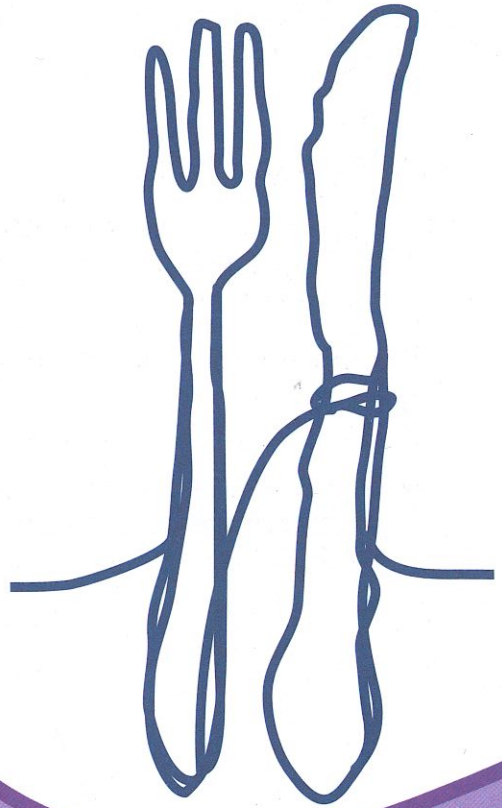


# Food and mood

## A short guide



Includes recipe suggestion

# About this guide

Evidence suggests that as well as affecting our physical health, what we eat may also affect the way we feel.

Improving your diet may help to:

- ♦ improve your mood
- ♦ give you more energy
- ♦ help you think more clearly.


This leaflet contains some healthy eating tips and a recipe suggestion.

For more detailed information on food and mood please see our website at [mind.org.uk/food](http://mind.org.uk/food) or the NHS website at [nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well](http://nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well)

## Eating regularly

If your blood sugar drops you might feel tired, irritable and depressed. Eating regularly and choosing foods that release energy slowly will help to keep your sugar levels steady.

**Slow-release energy foods include:** pasta, rice, oats, wholegrain bread and cereals, nuts and seeds.

- ♦ Eating breakfast gets the day off to a good start.
  - ♦ Instead of eating a large lunch and dinner, try eating smaller portions spaced out more regularly throughout the day.
  - ♦ Avoid foods which make your blood sugar rise and fall rapidly, such as sweets, biscuits, sugary drinks, and alcohol.
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## Staying hydrated

If you don't drink enough fluid, you may find it difficult to concentrate or think clearly. You might also start to feel constipated (which puts no one in a good mood).

- ◆ It's recommended that you drink between 6-8 glasses of fluid a day.
- ◆ Water is a cheap and healthy option.
- ◆ Tea, coffee, juices and smoothies all count towards your intake (but be aware that these may also contain caffeine or sugar).

## Getting your 5 a day


Vegetables and fruit contain a lot of the minerals, vitamins and fibre we need to keep us physically and mentally healthy. Eating a variety of different coloured fruits and vegetables every day means you'll get a good range of nutrients.

- ◆ Fresh, frozen, tinned, dried and juiced (one glass) fruits and vegetables all count towards your 5 a day.
- ◆ As a general rule, one portion is about a handful, small bowl or a small glass.

## Getting enough protein

Protein contains amino acids, which make up the chemicals your brain needs to regulate your thoughts and feelings. It also helps keep you feeling fuller for longer.

Protein is in: lean meat, fish, eggs, cheese, legumes (peas, beans and lentils), soya products, nuts and seeds.





## Managing caffeine

Caffeine is a stimulant, which means it will give you a quick burst of energy, but then may make you feel anxious and depressed, disturb your sleep (especially if you have it before bed), or give you withdrawal symptoms if you stop suddenly.

**Caffeine is in:** tea, coffee, chocolate, cola and other manufactured energy drinks.


- If you drink tea, coffee or cola, try switching to decaffeinated versions.
- You might feel noticeably better quite quickly if you drink less caffeine or avoid it altogether.

## Eating the right fats

Your brain needs fatty acids (such as omega-3 and -6) to keep it working well. So rather than avoiding all fats, it's important to eat the right ones.

**Healthy fats are found in:** oily fish, poultry, nuts (especially walnuts and almonds), olive and sunflower oils, seeds (such as sunflower and pumpkin), avocados, milk, yoghurt, cheese and eggs.

