic can help .

- Boost immunity by enhancing the production of antibodies
- Support the synthesis of vitamins and increase bioavailability of nutrients
- Protect the GI tract from disease-causing bacteria and other pathogens
- Alleviate symptoms of GI illness (diarrhea and constipation, IBS)
- Reduce seasonal and food allergies

Regarding dietary allergens and immunity, scientists believe probiotics achieve their health benefits by stimulating the immune response to increase the secretion of immunoglobulin-A (IgA), which boosts the body's response to food allergens. Elevated IgA may also decrease pathogens in the gut, which improves the balance of GI flora. Probiotics elevate natural "killer cells" that gobble up disease-generating "invader cells" and may protect nutrients that would otherwise be destroyed by pathogens.

Probiotic supplements come in liquid, powder, chewable and capsule form, ranging from one million to several billion live organisms. Most are sold refrigerated. Buy professional grade supplements only and keep probiotics properly stored so as not to kill the live, healthy bacteria. I recommend Designs For Health, Thorne, Pre Encapsulations and Garden of Life brands (not a professional brand, but good quality and readily available).

Even though probiotics have well documented health benefits, they are not a fix-all. Probiotics are most effective when you are supporting your health with a nutrient-dense, whole foods diet. Your health practitioner can determine the best probiotic strains and dosage and any other supplements suited for your specific health concerns.

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The Mind-Body Connection: Food for a Healthy Brain and Happy Mood

Jeannie Oliver Wellness, LLC September 6, 2016

There's no doubt about it: what we eat, and how much we eat, has a direct impact on our physical health. But did you know that those same choices also influence mood, mental alertness, memory, and emotional wellbeing? Food can act as medicine, have a neutral effect, or it can be a poison to the body and mind.

When food acts as poison, it creates inflammation, which alters the body's balance of nutrients, hormones, and neurotransmitters. This directly affects your body's ability to manage and heal from stress or illness.

Below are four common culprits that can be detrimental to brain and emotional health and a list of foods that help support your brain and nervous system.

Foods that Impact Body-Mind Wellbeing

Gluten: Gluten stimulates secretion of a protein called zonulin which causes permeability in both the gut lining and the blood-brain barrier. This permeability allows undigested food molecules and pathogens to access the bloodstream which triggers an inflammatory immune response. This elevated inflammation in the gut and/or brain can cause short-term reactions like lethargy, "brain fog", and fatigue, and contribute to long-term issues like depression and dementia.

Caffeine: The most socially accepted psychoactive substance in the world, caffeine is used to boost alertness, enhance performance, and even treat apnea in premature infants. Caffeine is frequently added to other foods, so be mindful of total consumption. Too much caffeine (500-600 mg daily) interferes with sleep quality, which affects energy, brain detoxification, concentration, and memory. Caffeine can also aggravate other health conditions, cause digestive disturbances, and worsen menstrual symptoms and anxiety.

Food Dyes: Listed on ingredient labels as "Blue 2," or "Citrus Red," food dye has been documented to contain cancer-causing agents (e.g., benzidine). They're also associated with allergic reactions and hyperactivity in children. Dyes are sometimes used to enhance skin color of fruits and veggies. A number of dyes have been banned from use in foods and cosmetics around the world and eating organic will help you avoid these chemical compounds.

Sugars: Increased sugar consumption (as much as 30% over the last three decades for American adults), is linked to decreased intake of essential nutrients and associated with obesity, diabetes, inflammatory disease, joint pain and even schizophrenia. Too much sugar results in blood sugar fluctuations, causing mood swings, anxiety, irritability, headaches, and increased depression. There are even sugars that can act as poison including High Fructose Corn

Syrup, table sugar, and artificial sweeteners such as aspartame .

MSG: Monosodium glutamate is a flavor enhancer common in packaged and prepared foods. Although the FDA considers MSG "generally safe," some individuals experience a complex of physical and mental symptoms after eating MSG-containing foods. Symptoms vary but can include headache, sweating, nausea, chest pain, heart palpitations, and overstimulation of the central nervous system which can lead to alterations in sleep, mood, and immunity.

