

## *Helpful Guides*

# Superfoods that can improve your **Mental Health**

We all need to get enough sleep. Most of us know this and try to follow it as a rule. Our brains and bodies work so hard during the day, more than we really know, and they deserve a rest at night.



The body and mind work as a team, and you can't feed one without the other.

Many studies have shown that diet and mental health are very much connected.

Some [nutritional psychiatrists](#) argue that a lack of essential nutrients can contribute to the onset of a range of mental illnesses, including anxiety, depression, ADHD, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia.

[Our gut is the starting point](#) for inflammatory responses, and as many mental health conditions are caused by subsequent inflammations in the brain, [a healthy gut is fundamental for a healthy mind.](#)

Keeping a balanced diet which supports our day-to-day functioning helps clarity of mind, concentration and mood. Unsurprisingly, most of the foods that do our mind the most good are also great for our body - superfoods! The winners to improve mood and happiness are those that are nutritionally dense with vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, fibre, and fatty acids.

### Here are some of the best around:

#### Leafy Greens

Through boosting brain functions with countless vitamins and antioxidants, common leafy vegetables such as kale, spinach, broccoli and lettuces, can improve mental health. Spinach is renowned for including high amounts of depression-fighting folic acid, which also aids concentration and reduces the effect of free radicals - unstable damaging molecules thought to play a significant role in several mental health disorders, including anxiety, depression, and bipolar disorder. Many greens include the antioxidant Lutein, which prevents the degeneration of cognitive functions, along with Vitamin K which enhances and supports brain functioning.

#### Berries

There's much scientific evidence suggesting that blueberries, strawberries, blackberries and others are beneficial to the mind in a number of ways. Many berries contain polyphenols which improve memory functions such as concentration, attention span, and energy levels. Berries' mood-boosting properties are related to their high levels of Vitamin C, which studies have found to counteract anxiety and fatigue. They also help prevent the release of cortisol, a chemical produced by stress negatively affecting memory and emotional response, furthering berries' ability to aid anxiety and depression.

## See how the Fircroft Trust can help you in other ways...

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### Whole Grains

Complex carbs such as whole wheat, brown rice, oats, barley and quinoa are fantastic mood stabilisers. Their balancing abilities are mostly enabled by their sustained release of glucose, powered by their high levels of Vitamin B - the nutrients in charge of brain health. These attributes level out mood and prevent negative feelings such as anger, irritation, and depression by converting glucose into energy and 'happy chemicals' such as serotonin and dopamine.

### Seeds

Overall, seeds are great. They contain crucial vitamins and minerals, such as magnesium, vitamin E and zinc, are a great source of healthy fats such as omega 3, and are rich in protein and fibre. Chia seeds' high fibre count regulates the gut-brain connection which supports in production of serotonin. Flax seeds reduce systemic inflammation, a digestion malfunction which is associated with depression. Sunflower seeds' vitamin E, battling damage caused by oxidative stress, and in turn neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's and other types of dementia. Pumpkin seeds high in magnesium, iron and copper, combined vital ingredients for neurological function against depression and other conditions.

### Turmeric

By controlling inflammatory processes in the body, Turmeric reduces stress. It contains high levels of curcumin, which encourages the production of serotonin and dopamine, elevating mood and reducing the effects of depression. What's more, Curcumin boosts growth hormone production, facilitating brain cell generation and slowing mental function degeneration caused by ageing.

### Fish with Omega-3 Fats

Omega-3 is found in acids within fatty fish such as salmon, tuna, sardines and mackerel. Building brain cells and contributing to nerve function improvement, it can minimise the effects of depression, ADHD and even menopause. As it also plays a super important part in brain function and development, it's thought to enhance memory and support people with Alzheimer's disease or other cognitive impairments. This doesn't feel like it bodes quite so well for people that don't eat fish, but you can in fact purchase vegan Omega-3 supplements so as you don't miss out on all these benefits.

In feeding the body, you feed the mind. A mindful, balanced approach to diet is of course key, and if depriving yourself of your favourite snacks is going to make your day worse when you need a little extra happiness, then treat yourself! After all, one of chocolate's main ingredients, cacao, also contains mood-boosting chemicals such as tryptophan. It's just all about keeping things level to give your brain and body the best shot at being its best.

Obviously, there are some struggles beyond quick fixes. If you're heading through a tough time mentally, don't forget that there's no one-fits-all solution, and sometimes we need a little more help than superfoods. If you are struggling now and need help, here are some useful resources:

#### Mind information hub:

<http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/>

#### For 24/7 support:

call The Samaritans on 116 123

**Please use all the resources available to you – and remember, friends and family can also offer valuable support and advice so please don't be afraid to ask.**