Try to avoid anything which lists 'trans fats' or 'partially hydrogenated oils' in the list of ingredients (such as some shop-bought cakes and biscuits). They can be tempting when you're feeling low, but this kind of fat isn't good for your mood or your physical health in the long run.



## Planning ahead

Finding the time to eat well can often be really difficult. If you have times when you're feeling well and enjoying preparing food, try making some extra meals to store. You could make enough to last for several days, and freeze them in portions to use at times when you can't face cooking.

## Sharing meals and cooking

Preparing your own food might feel daunting, but cooking with others can be a lot of fun. Ask your family, friends, colleagues, or other social groups to join in – they might be very happy to plan, cook and eat a meal together with you.


## Getting professional support

Sometimes the best way to improve your diet is with the help of a health professional.

- ◆ Dietitians can help you work on specific problems.
- ◆ Nutritional therapists can help you improve your overall health.
- ◆ You could ask your NHS doctor to refer you, or find private practitioners at [freelancedietician.org](http://freelancedietician.org) or [bant.org.uk](http://bant.org.uk)

## Managing food intolerances

Intolerances to particular foods (such as wheat, dairy or yeast) can cause lots of unpleasant feelings, both physical and mental. If you're concerned about this, ask a health professional to help you investigate your tolerances safely.

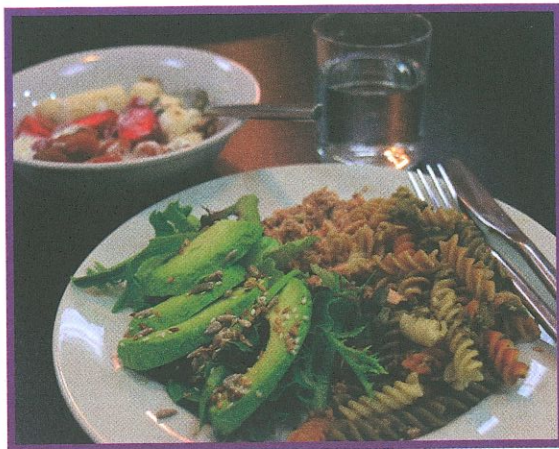


# Recipe suggestion

This recipe is an example of how you could combine a range of proteins, omega-3 fats, vitamins, wholegrains and healthy gut foods in a single meal. It's also low in sugar, caffeine and additives.

- Serves: 2–4 people
- Time: about 20 minutes
- Skill level: very easy
- Cost: under £10\*

\*This is based on our experience of making this meal. Some ingredients work out cheaper if you buy slightly larger packets, such as pasta, dried fruits, nuts and seeds.



## Main course: pasta with pesto and oil-rich fish

You will need:

- 250g packet of wholemeal pasta
- 100g jar of pesto
- 180g tin of tuna in brine or water

Why not swap in: gluten-free pasta; nut and dairy-free pesto; any oil-rich fish, such as salmon, sardines or mackerel; soybeans; roasted butternut squash.

- 1.** Cook the pasta in boiling water following the packet instructions, then drain the water.
- 2.** Add 3 tablespoons of pesto to the drained pasta and mix together.
- 3.** Open the tin of fish, drain the liquid, stir the fish into the pasta and serve.

## Side dish: avocado salad and seeds

You will need:

- ♦ 250g mixed lettuce leaves
- ♦ 1 ripe avocado
- ♦ 50g of seeds (sunflower and pumpkin)

**Why not swap in:** spinach or watercress leaves; other seeds, such as flaxseed, linseed or a mixture; a light drizzle of olive oil.

1. Wash the salad leaves, and place on a dish.
2. Remove the skin and stone from the avocado, slice it up, and add the slices to the salad.
3. Sprinkle the seeds over the top and serve.

## Dessert: fruit and yoghurt

You will need:

- ♦ fresh fruit (such as 1 apple and 1 banana)
- ♦ 8 dried apricots
- ♦ 40g broken walnuts
- ♦ 4 spoonfuls of plain probiotic yoghurt

**Why not swap in:** any fresh fruit, such as strawberries or pears; any dried fruit, such as cranberries; any nuts, such as almonds or pecans; dairy-free yoghurt.

1. Wash the fresh fruit and cut into small pieces (removing the core if you want).
2. Rinse the dried apricots, cut them into quarters, then put them in a bowl with the yoghurt and fruit.
3. Serve with walnuts sprinkled over the top.



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