

6 mood-lifting foods to get you through the #SALockdown

By [Dr Christa North](#)

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Most of us are spending the lockdown at home - which means we have easier access to snacks. Boredom may often lead to veering into the wrong kind of snacks so it's crucial to understand how what you eat affects your mood.

There is an undeniable connection between your nutrition and your mental health. In particular, eating certain whole, natural foods can help to nourish your mind and ensure a healthier mental state.

Below are a few foods that dietician and Geneway practitioner Dr Christa North suggests as good options during this time:



Good fat

Fatty fish like salmon are rich in Omega-3 fatty acids, which may lower your risk of depression. Omega-3's contribute to the structure of your brain, improving the fluidity of your brain's cell membrane and play key roles in brain development and cell signalling.

Go nutty

Brazil nuts are one of the best sources of the mineral selenium, and studies have shown that people who are low in it have increased rates of depression with increased irritability, anxiety and tiredness. Brazil nuts are nutritional powerhouses and support brain function.



These independent food businesses are still operating during #SALockdown

31 Mar 2020



Vital vitamins

Bananas are high in vitamin B6, which helps synthesise feel-good neurotransmitters like dopamine and serotonin and prebiotic fibre. Bananas are a respectable source of vitamin C, and give you energy.

Don't forget to hydrate

Water is extremely important for our bodies to function properly. Even the smallest degree of water loss can impair our physical and mental wellbeing. When you're dehydrated, it can really hurt your ability to concentrate. Water also cushions the brain, spinal cord and other sensitive tissues.



Caffeine fix

A cup of caffeinated coffee can boost your mood in both the short and long term. On a short-term basis, the caffeine provides an immediate pick-me-up and can provide a mood boost. Plus, a review of data from 12 studies of caffeine and depression suggests that coffee may help protect against depression. According to the results, the ideal is about two cups (400 ml) of coffee per day.

Probing probiotics

Fermented foods like kimchi, yoghurt, kefir, kombucha and sauerkraut are rich in probiotics that support gut health. Dietary fibre, such as in plant foods such as cereals, fruits, vegetables, dried peas, nuts, lentils and grains also stimulate the production of probiotics. Probiotics can do more than improve your gut health. They also may enhance your brain.

The gut and brain are connected, a partnership called the gut-brain axis. The two are linked through the digestive tract, via the vagus nerve, the longest nerve in the body – which runs from the brain through the face and thorax to the abdomen. The gut has been called a 'second brain' because it produces many of the same neurotransmitters as the brain does, like serotonin and dopamine –which play a key role in regulating your mood. In fact, 90% of serotonin is made in your gut. What affects the gut often affects the brain and vice versa.

When your brain senses trouble, often known as the 'fight or flight' response, it sends warning signals to the gut, which is why stressful situations can trigger digestive problems such as a nervous or upset stomach. On the flip side, flares of gastrointestinal issues like irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) or chronic constipation may trigger anxiety or depression. A healthy gut helps cushion these responses.

Research has found that probiotics may help boost mood and cognitive function and lower stress and anxiety.

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