Becoming aware of your food choices, why you make them, and how you feel mentally and physically is an important first step in understanding your personal body-mind food connection. Keeping a mind-body food journal can be very helpful in providing a clear picture of how your food choices affect your health.

The Gut-Brain Connection and Foods that Support Body-Mind Wellbeing

Healthy Fats: These include fats such as organic avocado, virgin coconut oil, ghee and other animal fats from organic, grass-fed animals, fish oils, olive oil, flax seeds and oil, chia seeds, hemp seeds and oil, and organic nuts and seeds. Fat is your best friend when it comes to brain health, and contrary to old beliefs, it does not make you fat. In fact, healthy fats support healthy hormones and a healthy metabolism which means they can actually help you lose body fat.

Colorful Vegetables & Antioxidant Fruits: Vegetables and certain fruits like dark berries are loaded with antioxidants. Antioxidants are compounds that prevent or delay cell damage and they help reduce our overall inflammation and prevent disease. By "eating the rainbow" and getting as many different colors of veggies as possible (mostly those that grow above ground), you will be giving your body a healthy dose of antioxidants to help support a healthy brain and nervous system.

Naturally Fermented Probiotic Foods: Foods such as kimchi, sauerkraut, kombucha and homemade goat or sheep's milk kefir and yogurt are great sources of probiotics. We know that these friendly bacteria are crucial for a healthy gut but they also have a major influence on our mental and emotional health. You've heard the expression "gut feeling" or "gut instinct"; Well, doctors often refer to the gut as the enteric nervous system, or the second brain. The enteric nervous system or ENS is made up of over 100 million nerve cells lining your gastrointestinal tract from esophagus to rectum.

The ENS can also play a major role in emotional distress experienced by people coping with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and gut problems such as constipation, diarrhea, bloating, pain and stomach upset. "For decades, researchers and doctors thought that anxiety and depression contributed to these problems. But our studies and others show that it may also be the other way around," says According to [Jay Pasricha, M.D.](#), director of the Johns Hopkins Center for Neurogastroenterology. "These new findings may explain why a higher-than-normal percentage of people with IBS and functional bowel problems develop depression and anxiety,"

In short, if you have a healthy gut, you probably have a healthy brain so eat the foods that benefit both and you can't lose. If you're experiencing symptoms that interfere with your quality of living, [reach out](#) and let's talk about the role these or other foods may play in your emotional and physical health.

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Overcoming Systemic Candida - Could The Body Ecology Diet™ Be The Answer?

Jeannie Oliver Wellness, LLC June 6, 2016

I recently completed a 4-month therapeutic diet to address systemic candida, or candidiasis, a condition I've dealt with for years after taking copious amounts of antibiotics and eating a high sugar diet as a young girl. Only in recent years have I learned how to address this condition with diet and for a while I seemed to have things under control. But after a few months of being slightly more liberal with my intake of fruit, red wine and dark chocolate, I could feel that it was time to get serious and I started the anti-candida protocol that I've created for my clients.

My protocol is fairly simple – no sugar, alcohol, fruit, grains or starchy foods and lots of organic vegetables with a little clean protein and small amounts of nuts and seeds combined with broths, probiotic foods like sauerkraut, and a few specific supplements. But even as a nutrition expert I found myself wanting to better understand why I was eliminating certain foods and what benefits I was getting from what I was eating, so I turned to the industry expert in candida diets, Donna Gates and her book the [Body Ecology Diet™](#). Donna Gates developed this protocol to combat yeast overgrowth and help restore the body's "inner ecology" and her book turned out to be a great resource for me. While the protocol was developed specifically to treat candidiasis, it has also been found to benefit the immune system as a whole.

Candidiasis is a systemic fungal infection of candida albicans and it can wreak havoc on the body by overwhelming the immune system and leaving the patient vulnerable to other types of illness and infection such as HIV, herpes, Epstein Barr, chronic fatigue syndrome and cancer. According to [The Body Ecology Diet™](#), we can boost the body's ability to fight off or prevent these illnesses if we can eradicate any existing candidiasis.

