The food we eat is intricately linked to our mood, emotions, and behavior. A famous study demonstrated that when prisoners received adequate micronutrients, scientists found a dramatic reduction in violent incidents and behavioral issues. As the “gut-brain hypothesis” suggests, what we eat affects how we think and feel.

Below are eight ways to nutritionally boost your mood that are all backed by science:

1.) **Eat healthy fats.** Researchers have found that polyunsaturated fats (in particular omega-3 fatty acids) play a vital role in the brain and in modifying inflammatory pathways.

   Neuro-inflammation is associated with symptoms of depression, so a diet rich in omega-3 fats may be beneficial. Sources of omega-3 fats include seeds, walnuts, and oysters, although the highest amounts exist in oily fish such as salmon, sardines, and mackerel.

2.) **Try more tryptophan.** Tryptophan is an essential amino acid (the building blocks of proteins) and is required to produce serotonin. Serotonin is thought to produce a stable mood, and reduced levels have been found in people with depression.

   Foods that naturally support tryptophan levels include seeds, nuts, cheese, oats, and meats.

3.) **Let the sunshine vitamin in.** Vitamin D does more than just support bone health. This hormone (yes, it's actually a hormone!) is vital in activating the conversion of tryptophan to serotonin. Inadequate vitamin D levels could be linked to symptoms of depression.

   Few foods are rich in vitamin D, with oily fish topping the list, but the best source is sunshine.

4.) **Make a beeline for the B vitamins.** B vitamins, including folate (B9), play an important role in producing brain chemicals that regulate mood and other brain functions. Low levels of folate and B vitamins have been linked to poor mood. The best way to ensure adequate B vitamins is to consume a healthy, varied diet.

   B12 can be tricky for those who restrict animal-derived foods; try giving fortified soy products and nutritional yeast a try.
5.) **Slow down on the sugar!** Have you ever had a sugar binge over a weekend and then found your gut “messed up”? Well, sugar can indeed mess with your gut!

When we overconsume sugar, it’s poorly digested and passes into the colon. There it fuels the growth of “bad” bacteria, which can wreak havoc on your health, promoting inflammation and disrupting the healthy ecology of your gut microbiome.

The majority of serotonin is made in the gut, which could be influenced by the health of your microbiome.

6.) **Choose complex carbs.** Complex carbohydrates are more slowly digested and offer a gradual release of energy into the blood stream. They also support the body’s natural detox systems and promote the activity of desirable gut bacteria.

Try adding more root vegetables, legumes, and buckwheat to your diet.

7.) **Dig into fermented foods.** Cultured and fermented foods promote a healthy gut, which can lead to a more positive mood.

Food choices include yogurt, kefir, fermented vegetables, sauerkraut, pickles, and kimchee.

8.) **Drink water!** Water is the elixir of life. It’s essential for the trillions of tiny chemical reactions that energize us throughout the day and stabilize our mood. Dehydration can cause fatigue and irritability, and drinking water is the best way to stay hydrated.

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