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Employee Assistance Service for Education

Monthly Article

Diet and Mental Health

Tips from The Eatwell Guide

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EASE CAN HELP DURING DIFFICULT TIMES

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(800) 882-1341

**Free confidential professional help for
member district employees and family members:**
Family troubles. Emotional distress. Job stress.
Anxiety. Drug/alcohol use. Grief. Loss.
Life transitions issues.

Professional counselors are ready to help.
Call the EASE Hotline for 24/7 assistance.

MESSAGE FROM EASE

March is National Nutrition Month and we are focusing on the link between good nutrition and mental health. The way that we feel is in many ways directly linked to our brain health. Think about brain functioning. Our brains are literally always "on". The brain takes care of our thoughts and movements, breathing and heartbeat, our senses — it works hard 24/7, even while we're asleep! This means that the brain requires a constant supply of fuel. That "fuel" comes from the foods we eat — and what's in that fuel makes all the difference. Put simply, what we eat directly affects the structure and function of the brain and, ultimately, our mood. (Nutritional Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School, 2015) If you have not already, this month start paying attention to how eating different foods makes you feel — not just in the moment, but the next day. Try eating a "clean" diet for two to three weeks — that means cutting out all processed foods and sugar. See how you feel. Then slowly introduce foods back into your diet, one by one, and see how you feel. When some people "go clean," they cannot believe how much better they feel both physically and emotionally, and how much worse they then feel when they reintroduce the foods that are known to enhance inflammation. Studies have found that healthy diets can help with symptoms of depression and anxiety. Research shows that the foods we eat today can affect how we feel today and have long-lasting effects on our minds and bodies. There are many health benefits to eating clean, but one that is often overlooked is our mental health! Choose nutrition that supports your overall physical and mental health! Try it out, and see how you feel! *Learning to treat your body with kindness can take practice - but YOU are worth it!*

![NATIONAL NUTRITION MONTH banner with fruits and vegetables]

DIET AND MENTAL HEALTH

Research suggests that what we eat not only affects our physical health, but also our mental health and well-being. The idea that what you eat matters is one concept that health researchers have come to agree on. Although some may not always agree on what constitutes a healthy diet, medical experts have long understood that while certain foods help to improve your physical well-being, others can have the opposite effect. The foods that we eat affect our mood, feelings and cognitive function. Eating a well-balanced diet that is rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean proteins can help to boost our mental health and well-being.

Barriers to keep in mind that will get you on your way to optimal mental health:

- *Trust Your Gut* - Start removing those hard-to-digest foods (processed, fried, and packaged), and add in nutrient dense goods such as veggies and clean proteins.
- *Take Care of Your Brain* - Focus on eating healthy, satiating fats, like avocado, flax oil, and fish oil.
- *Cool Inflammation* - Get rid of some of that sugary and processed food, and go for clean, whole foods, like home-cooked meals packed with veggies, as well as dark chocolate and fruit for snacks.

Research Says ...

It is important to have good nutritional intake at an early age. This was explored in multiple studies, including a systemic review in 2014. The study found that a poor diet (with high levels of saturated fat, refined carbohydrates and processed food products were linked to poorer mental health in children and adolescents. Research studies have also shown that poor nutrition can lead to physical health problems such as obesity. Results from a 2010 systematic review found two-way associations between depression and obesity. The study found that people who were obese had a 55% increased risk of developing depression over time, whereas people experiencing depression had a 58% increased risk of becoming obese.

Tips from The Eatwell Guide

The Eatwell Guide shows how much of what we eat overall should come from each food group to achieve a healthy and balanced diet. The guide divides the foods we eat and drink into 5 main groups. Try to choose a variety of foods from each of the groups to help you get the wide range of nutrients your body needs to stay healthy.

Eat at least 5 portions of a variety of fruits and vegetables a day.

Choose from fresh, frozen, tinned, dried or juiced.

Base meals on potatoes, bread, rice, pasta or other starchy carbohydrates.

Choose higher fiber wholegrain varieties, such as wholewheat pasta and brown rice, or simply leave skins on potatoes.

Eat some beans, fish, eggs, meat and other protein.

Choose lean cuts of meat and mince, and eat less red and processed meat like bacon, ham and sausages.

Have some dairy or dairy alternatives (such as soy drinks and yogurts).

Try to go for lower-fat and lower-sugar products where possible, like 1% fat milk, reduced-fat cheese or plain low-fat yogurt.

Choose unsaturated oils and spreads, and eat in small amounts

Unsaturated fats are healthier fats and include vegetable, rapeseed, olive and sunflower oils.

Eat foods high in fat, salt and sugar less often and in small amounts

They're not needed in our diet, so should be eaten less often and in smaller amounts.

Drink plenty of fluids – t 6 to 8 cups or glasses a day is recommended

Water, lower-fat milks and lower-sugar or sugar-free drinks, including tea and coffee, all count.

https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/the-eatwell-guide/   https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/d/diet-and-mental-health.
https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-whole-truth/202005/nutrition-and-mental-health-the-physiology-well-being

TALK TO US

EASE has counselors if you want to talk.

