Understanding food & mood

Poor food choices and irregular eating habits can contribute to mood swings and intensify depression. Choosing healthier foods and paying attention to eating routines can make a significant difference in steadying mood.

This worksheet will help you to evaluate how your food and eating choices may be affecting your mood and then to plan any changes to improve your mood through making healthier, more constructive choices.

1. Keep a food diary

Use the Daily Routines Diary to keep a record of your daily eating habits, making note of the types of food, rough portion size, and any notes or comments in relation to your thoughts and feelings about what you are eating. Try to keep the diary for at least a week. Don’t change anything yet, just record things accurately without judgement at this stage.

Consider:
What have you learnt by keeping a food diary? Are you eating regular, healthy meals and snacks on the whole, or do you think you need to make some changes to take care of your body’s needs better? Did you notice any patterns connecting food and mood, such as irritability as a result of blood sugar ‘crashes’?

My food and mood summary:
________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________

“Eating more healthy foods is another strategy – I like to try out food that has been shown to reduce depression. It also gives me a chance to try something different with cooking, and as I personally enjoy cooking it helps me reduce stress levels.” – Leigh

www.studentsagainstdepression.org

© Denise Meyer & The Charlie Waller Memorial Trust
2. My better eating options

Read the notes on the ‘Understanding Food & Mood’ page about healthier food choices and eating patterns. Write down a range of healthy breakfast, lunch, supper and snack options to suit your budget.

| Breakfast options | 1.  
|                   | 2.  
|                   | 3.  
|                   | 4.  
|                   | 5.  

| Lunch options | 1.  
|               | 2.  
|               | 3.  
|               | 4.  
|               | 5.  

| Supper options | 1.  
|               | 2.  
|               | 3.  
|               | 4.  
|               | 5.  

| Snack options | 1.  
|              | 2.  
|              | 3.  
|              | 4.  
|              | 5.  

Other ideas and notes for better eating habits

If you are compromising on food due to money pressures then you might benefit from reading one of the many useful books aimed at students advising on eating well on a budget. If you are truly suffering deprivation then see your campus financial office for advice and possible access to hardship funds.
3. My food & mood plan

Write an intention statement for how you plan to improve your food choices and eating habits.

Example:
(Breakfast) I will ___ eat breakfast every morning, choosing from my list of healthy choices.
(Lunch & snack) I will ___ make myself a healthy sandwich for lunch before I go out to lectures, and also pack a piece of fruit and some nuts for a snack, so that I don’t get tempted to buy crisps and chocolate at the Student Union.
(Supper) I will ___ plan a cooking rota with my housemates so we take turns to cook a healthy meal to share.
(Snack) I will ___ have a milky drink or bowl of cereal as part of my wind down routine before bed.

Things I need to change/do to give me the best of chance of sticking to this plan:
___ Plan out my shopping budget and buy the foods I need to make healthy choices.
___ Speak to my housemates about the cooking rota.
___ Make sure I don’t get too rigid about it, and allow myself a few unhealthy choices in moderation, so I don’t feel restricted.

My food & mood intention statement:

(Breakfast) I will ____________________________________________

(Lunch & snack) I will ____________________________________________

(Supper) I will ____________________________________________

Things I need to change/do to give me the best of chance of sticking to this plan:

________________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________________

4. Evaluation

Don’t set yourself overly rigid expectations – the aim is to make sure you have a generally balanced and healthy diet. It won’t always go to plan, but that is not the end of the world. Work on other aspects of your daily routine, like exercise and relaxation strategies, to support the changes you are trying to make in your eating habits. Use the diary to check your progress after a while.