

## **General Dietary Advice for Improving Mental Health**

### **Sugar**

Refined sugars act like a drug in the body. They go straight into the blood stream from the stomach and can give an instant high in terms of both mood and energy. The problem is that 'what goes up must come down' and following any initial high there can be a significant drop in mood. This will exacerbate any existing condition involving mood swings or depression. The fluctuation in blood sugar levels can also increase anxiety. There are many 'hidden' sugars in processed foods. Baked beans and tomato ketchup both contain significant amounts of sugar. Many breakfast cereals are high in sugar. Always check the list of ingredients on any foods you buy.

### **Gluten/Wheat**

There is now an established link between Schizophrenia and Celiac disease, which began with research done with gluten free diets in the 1960's. When suffering from any form of mental illness it is worth cutting out gluten for a few weeks to find out if you have a problem. Even if you do not have Celiac Disease you may still have sensitivity to gluten or wheat,

### **Coffee, Tea and Alcohol**

Coffee and tea both contain **caffeine**, which is a stimulant. Like sugar, this can give a lift in mood followed by a low. Caffeine also stresses the adrenal glands, which in turn limits the body's ability to deal with stress. Caffeine can bring on feelings of anxiety. Alcohol can improve mood initially (often why we drink it!) but is actually a depressant in the long term. Many people feel depressed even after a couple of drinks. Alcohol also affects sleep. It may help you to get off to sleep initially but can lead to chronic sleep problems including waking up too early.

### **Meat and Dairy Products/ Hormones**

There are a lot of artificial hormones used in the farming industry. If there is a hormonal element to your mental health symptoms, it may help to eat only organic dairy products and meat, as no artificial hormones are used in this method of farming.

### **B vitamins and Zinc**

There is evidence to suggest that some people with mental health problems are deficient in Zinc and other vitamins and minerals. Taking a good multivitamin and mineral will deal with general deficiency. Larger doses of Zinc in addition to this have also helped some people. B vitamins are particularly good for the nervous system and symptoms of stress,

### **Food Sensitivities**

Individuals can be sensitive to any foods. However there are foods that come up more often than others. Generally when we think of reacting to foods in the diet, we think of skin rashes or perhaps eczema, but intolerance to something you eat can actually affect your mood. Wheat and sugar and others have already been mentioned, some others might include: Tomatoes, Oranges, Chinese food (Monosodium glutamate), Kiwi fruit, food additives, Saccharin or vinegar. It is important to stress that these are not foods that everyone should avoid, but examples of foods that some individuals have reacted to. They will not affect every one and there may be other foods not listed here that could affect your mood.

### **Eat meals regularly to maintain blood sugar levels**

An important way of keeping blood sugar levels stable is to eat regular meals - little and often. Leaving long gaps between meals can exacerbate many symptoms from agitation to depression.

## EXAMPLE DIET

First thing; glass of water

### Breakfast

Natural yoghurt and fruit

Apple juice

Decaf. Tea

B complex tablet

Water

### Mid-morning snack

Oatcakes and hummus Carrot sticks Decaf, Coffee

Water

### Lunch

Homemade soup and rice cakes

tablet

Or rice salad with olives

Fruit salad

Pineapple juice

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Multivitamin and mineral

Zinc tablet

Water

### Tea/Dinner

Organic chicken, new potatoes and broccoli Or stir fry tofu, rice noodles and veg. Grape juice

Water

### Supper/snack

Rice cakes with olive pate Celery stick and dried apricots

Aim for 1 1/2 litres of water daily, to be drunk between meals.

Carry snacks around with you if you have a tendency to skip meals.