

DEPARTMENT OF NUTRITION

FOOD AND MOOD

Any of these can cause depression. Are you at risk?

LACK OF SUNSHINE

Exposure to sunlight creates Vitamin D in the skin. Without adequate Vitamin D, people are at risk for many diseases and conditions including depression. To prevent or treat depression your face and arms or back need 15-20 minutes of daily exposure to sunlight. Darker skin requires longer exposure to create enough Vitamin D. If you don't get adequate sunlight, and let's face it, most people in the Northwest do not and you do not drink 32 ounces of milk daily you will need a Vitamin D supplement. Aim for 1000 IU Vitamin D daily. If you suspect your Vitamin D level is low, ask your health care provider to test your level. You may need much larger doses of Vitamin D to correct a deficiency. **Caution:** Vitamin D is one of the vitamins on which you can overdose. Do not take more than 2000 IU daily unless recommended by your health care provider.

TOO BUSY TO EAT

Skipping meals and skimping on protein foods can cause you to feel low energy and more depressed. Those who "skip and skimp" may be more likely to crave and overeat foods that are high in sugar, fat, and calories later in the day. Eat small meals or snacks every 3-4 hours.

NOT ENOUGH SLEEP

A lack of deep sleep is related to depression, weight gain, and higher blood sugar levels which are a concern for those with pre-diabetes and diabetes. Aim for 7-8 hours of sleep a night. To help you get a good night's rest, take a brisk walk or other enjoyable exercise earlier in the day. Avoid caffeine after noon. Relax to favorite music or with a hot shower/bath at bedtime.

LACK OF EXERCISE

Regular exercise can be as effective as antidepressant drugs in combating depression. Make a plan for regular activity, something that you will enjoy doing on a consistent basis. Consider: walking, water aerobics, bicycling, even dancing! Home or gym equipment are useful for those rainy Oregon days. Begin at a comfortable level, and increase 5-10 minutes each week, aiming for a total of 60 minutes a day (yes, you can break that time up into shorter segments that will add up to 60 minutes) or, using a pedometer, work up to walking 10,000 steps throughout your day.

RARELY EAT MEAT

Meat is a significant source of iron. Iron deficiency can contribute to depression. So if you do not eat meat or eat very little meat you may be at risk for developing iron deficiency depression. If you eat dairy products along with the meat (a glass of milk, cheese on your burger, etc) your iron levels may be low as the calcium from dairy products binds up the iron and keeps it from being absorbed. This is particularly a problem for children and women of childbearing age. If you choose to eat meat, have small servings of lean meat regularly. If you do not choose to eat meat, include several sources of plant based iron daily (baked potatoes with the skin, blackstrap molasses, beans/legumes, fortified cereal, fortified bread, quinoa) and take a supplement that contains iron but no calcium.

TOO MANY SUGARY FOODS AND DRINKS

Candies, soda pop, sweet pastries, and cookies may give you an extra charge of energy, but following a "sugar high" your mood and energy level can spiral downwards. This can cause you to crave sugary foods

and drinks all over again, setting you up for a roller-coaster day of high and low moods and energy levels. Instead, avoid those simple carbs and opt for protein + fruit or whole grains: PB on toast, turkey sandwich, fruit and a lite cheese stick, hummus and crackers.

RARELY EAT FISH

Fish is the only known, good source of the Omega-3 fat EPA, an essential fatty acid that affects brain function. If you do not get adequate EPA you may be susceptible to depression. Healthy, non-depressed people need fish 3 times a week to get adequate Omega-3 fat. If you are experiencing depression, ask your health care provider about the supplement dose and kind of Omega-3 fat that is used to treat depression.

HEAVY MENSTRUAL PERIODS

Iron is lost through menstruation. Unless the iron is adequately replaced by your diet or an iron supplement, girls and women will become depleted in iron and are then vulnerable to depression. Have your iron storage level (ferritin) checked regularly. Your level needs to be at least at 30 to avoid the symptoms of iron deficiency.

NUTRASWEET/EQUAL

A European study has linked depression to the use of Aspartame (brand name: NutraSweet, Equal). If you are susceptible to depression avoid regularly having foods and beverages with Aspartame. The biggest source of Aspartame for most Americans is diet pop. The very beverage that you are using to give you a caffeine energy boost may be contributing to the problem of ongoing depression. The added benefit of avoiding diet (or any sweet) pop is that your taste buds will begin to readjust to a more natural level of sweetness and your tolerance for sweets may begin to decrease. To quench your thirst, water is still the best bet.

DIABETES

Did you know that studies show a link between diabetes and depression? In fact, ten to twenty percent of people with diabetes also have depression. By partnering with your doctor or nutritionist, and/or diabetes educator, you can better manage both diabetes and depression through healthy lifestyle choices, blood sugars monitoring, and appropriate medications.

Caution: Depression can be a life threatening condition. This information is not meant to replace medical advice. Do not self treat depression with food and nutrition without consulting your health care provider.

MORE HELP IS AVAILABLE

If you need help planning a diet to meet your nutritional needs The Portland Clinic has dietitians who can work with you at our South and Beaverton locations.

Call the Appointment Scheduling Line, 503-223-3113 to set up an appointment.

