

Tips to Boost Your Mood this Blue Monday

We all have favourite foods that we turn to. Ones that provide us with comfort, satisfaction, a sense of wellbeing and, of course, help boost our mood on a gloomy day. But did you know there is actual science behind why certain foods can affect our brain and how we feel?

Dr Emily Prpa, Nutritionist and Science Manager at [Yakult](#), comments: "Certain foods can impact how we feel because of the close relationship and continuous back-and-forth communication between our gut and our brain – known as the gut-brain axis.

"Scientists have now realised the important role of your gut bugs (and looking after your gut health) play in both physical and mental wellbeing; your brain "talks" to all organs in the body, but your gut also "talks" back to your brain.

"At the heart of this connection lies the gut's nervous system, known as the enteric nervous system (ENS). The ENS has long been known to control digestion, but now we know it can also work independently of and with the brain. This is why the ENS is often called the body's "second brain".

Did you know...

It's actually your ENS that makes you 'feel butterflies' before a first date or 'sick to your stomach' about an upcoming work presentation?

"Whilst the ENS is central to the communication between our gut and our brain, the most direct route of communication between these two organs is via the vagus nerve. The gut microbiota (collection of gut bugs) is also involved in communicating messages from the gut to the brain and why our gut health can impact both our physical and mental health.

The routes of communication between gut microbes and the brain are varied and complex, and understanding is still evolving. There appear to be many pathways involved including immune, neurological, endocrine and nervous system pathways¹. For instance, our beneficial gut bugs can actively promote the production of tryptophan, the building block for serotonin – also known as the "happy hormone". Notably, tryptophan has the capacity to cross the blood-brain barrier, with the potential to directly influence mood and overall well-being."

Below, Dr Emily has shared some of the best foods to eat for your mood and their potential effects:

Mediterranean Diet

Research² shows that a modified Mediterranean diet for 12 weeks significantly decreased symptoms in depressed individuals and reduced their severity of anxiety. The research focused on increasing diet quality with an emphasis on 12 key food groups: wholegrains, vegetables, fruit, legumes, unsweetened dairy foods (such as natural yoghurt), raw and unsalted nuts, fish, lean red meat, chicken, eggs and olive oil.

High-Fibre Foods

A growing body of research has suggested that having a healthy, balanced diet that's rich in plant foods (i.e. fibre) may reduce the risk of depression⁴. Good sources of fibre include fruits and veg (such as figs, strawberries, broccoli), beans and lentils, and nuts and seeds

¹ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/22968153/> Tan, H. E. (2023). Frontiers in Neuroscience, 17, 1151478.

² Jacka, F. N., O'Neil, A., Opie, R., Itsiopoulos, C., Cotton, S., Mohebbi, M., ... & Berk, M. (2017). A randomised controlled trial of dietary improvement for adults with major depression (the 'SMILES' trial). *BMC medicine*, 15(1), 1-13

(such as almonds, peanuts and sunflower seeds). Another simple way of boosting fibre intake is by swapping white carbs for whole-grain versions of rice or pasta.

Foods containing tryptophan

Tryptophan is a precursor of serotonin (known as the “happy hormone”), which is important for mood. It is found in a wide variety of protein-containing foods, including eggs, cheese, meat (especially turkey) and fish. Even staples such as wholegrains (oats, brown rice, quinoa) and sweet potatoes carry within them the potential to contribute to our ‘happiness quotient’.

Consuming Omega-3 fatty acids

Omega-3s are a type of fat that your body cannot make, but are vital for health, so you must get them from your diet. These fatty acids have been linked to improved mood and cognitive function. They can be found in oily fish such as salmon and mackerel, as well as chia seeds, walnuts, flaxseeds and rapeseed oil for those looking for a plant-based alternative.

B vitamins

There is evidence that B vitamins may help reduce stress in healthy individuals. They can be found in meats such as turkey and tuna, as well as legumes (lentils or beans), potatoes, whole grains, bananas and chili peppers. A colourful stir-fry with a mix of lentils and an assortment of vegetables over a bed of brown rice is a tasty way to easily obtain these vitamins.

Hydration

It may sometimes be overlooked, but hydration is essential for optimal brain function and mood regulation. It’s not surprising that dehydration can lead to feelings of fatigue and irritability. Besides just drinking water, water-rich foods like fruits and vegetables also contribute to overall hydration levels. Think watermelon, cucumber, strawberries and celery.

Dr Emily adds: “It’s important to remember that while these foods hold the potential to bolster our mood, they are just one facet of a holistic approach to well-being. Exercise, adequate sleep, and effective stress management are equally vital components.”

ENDS

For bespoke copy, please contact pressoffice@yakult.co.uk.

Editor’s Notes

About Yakult

Yakult was developed over 90 years ago by the Japanese scientist Dr Shirota, who spent many years investigating the benefits of intestinal bacteria. In the 1930, he selected and cultivated a unique strain of lactic acid bacteria - *L. casei* Shirota. This friendly bacteria is scientifically proven to reach the gut alive and increase the bacteria in the gut!*

In 1935, this bacteria was used to create the iconic fermented skimmed milk drink – Yakult.

In the UK and Ireland, three Yakult products are available, all bursting with 20 billion of Yakult’s friendly bacteria. All are gluten-free, fat free and suitable for vegetarians.

Yakult Original is the iconic fermented milk drink which has a hint of vanilla and lemon flavours.

Yakult Balance contains fewer calories and less sugar** and is rich in vitamin D***, which supports immunity and muscle & bone health.

The Yakult logo, featuring the word "Yakult" in a bold, red, sans-serif font.

Yakult Plus has a juicy peach flavour. It's rich in vitamin C**** to support the immune system and help lower fatigue. It also contains fibre that feed the bacteria in the gut.

Today, more than 40 million Yakult products are consumed every day, in 40 countries and regions around the world.

For more information, please visit www.yakult.co.uk or find us on Facebook (@YakultUKIE) and Instagram (@Yakult_UKireland).

**Yakult's bacteria L.casei Shirota, increase both the lactobacilli and bifidobacteria in the gut.*

***Yakult Balance contains 68% less sugar and 38% fewer calories than Yakult Original*

****Vitamin D contributes to the normal function of the immune system and the maintenance of normal bones and muscle function. Each bottle of Yakult Balance accounts for 30% of the EU reference intake for vitamin D. Enjoy as part of a healthy balanced diet and lifestyle. Recommended consumption: 1 bottle per day.*

*****Vitamin C supports the normal functioning of the immune system and contributes to the reduction of tiredness and fatigue. Each bottle of Yakult Plus accounts for 30% of the EU reference intake for vitamin C. Enjoy as part of a healthy balanced diet and lifestyle.*

Yakult