

BOOST YOUR MOOD

Food and lifestyle upgrades to
lift your spirits



FOOD & MOOD

The link between physical health and what you eat is well understood, but did you know that what you eat has a huge impact on your mood and how you feel?

I wonder how we forgot about this connection, because it was common knowledge in times gone by. Way back when (think medieval times), people would eat quince, dates and elder flowers, if they were feeling a little blue, and use lettuce and chicory as nature's tranquilisers.

Modern science has extensively studied the impact of food on mood, and we now understand why food has such a positive (or negative) effect and also which foods we should be eating more (or less) of to support mental health.

Managing anxiety, stress, depression and other mood disorders is complex, and there's no one-size-fits-all solution. But we know that the right diet and lifestyle plan combined with motivational coaching to help you every step of the way can be an enormous help.

This guide is designed to help you take the first steps in supporting your mood through diet and lifestyle changes. But, if you have tried to make changes on your own in the past, you'll understand that having the knowledge is only a very small piece of the puzzle. My signature Mood & Energy programme has been created to help raise your mood, boost your energy and help you get motivated and back to living life to the full, reduce anxiety, and improve your overall wellbeing. To find out more about this programme, drop me an email or book in for a free call.



CHECK YOUR MOOD

Check yourself out on the questionnaire below to find out where you fit on the continuum, from happy and content to prone to low moods, through to clinically depressed.

Add 2 points for every frequent score, 1 for occasionally and 0 for rarely.

	FREQUENTLY	OCCASIONALLY	RARELY
Do you feel downhearted, depressed or sad?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you feel worse in the morning?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have crying spells, or feel like it?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have trouble sleeping?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is your appetite poor or are you losing weight?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are you gaining weight or bingeing on sweet foods?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you feel unattractive and unlovable?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you prefer to be alone and shy away from social events?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you feel fearful and easily panic about things?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you feel anxious and nervous?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are you often tired?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you easily become irritable or angry?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are you restless and unable to keep still?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you feel hopeless about the future?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you think you have let or are letting people down?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is your mood affecting your work?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is it an effort to do things you used to do with ease?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you feel like you've slowed down?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you find it difficult to make decisions?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you worry about your health?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you feel less enjoyment from activities you used to enjoy?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have less interest or desire for sex?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

LOW MOOD QUESTIONNAIRE

YOUR SCORE

Below 5

Your mood is normal. You appear to be positive, optimistic and able to roll with the punches. This book will give you clues on how to handle those occasions when things aren't going so well for you.

5 - 10

You have a mild case of the blues. Following the advice here, either by yourself or with some support, will help to get you back on track.

10 - 15

You have a moderate case of the blues. As well as following the advice given here, you could benefit from some additional professional help before symptoms worsen.

More than 15

You have a number of symptoms of depression and, it is important that you take action immediately to get professional help and support.

HAMILTON RATING SCALE OF DEPRESSION

The Mood Check above is based on similar symptoms that are used in medical questionnaires designed to diagnose depression. One of the most widely used is called the 'Hamilton Rating Scale of Depression' (Ham-D), which is also one of the most widely used tests to evaluate the effectiveness of different mood boosting approaches, for example anti-depressant drugs or psychotherapy. If you are diagnosed with depression it is usually on the basis of a scale such as the Ham-D. So, when you read about studies that show, for example, a 30% improvement in the Ham-D score, you'll have a good idea of what that means.

When making positive changes to your diet, lifestyle and mindset, you can also use the Mood Check above as a yardstick so that, as you try out different factors, you can come back to this questionnaire and rate how you feel as a result.

EAT

Good nutrition makes all the difference

The very edited highlight of the research into what you should eat to balance your energy and improve your mood is to follow a Mediterranean- style diet featuring plenty of whole, natural foods. That also means learning to balance your blood sugar levels. Loss of blood sugar balance has a clear link to stress, anxiety and depression. 50% of low mood is down to blood sugar imbalances.

Learning how to become a master of your blood sugar balance is the secret to having more energy, a better mood and controlling your weight - and losing it if you need to. Feeling more confident about the way you look is in itself an excellent way to boost feelings of self-worth.

In the same way that eating well can positively influence mood, making poor food choices can have the opposite effect. Research by a team at Binghamton, New York, showed that young adults under 30 who ate fast food more than three times a week scored higher when it came to levels of mental distress. The same researchers found that those who ate meat fewer than three times a week had more mental health problems (potentially as the amino acid tryptophan found in meat is the pre-cursor to the feel-good chemical serotonin).



EAT

IN

Eat 3 meals a day with a mid morning and a mid afternoon snack.

Eating low GL (glycaemic load) carbohydrates that keep your blood sugar level even and minimises mood-altering blood sugar dips.

Sufficient protein, giving you an optimum supply of essential amino acids. Have some form of protein with every meal and snack.

Eat whole, unadulterated food, high in soluble fibre (beans, lentils, oats). High mood-boosting Vitamin B foods like nuts, seeds, beans and green leafy vegetables (which also include essential zinc and magnesium) are good for mental stability.

Foods containing high amounts of essential omega-3 fats as well as vitamin D. Include a serving of each of the following foods in your diet every day: fish (especially oily fish such as salmon, mackerel, herring, kippers, sardines, tuna). Or free-range eggs or free-range chicken, or turkey. Nuts, seeds and beans, especially flax seeds, pumpkin seeds, almonds, and all beans. All berries, cherries, plums, apples and pears, green vegetables: broccoli, asparagus, peas, artichoke, kale, cabbage, watercress, rocket.

OUT

Avoid sugar in its many disguises and limit foods containing carbohydrates that break down into sugar fast - bread, rice, pasta, pastries, cakes and cookies.