The Body Ecology Diet™ was designed to support the immune system, organs and digestion, starve the yeast, and restore balance to the body's internal chemistry and microbiome by applying 7 key principles. These principles draw on the wisdom of both ancient and modern medicine and nutrition, including Chinese medicine Ayurveda, macrobiotics, traditional fermented foods and food combining.

The first of these 7 principles is that of expansion and contraction, also known as the Chinese concept of yin and yang. Certain foods are considered yang/contracting while others are yin/expanding. Yin foods are cool and tend to moisten the body, while yang foods are more warm and dry. If one consumes too many yang or contracting foods, the body may become too tight leading to poor circulation, detoxification and elimination. On the other hand, if too many yin or expanding foods are consumed it can make one feel spacey, confused and lacking focus. The goal is to consume a balance of both yin and yang foods and to eat mostly foods that are more balanced in nature.

Maintaining the acid/alkaline pH of the body is the basis of the 2nd principle. This concept has become somewhat controversial in light of recent studies disproving the theory that diet can alter the pH of the blood ([1](#), [2](#), [3](#)). The Body Ecology Diet™ is based in the belief that our diet determines the pH of all of our bodily fluids and that by eating more alkaline-forming foods we can ensure the ideal, slightly alkaline pH (about 7.4) within the body. These alkaline-forming foods include most vegetables, sea vegetables, herbs, raw seeds (except for sesame), almonds (soaked & sprouted), fermented/cultured vegetables, raw kefir, raw apple cider vinegar, filtered water, lemon, lime, cranberries and blackcurrants (both unsweetened). A few acid-forming foods are also permitted on the diet, including eggs, fish, poultry, beef, buckwheat and unrefined oils (all organic).

Principle 3 of The Body Ecology Diet™ is Uniqueness, meaning that we are all unique individuals and will respond differently to diets, treatments, etc. depending on our individual needs, health, physiology, background and preferences. The importance of listening to one's body and intuition is emphasized in this principle.

Cleansing is the 4th principle and possibly the most important since this process is the body's way of ridding itself of toxins, impurities, aging cells and tissues, and waste. Our organs of detoxification (liver, kidneys, lungs, colon), our skin, our urinary tract and even bodily fluids like tears also help to carry away impurities. Disease occurs when those channels of elimination are overwhelmed and the body cannot cleanse itself effectively. During the first 3 months of following The Body Ecology Diet™ people may feel worse before they feel better. This is because the candida produces toxic substances when it dies off which can cause symptoms such as fatigue, flu symptoms, skin rashes, headaches, depression, aches and pains. While this may be unpleasant, it is a sign that your body is eliminating those nasty toxins. It may be tempting to abandon the diet when this happens but this is the most important time to stay the course, and it is necessary to go through this stage in order to heal and feel better. Simple practices like drinking lots of pure water, sweating in a sauna, and colon hydrotherapy can be extremely helpful in alleviating die off symptoms.

The 5th principle is proper food combining. This theory is based on the belief that eating compatible foods at each meal can promote proper digestion, promote fat loss, and increase overall health. This practice is often bypassed in traditional candida diets but it can be extremely effective since it can prevent undigested food from rotting and fermenting in the gut. When food ferments in the gut it produces sugars that provide food for yeast and parasites, thereby worsening the problem and putting additional stress on the immune and digestive systems (I explored this concept in more detail in [this article](#)). The basic rules of food combining as outlined in The Body Ecology Diet™ are: 1. Eat fruit alone and on an empty stomach, 2. Always eat protein with non-starchy vegetables and sea vegetables, and 3. Always eat grains or grain-like seeds (amaranth, quinoa, buckwheat, millet) and starchy vegetables with non-starchy and/or sea vegetables.

The 80/20 Principle is #6 and it is two-fold. Rule number one of the 80/20 Principle is to eat until your stomach is 80% full, leaving the remaining 20% to do the work of digesting your meal. This can take some time to get dialed in, especially if you're not particularly in touch with your body's signals, but once you learn to identify that point at which you are 80% full you will appreciate the benefits of this step. Rule number two is to fill 80% of your plate with vegetables, and the remaining 20% with protein or grains and starchy vegetables. By practicing the 80/20 Principle you will feel less bloated and will most likely enjoy healthier digestion and elimination.

