



**heretohelp**

Mental health and substance use  
information you can trust



**Canadian Mental  
Health Association**  
British Columbia  
*Mental health for all*

# mental health and nutrition

## a common-sense guide

[www.heretohelp.bc.ca](http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca)



Our bodies and minds are not separate. There's a relationship between a person's mental health and what they eat. People with poor mental health tend to have poorer diets. People who eat well and get the nutrition they need tend to feel better in general, including mental health.

Food, however, is only one part of the picture. Income, access to food, finding time or energy to prepare food, and other factors all contribute to mental health and are affected by mental health.

**There are few quick fixes.** There may be links between some vitamin and mineral deficiencies and mental health, but the relationship isn't clear. We do know that a few supplements won't make up for an otherwise poor diet. We also know that too many supplements can be harmful and some interact with medications. Exercising as a quick fix to make up for unhealthy foods doesn't work, either.

**Brain food?** The evidence isn't clear. For example, fats found in fish, some nuts, and some seeds called omega-3 fatty acids are often said to be very good for brain health. Fats are definitely an important part of a healthy diet. But there isn't much evidence to show that omega-3 fatty acids on their own can prevent or treat mental health problems like depression, bipolar disorder or schizophrenia. Eating for mental health is really about eating for overall health—and that means aiming for good nutrition over time rather than quick fixes.

**Listen to your body.** For example, if you feel thirsty, your body is probably asking for water! When you ignore that sign and don't get enough water, you may feel tired and even find that your mood is lower. If you have a hard time trusting your body's cues, consider seeking extra support.

## A strategy for healthy eating

- Listen to your body
- Eat to feel energized and capable
- Focus on real food as much as you can
- Be wary of buzzwords like superfood, cleanse, and detoxify—they may be misleading or simply meaningless
- How you eat matters, too: whenever you can, eat with other people for the social benefit

## When to seek extra support

### **Diet, supplement, or nutrition questions or concerns?**

Talk to your doctor. In BC, you can also talk to a registered dietician for free by calling HealthLinkBC at 811

### **Mental health problem affecting your eating habits?**

Talk to your care provider or seek help from a health professional

**Food becoming a coping mechanism? Or restricting, purging or binge-eating foods?** Talk to a mental health professional or find help across BC at [keltyeatingdisorders.ca](http://keltyeatingdisorders.ca)

**More lifestyle tips to improve mental health?** Visit [heretohelp.bc.ca/wellness-modules](http://heretohelp.bc.ca/wellness-modules)