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Diet plays a key role for mental health

A diet high in fats, sugars, junk foods and processed meats is contributing to the current general malaise in the community and a high incidence of poor mental health, according to Doctors For Nutrition.

Depressive disorders affect [more than 300 million people](#) around the world, and are associated with unemployment, poor physical health, impaired social functioning, and, in its most severe forms, suicide.

[One in five Australians](#) aged 16-85 experience a mental illness in any year and the prevalence is the same in [New Zealand](#). According to the The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, mental health concerns are the [single most common reason](#) people visit their GP.

Numerous studies have linked physical health with mental health. Essentially, the healthier we are, the higher likelihood we have of experiencing a greater sense of overall wellbeing.

Health-promotion charity, Doctors For Nutrition, report there is mounting evidence indicating that a whole food plant-based diet can improve people's mental and physical health. In the process, this can help address the gap in life expectancy for people with poor mental health, which is currently a shocking [10-20 years](#), with lifestyle diseases a major cause.

"Nutrition interventions are an important tool that we need to utilise in caring for some of society's most vulnerable people," says DFN spokesperson Dr Alyce Churchill.

This can practically translate to, for example, a breakfast full of nutrient-packed ingredients such as rolled oats, fruit, seeds, and soy milk. Health-wise, this recipe

wins hands down over a meal based on bacon – a processed carcinogenic meat – and eggs, which are high in artery-clogging cholesterol.

All animal products contain arachidonic acid, an inflammatory compound known to contribute to brain changes, which may adversely affect mood. Excessive intake of foods high in arachidonic acid, such as chicken and eggs, can ultimately make us chronically sick, with evidence associating high levels of arachidonic acid in the bloodstream with a [greater incidence of suicidal risk and major depressive episodes](#).

A [wholefood eating pattern](#) centred on fruits, vegetables, grains and legumes can lift our mood and protect us from depression. Too much processed food may conversely put our mental health at risk.

The most [recent research](#) gathered from 16 randomised controlled trials found dietary interventions hold promise as a novel treatment and prevention avenue for reducing symptoms of depression across the population. DFN are excited about the emerging research into the gut-brain connection via the intestinal microbiome and the potential for enhancing mental wellbeing through a diet high in fibre-rich fruit and veg.

Whilst there are many underlying factors contributing to mental health and wellbeing, it is clear that nutrition is of critical importance.

Ends.

For Further Information & Comment

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