



# Pick me up

## These foods can brighten your mood

Aetna Resources For Living<sup>SM</sup>

Do you ever find yourself standing in front of an open refrigerator or cupboard when you're feeling bored or blue? You're not alone if you turn to food. And there's good reason why.

Certain foods can help elevate your mood. But it's important to know which foods can give you a lift — and which can bring you down.

### What are some “feel good” foods?¹

Here are some foods that can perk you up:

- **Probiotics.**¹ Food and drinks that are high in good bacteria can make you feel better. They've been shown to help with anxiety and stress and improve your outlook on life. So reach for some yogurt or other foods or drinks with live cultures.
- **Mediterranean foods.**² A recent study showed that people with moderate to severe depression felt better after eating a Mediterranean-style diet. They ate a lot of vegetables, fruits and lean meat. The more they improved their diets, the more their depression improved.
- **Whole foods.**² Unprocessed foods are naturally high in vitamins and minerals. Eating these healthy foods, like vegetables, grass-fed beef and nuts can help your brain fight off stress.

¹Selhub, Eva. **Nutritional psychiatry: Your brain on food.** Harvard Health Publishing. Accessed January 2021.

²Lugavere, Max. **How your next meal could help fight depression and stress.** CNN health. Accessed January 2021.

## Foods can make you unhappy too.

Some foods can create the opposite effect of “feel good” foods. They include:

- **Sugar.** When you eat sweets, your blood sugar spikes... and then drops like a ton of bricks! Too much sugar in your diet can lead to mood swings, low energy and the blues. When you crave something sweet, reach for some fruit.
- **Processed foods.**<sup>3</sup> If foods have been made to last on a shelf, they'll probably be hard on your body and brain. Many processed foods lack nutritional value. And they've been linked to mental health issues like depression. But some processing — like the freezing of fruits and vegetables — is okay.

So which items should you avoid? Limit heavily processed foods that contain a lot of chemicals, salts, sugar or fat. Your body needs nutrients. And many processed foods can lead you to overeat while your body and brain starve.

## So is happiness all about diet? No way!

Diet is an important part of your wellbeing. But, it's your overall lifestyle that makes you a more satisfied and joyful person. So be sure your life includes the mainstays of happiness like:

- Time with friends and loved ones
- Enough sleep and rest
- Activities you enjoy
- Healthy doses of fun!

It's normal to crave comfort foods when you're feeling blue. But they can make you feel worse in the long run. Choose foods that can actually improve your mood.



<sup>3</sup>Jacka, Felice et al. A randomised controlled trial of dietary improvement for adults with major depression (the 'SMILES' trial). BMC Medicine. Accessed January 2021.

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