

7. FOOD and MOOD

What we eat and our pattern of eating affects our mood: eating healthily is very important for psychological as well as physical wellbeing. So check out how you're eating habits might be affecting your mood for better or worse. Here are some guidelines:

What you eat and drink

Each day include:

- 5 fruit and vegetables a day for mood enhancing vitamins and minerals.
- protein e.g. pulses, soya products, fish, dairy,
- complex carbohydrates e.g. wholegrain bread, pasta, rice, oats.
- essential fatty acids in oily fish, seeds, nuts etc. These have nutrients that boost mood.
- plenty of water - important for physical and mental wellbeing.

How you eat

- Eat regularly and have breakfast. Include foods that release energy slowly such as wholegrains (and other low Glycaemic Index foods). This will help keep energy levels stable throughout the day and smooth negative effects of fluctuating blood-sugar levels which include irritability, poor concentration, fatigue, depression and food cravings.
- Take time to taste, digest and enjoy your food.
- Be moderate rather than obsessive – eating healthily doesn't mean completely depriving yourself of things you like.

Why you eat

Food isn't just a source of nutrition: we use food to help us manage the ups and downs of life. Sometimes normal emotional eating develops into disordered eating patterns and we start over- or under-eating whenever we feel a negative emotion - sadness, anger, rejection, etc. This indicates that we need to find other ways of managing our emotions and looking after ourselves. If this is the case for you – don't be hard on yourself....if disordered eating was the best way you could find at the time – respect yourself for doing the best that you could and look for support in helping you find other coping strategies. See below for some suggestions:

- Express your feelings by talking to someone you trust or writing them down.
- If you're feeling low, find things you can do to calm yourself – take a bath, paint a picture, listen to music, go for a walk, write a poem, knit or craft something you find works for you.
- Write down positive qualities about yourself and things you are grateful for: when you feel you're struggling read through these positive thoughts.
- Learn something new.
- Keep busy after meal times.
- Don't constantly compare yourself to others you are an individual and you will find your own path.

For more wellbeing resources visit: students.leeds.ac.uk/counsellingandwellbeing