Avoid foods high in saturated, hydrogenated, processed fats or damaged fats, such as sausages, fried foods and junk food.

Reduce wheat and milk, common contributors to food intolerances and altered moods. Testing available - please email me. Limit or avoid caffeinated drinks (1 coffee or 2 weak teas a day).

Limit or avoid alcohol (no more than 3 small glasses of wine, half-pints of beer or measures of spirit a week - and not all on the same night).

ESSENTIAL FATS

Key to your mood and brain function

Few of us get enough omega-3 fats in our diet, and these are key to our mood and brain function. The dry weight of our brain is literally 60% fat - so not surprising that we depend on a daily intake of essential fats.

EPA, DPA and DHA - certain long-chain omega-3 fats - build and rebuild your brain, and are part of the equation for happiness. The higher your blood levels of omega-3 fats, the higher your levels of the feel-good neurotransmitter serotonin are likely to be.

Omega-3 fats help build receptor sites as well as improving their function. There have been ten good quality double-blind controlled trials to date giving fish oils rich in omega-3s to depressed people. Five showed significant improvement, greater than that reported for anti-depressant drugs.

Most studies on anti-depressant drugs report something like a 15% reduction in depression ratings. Three studies on omega-3s reported an average reduction of 50% - and without side-effects.

Sources of omega-3 fats: oily fish (salmon, trout, mackerel, sardines, cod, tuna, halibut), walnuts, chia seeds, flax seeds. If you are vegetarian or vegan, consider taking an omega-3 supplement (e.g. DHA from seaweed). Most plant sources of omega-3 do not contain the long-chain fatty acids mentioned above. Although the body can make those from short-chain omega-3s - like the ones found in nuts and seeds - conversion is poor and it is difficult to get enough omega-3 that way, especially if you are not in good health or pregnant, when you need some extra.



EXERCISE

Exercise plays a key part in beating the blues

A number of studies, in which people exercised for 30 to 60 minutes, 3 to 5 times a week, found a drop of around 5 points in their Hamilton Rating Scale - more than double what you'd expect from anti-depressants alone.

If you are feeling down and de-motivated, it's not easy to get started on exercise: but the benefits are worth it.

Exercise increases blood flow to the brain and raises levels of the brain chemicals serotonin and dopamine. Higher serotonin levels make us feel good. Dopamine helps create a sense of motivation.

Natural light also stimulates serotonin. Exercise helps you to sleep, because it can "burn off" excess adrenalin.

If it helps to balance blood sugar and lose weight and that, in turn, improves your mood and motivation.

When you get started, aim for 20 minutes of exercise five days a week, preferably outdoors. If you are significantly overweight, this could be brisk walking - 30 minutes a day would be better.

Find something you like doing, preferably in a pleasant area, and with other people. It's great to have an exercise buddy. Exercise then becomes another means of focusing attention away from yourself and your preoccupations, and of spending enjoyable time with others. An exercise buddy also adds accountability: You are more likely to show up.

Following the low-GL mood boosting diet, and maybe taking the right supplements, will improve energy levels enough to give it a go.



SLEEP

Mood and Sleep have a lot in common

Lack of sleep has a big effect on how you feel, and finding out how to sleep through the night and wake up refreshed, could be the missing piece in getting you to feel a whole lot better.

The amino acid tryptophan is not only the raw material for serotonin, but also for melatonin, a brain chemical that helps you sleep by controlling the sleep/wake cycle. It's the brain's neurotransmitter, which keeps you in sync with the earth's day/night cycle. Jet lag, for example, happens when the brain's chemistry takes time to catch up with a sudden time zone shift.

As you start to wind down in the evening, serotonin levels rise and cortisol levels fall. As it gets darker melatonin kicks in.

What can you do to improve your quantity and quality of sleep?

Provide more of the building blocks that make serotonin - tryptophan, an amino acid present in most protein-rich foods like chicken, cheese, tuna, tofu, eggs, nuts, seeds and milk.

The conversion from tryptophan to serotonin requires folic acid, B6, vitamin C and zinc. These can be found in beef, broccoli, cashews, chicken, chickpeas, cauliflower, peppers, kale, kiwi, lamb, oranges, parsley, pumpkin seeds, pineapple, salmon, spinach, turkey and tuna.



SLEEP ACTION PLAN

Try to go to bed at the same time every day, your body thrives on routine.

Keep the temperature in your bedroom comfortable; not too hot, nor too cold.

Use your bed only for sleep and sex. This may help you switch off.

Keep the bedroom completely dark, so you're not disturbed by light, which your brain detects even when your eyes are closed, eye masks can be useful.

Spend time outdoors to soak up the sun.

Take some gentle exercise every day. There is evidence that regular exercise improves restful sleep. This includes stretching and aerobic exercise. A brisk walk ticks both boxes.

Make an effort to relax for at least 5 minutes before going to bed - a warm bath, massage, meditation.

Keep your feet and hands warm. Wear warm socks and/or mittens or gloves to bed.

Consider getting a traditional alarm clock so your smartphone can stay out of the bedroom (see below). Better still, work out how much sleep you need by going to bed 15 minutes earlier until you find that you wake up naturally before your alarm. That's your personal sleep requirement.

TAKE ACTION

Low mood affects up to 20% of us at any one time

Low mood affects up to 20% of us at any one time, so everyone is likely to experience some form of it at one time or another. Many periods of low mood can be almost eradicated by following the simple steps in this guide and by following my signature Mood & Energy programme. Not only because this addresses many of the physical causes of low mood, but also because you are spending your time focusing on a positive action plan and learning new things rather than ruminating about problems.

To find out more about how a nutrition & lifestyle programme can help, email or visit my website to book a free call with me.