Last but not certainly not least is #7 - the principle of Step by Step. One's health doesn't just suddenly deteriorate, it happens step by step in small increments over time in ways that we are often unaware of. The healing process works the same way. If we don't follow each necessary step to heal and restore our inner ecosystem, we cannot achieve true health and vitality.

The Body Ecology Diet™ first steps to healing are:

- Create a hearty inner ecosystem in the gut and intestines

- Create energy by supporting and nourishing the adrenals and the thyroid
- Eliminate any existing infections, especially fungal infections like candida
- Cleanse.

In addition, we can help speed the healing process by:

- Be gentle and patient with yourself
- Eliminating stress in every way possible
- Follow the diet exactly
- Eat cleansing foods such as lemons, limes, cultured vegetables, coconut kefir, and raw apple cider vinegar.
- Avoid medications that inhibit the cleansing process
- Make colon cleansing a priority
- Rest during times of cleansing / detoxification
- Use probiotics to increase beneficial bacteria in the gut

Another concept that Donna Gates refers to in The Body Ecology Diet™ is that of the [Blood Type Diet](#), pioneered by Dr. James L. D'Adamo. Dr. Adamo believed he discovered a connection between blood types and dietary requirements, and although there is some research that suggests there is no such connection (4), there are many others who report that eating according to their blood type has been positively life changing. I believe this is a prime example of bio-individuality – what works wonders for one person may have no effect or a negative effect on another. Body Ecology believes that while the blood type theory may help you better understand your body, it is still a work in progress and needs further research and study to prove it's validity.

In conclusion, The Body Ecology Diet™ can be a very effective way of restoring balance and health to your “inner ecosystem”. But as with any dietary protocol it is important to keep in mind that there is no one size fits all when it comes to nutrition and healing. For example, some people thrive by including certain grain-like seeds in their diet, while others (like me) have more success following a completely grain-free autoimmune paleo style diet. Listen to your instincts, consult your health practitioner, and don't be afraid to experiment. Chances are with a little guidance, detective work and flexibility you can discover the best approach for your body. As you heal and your body becomes stronger you can enjoy a wider variety of healthful, whole foods but in the meantime, approach any dietary protocol as a fun experiment and do your best to enjoy the process.

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Candida Diet Friendly
Smoothies & Juices
Salads
Snacks
side dishes
Holidays
Vegetables
breakfast
Kid Friendly
sweets & desserts
lunch
dinner

Are you getting the
nutrients you need
from your diet?

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Fatty fast food is low in fibre and plant foods, both of which provide your good gut bacteria with the nutrients they need. Consequently, a diet full of fast food provides less food for beneficial microbes, helping potentially harmful pathogens to dominate. Your individual mix of gut flora can even affect your appetite. The bacterium *Helicobacter pylori*, for example, inhibits the hunger-enhancing hormone ghrelin, thus curbing cravings. Gut bacteria can also influence sugar cravings. When two groups of mice consumed a sugar solution in a 2012 French study, those with healthy gut flora ate less. The Food-Mood Connection. Yes, your eating habits play a big role in determining your disease risks. But did you know that they also have a huge effect on your state of mind? Jack Challem Jack Challem is the author of *The Food-Mood Solution: All-Natural Ways to Banish Anxiety, Depression, Anger, Stress, Overeating, and Alcohol and Drug Problems* (www.foodmoodsolution.com), which will be published in February 2007 by John Wiley & Sons. Leave a Comment. Cancel reply. Depression affects more than 120 million people worldwide, making it the leading cause of disability, according to the World Health Organization. In North America, the problem is even more pronounced. About a third of people being treated for clinical depression are considered "nonresponders." They try drug after drug, with no relief. Another third feel a little better, but still not great. Nutrition can get your gut health back on track. Your GI tract does more than move food from one end to the other. It's responsible for absorbing the nutrients your organs — including the brain — need to function properly, and for constraining harmful bacteria and other molecules so they can't get access to (and harm) the rest of the body.