

# Depression

## WHAT IS IT?

Depression is a mood disorder that causes a persistent feeling of sadness and loss of interest in doing activities. It is very common with 18% of the US population experiencing depression.

## GENTLE NUTRITION SUGGESTIONS

Follow as you are able.

- **Omega-3 fatty acids:** this category of fats supports brain health and can be low in people with Depression. Foods high in omega-3s include fatty fish (wild salmon, tuna, cod, anchovies, and sardines), walnuts, and seeds (flax, hemp, and chia). Aiming for eating fatty fish at least 2 times per week or ¼ cup of walnuts and 1-2 Tbsp of flax, hemp, or chia seeds daily can help get your daily needs met. Consider adding nuts and seeds in oatmeal, yogurt, salads, smoothies.
- **Fermented foods:** probiotic-rich foods increase the beneficial bacteria in our intestines. Our microbiome is made of bacteria and other probiotic organisms that naturally inhabit our digestive system. Our gut health can be connected to our mental health impacting conditions like depression. Fermented foods include yogurt, kefir, kombucha, miso and traditionally fermented sauerkraut, kimchi, and pickles (found in the refrigerated section at the grocery store).
- **Iron:** this mineral is needed for making dopamine (a feel-good chemical messenger). Iron deficiency is associated with depression. Foods that are high in iron include grass-fed beef, liver, oysters, clams, mussels, beans, and dark leafy greens.
- **B vitamins:** B9 and B12 are needed for the synthesis of serotonin (a chemical messenger that stabilizes mood, happiness) and dopamine. B9 and B12 deficiencies are linked to depression. Foods high in vitamin B9 include dark leafy greens, beans, peanuts, sunflower seeds, fruit, whole grains, liver, seafood, eggs. Foods high in vitamin B12 include meat, seafood, eggs, and dairy (milk, cheese, and yogurt). If you are vegan, try taking a vitamin B12 supplement (nutritional yeast is not a reliable source).

## OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Vitamin D test:** low vitamin D levels are associated with depression. Have your provider order labs to test your Vitamin D levels and supplement accordingly.
- **Thyroid:** ask your doctor for a thyroid assessment to rule out any thyroid issues. Hypothyroidism can cause symptoms similar to depression.
- **Decrease alcohol:** consider reducing or eliminating alcohol. Alcoholic beverages depress the nervous system and disrupt sleep. Restful sleep is important in supporting your mood.
- **Movement:** this can be tricky for people with depression due to potential loss of interest in activities. The research shows that even 5 minutes of movement can help improve depression.
- **Mindfulness:** consider trying meditation or yoga to improve depression. If you are new to meditation, start out with guided meditation. Try short, 3 to 5-minute sessions and increase from there. Apps like Calm or Headspace can help you with this.
- **Supplements:** certain supplements may reduce depression such as vitamin D, fish oil, B-complex vitamins, and probiotics. Talk to your dietitian or primary care provider for specific dosages and interactions with your current medications.

\*Do not engage in any of these suggestions if they are harmful to other aspects of your health.

---

## REMEMBER

We are imperfect beings and each day is new and different. Some days it may be easier to follow the suggestions than others. Be gentle with yourself.

## GOAL

Self-compassion and kindness towards your body.

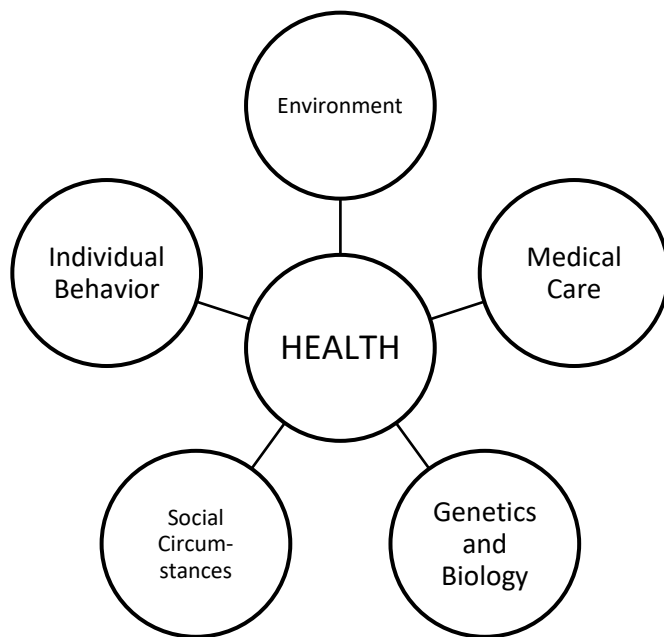
## EVERY BODY IS DIFFERENT

There are a spectrum of symptoms and reactions. If any food or movement recommendations do not feel right for your body, trust that! It may be helpful to talk more about this with your dietitian.

# TOTAL HEALTH

Health is complex and is influenced by many factors. Not all factors are within your control.

It is important to consider all these factors, not just individual behaviors, when exploring ways to address your health.



## REMINDER:

This health condition is not your fault!

Discuss causes and risk factors with your doctor or registered dietitian if you are interested.

Image Description: A series of circles with Health labeled in the center circle. There are five additional circles surrounding the center circle each one connected to the center with a line. The surrounding circles are labeled: Environment, Medical Care, Genetics and Biology, Social Circumstances, and Individual Behavior.

---

## REFERENCES

- Parletta N, Zarnowiecki D, Cho J, et al. A Mediterranean-style dietary intervention supplemented with fish oil improves diet quality and mental health in people with depression: A randomized controlled trial (HELFIMED). *Nutr Neurosci*. 2019;22(7):474-487. doi:10.1080/1028415X.2017.1411320
- Dinan TG, Stanton C, Cryan JF. Psychobiotics: a novel class of psychotropic. *Biol Psychiatry*. 2013;74:720-726. doi: 10.1016/j.biopsych.2013.05.001.
- Shafi M, Taufiq F, Mehmood H, et al. Relation between Depressive Disorder and Iron Deficiency Anemia among Adults Reporting to a Secondary Healthcare Facility: A Hospital-Based Case Control Study. *J Coll Physicians Surg Pak*. 2018;28(6):456-559. doi:10.29271/jcsp.2018.06.456
- Esnafoğlu E, Özturan DD. The relationship of severity of depression with homocysteine, folate, vitamin B12, and vitamin D levels in children and adolescents. *Child Adolesc Ment Health*. 2020;25(4):249-255. doi:10.1111/camh.12387
- Saeed SA, Cunningham K, Bloch RM. Depression and Anxiety Disorders: Benefits of Exercise, Yoga, and Meditation. *Am Fam Physician*. 2019;99(10):620-627. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31083878/>

## DISCLAIMERS

Handout created by Angelina Andriola, Bastyr University Dietetic Intern and reviewed by Meghan Cichy, Registered Dietitian. Template design by Elisabeth Kelsey, Bastyr Dietetic Intern. This handout is for education purposes only. This handout should not be used as a substitute for medical advice. No changes may be made without written permission. May not be sold.