

Preventing suicide at Lake Tahoe: Food for thought for mental wellness

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Sarah McClarie
Special to the Sun-Bonanza



Eating healthy and smart foods is important to promote mental wellness.
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TAHOE-TRUCKEE, Calif. — Is happiness at the other end of your fork? Many people self-medicate with food, such as chocolate and coffee, but is there any real merit to the link between food and its effects on mood?

Emerging research from the fields of nutrition as well as the field of neuroscience show links between diet and mood.

By changing what we eat, we can boost our brain's health, stabilize our mood, and improve our focus.

Eating well and eating for mental health are one in the same; this does not mean a life of only broccoli and kale!

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Eating for health is more than eating a few vegetables here and there. Eating well includes foods that are rich in nutrients: vitamins, magnesium, fiber, iron and fatty acids.

There are certain foods that can stimulate certain parts of brain functioning. For example, serotonin (a "happy hormone") found in chocolate allows for a calming feeling or acts a joy stimulant.

The next time you reach for chocolate, consider if you are craving chocolate or if you are craving a happy mood. Remember, there are many pathways to happiness that don't include chocolate.

FOOD FOR MOOD:

Tomatoes contain mood enhancers, such as folate, magnesium, iron, and vitamin B6, all needed by your brain to produce important mood-regulating neurotransmitters such as serotonin, and dopamine (the pleasure compound).

Garlic is a great source of chromium, which influences the regulation of serotonin, the brain's happiness chemical.

A recent study found fish oil to be as effective as Prozac for treating depression.

You can boost your dopamine (a happiness booster) through food such as bananas, almonds, and avocados.

FOOD FOR ENERGY:

Nuts are nature's multivitamins. They contain a wealth of trace minerals, macronutrients, and vitamins, including magnesium, copper, iron, manganese, zinc, calcium, omega-3s, vitamin E, folate, and other B vitamins.

Green, leafy vegetables, the darker the better, are among the most nutrient-dense foods we eat. Folate, which protects us from depression, originates in the leaves of plants.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT:

Butter is rich in fat-soluble vitamins such as Vitamin A and Vitamin C.

Iron in your diet is important for your mental and physical health, and to keep up your energy levels.

MOOD DOOMERS (FOODS TO AVOID):

White sugar. Fluctuations in blood sugar from processed sugar can cause mood-swings, low energy, and depression. Instead of processed sugar, opt for foods sweetened naturally such as fruits or foods containing molasses, honey, or real maple syrup.

Processed foods. The more ingredients you can't pronounce in a product, the more likely it is that you shouldn't eat it. Many additives in processed foods put extra stress on the body.

When we pay attention to what we put into our bodies, and when, we are focusing on what is important for healthy brain functioning. Eat well for mental health and wellness!

Sarah McClarie is the facilitator for the Tahoe Truckee Youth Suicide Prevention Coalition. Contact her at smcclarie@ttusd.org or by calling 530-582-2560.

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