(800) 882-1341

Eatwell Guide

Use the Eatwell Guide to help you get a balance of healthier and more sustainable food. It shows how much of what you eat overall should come from each food group.
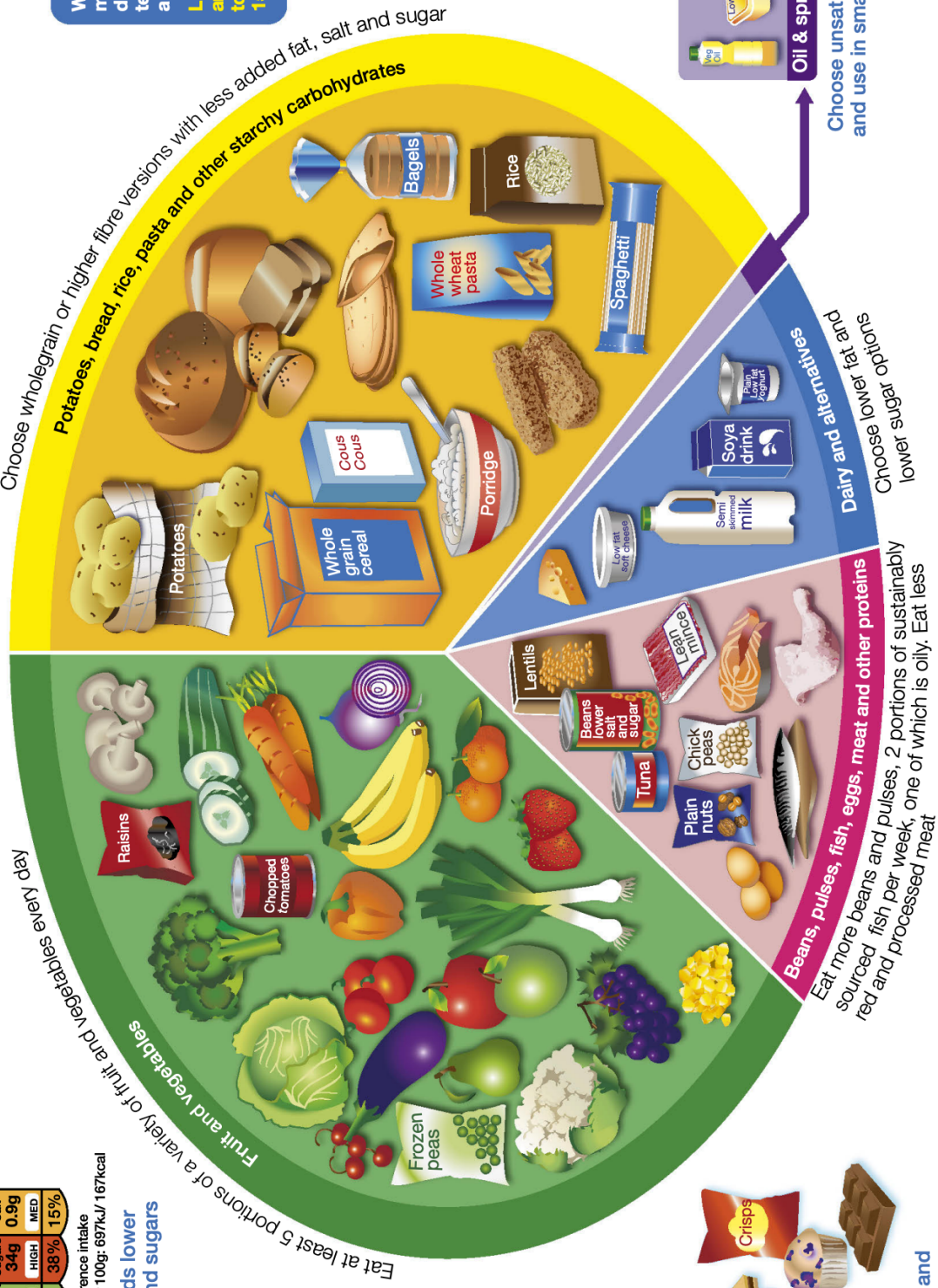
6–8 a day

Water, lower fat milk, sugar-free drinks including tea and coffee all count.

Limit fruit juice and/or smoothies to a total of 150ml a day.

Choose unsaturated oils and use in small amounts

Oil & spreads

Lower fat spread

Veg Oil

Choose wholegrain or higher fibre versions with less added fat, salt and sugar

Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates

Bagels

Rice

Whole wheat pasta

Spaghetti

Cous Cous

Porridge

Whole grain cereal

Potatoes

Per day   2000kcal   2500kcal = ALL FOOD + ALL DRINKS

Dairy and alternatives

Choose lower fat and lower sugar options

Plain Low fat Yoghurt

Soya drink

Semi skimmed milk

Low fat soft cheese

Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins

Lentils

Lean mince

Beans lower salt and sugar

Chick peas

Tuna

Plain nuts

Eat more beans and pulses, 2 portions of sustainably sourced fish per week, one of which is oily. Eat less red and processed meat

Eat at least 5 portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables every day

Fruit and vegetables

Raisins

Chopped tomatoes

Frozen peas

Check the label on packaged foods

Each serving (150g) contains

Energy	Fat	Saturates	Sugars	Salt
1046kJ 250kcal	3.0g	1.3g	34g	0.9g
	LOW	LOW	HIGH	MED
13%	4%	7%	38%	15%

of an adult's reference intake
Typical values (as sold) per 100g: 697kJ/167kcal

Choose foods lower in fat, salt and sugars

Crisps

Sauc

Eat less often and in small amounts