

# THE DEPRESSION WEAPON



## HOW CERTAIN FOODS AFFECT YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

by Kathleen Kendall-Tackett, Ph.D.

Have you ever been cranky when you are hungry, or groggy after a big meal. Food can seriously affect your mood and your overall mental-functioning. That's why it should be no surprise that the "right" fats can make you happy!

**D**oes it seem like more and more people you know are depressed? You're not imagining things. Depression is on the rise, both here and abroad. And much of this increase is due to what we eat.

Over the last century, we've increased our consumption of processed foods, which primarily uses vegetable oils, such as corn and safflower oils as their staple (Omega-6 fatty acids), while simultaneously decreasing our consumption of fish and plant sources (Omega-3 fatty acids). As a result, we are often deficient in Omega-3s and this deficiency can lead to a whole host of problems, including depression.

It's true what they say. Fats can make you happy, as long as they're the right kind. And the fats with the right stuff are the Omega-3s. You may already know that Omega-3s are good for your heart. What you may not know is that Omega-3s can help you cope with stress and protect your mental health.

### EFFECTS OF INFLAMMATION

While we need some Omega-6s, most Americans get way too many.

And excessive Omega-6s increase inflammation, which makes us vulnerable to depression. Inflammation also increases the risk of diseases such as coronary heart disease, diabetes, and even cancer, and it explains why people with these diseases are often depressed as well.

There are a number of reasons why inflammation increases the risk of depression. First, when inflammation levels are high, people experience classic symptoms of depression such as fatigue, lethargy, and the desire to withdraw. Second, inflammation increases levels of cortisol, a stress hormone that is often elevated in depressed people. And finally, inflammation decreases serotonin, our bodies internal "mood" regulator.

Researchers have also learned about the depression-inflammation connection by studying treatments that alleviate depression. For example, did you know that antidepressant medications are also anti-inflammatory? Well, Omega-3s also lower inflammation in your body. A recent study in Italy found that people with high levels of Omega-3s in their blood had low levels of inflammation. In contrast, people with low levels of

Omega-3s had higher levels of inflammation.

The mental health effects of Omega-3s can be seen in several recent studies. These studies found that populations with higher levels of Omega-3s in their diets had lower rates of major depression, postpartum depression, bipolar disorder, and even suicide. So how can you get more Omega-3s in your diet?

### OMEGA-3S ARE NOT CREATED EQUAL

Go into any well-stocked supermarket and note the dizzying array of foods that are fortified with Omega-3s: eggs, cereal, soy milk, snack bars. But with regard to depression, Omega-3s are not all created equal. If you want the anti-depressant effects of Omega-3s, then look for foods or supplements containing the long-chain Omega-3 fatty acids: EPA and DHA.

### HOW TO GET EPA AND DHA

Getting EPA and DHA from eating seafood can ease depression, however, you may not be able to safely



# Making Decisions

eat enough fish in order to get an antidepressant effect. Fortunately, there are many sources of EPA/DHA that are safe to take. One type, Fish-oil supplements, contain both EPA and DHA and have been used to treat depression, often in conjunction with medications.

## HOW MUCH YOU SHOULD TAKE

Several consensus panels have recommended 200-400 mg as the minimum daily dose of DHA. For treatment of depression, 1000 mg of EPA was found to be the optimum dose. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has indicated that up to 3000 mg of DHA/EPA is "generally recognized as safe" (1500 mg DHA, 1500 mg EPA). But be sure to discuss any supplements you take with your health care provider since they can potentially interact with a small number of prescription medications.

Omega-3s can have a positive impact on your mental health, so make them a part of your daily diet. If you do, you'll discover what many others have learned: that the right kind of fats *can* make you happy. **GB**

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*Note:* This article is for information purposes only and is not intended to diagnose or treat.

Most people are decidophobic, and fear making a wrong decision. Unless you can see into the future, you cannot know with absolute certainty that the decision you're making is the best one, because the results of your decision are based on future actions -- and future actions are often unpredictable.

From the moment you wake up, you make decisions. Getting up is a decision, just like falling back asleep and missing work, is a decision. But before you make a decision, recognize that all decisions come with consequences. Some are so mild that they're immediately dismissed, but some are not so good and will linger. Be sure to stop and evaluate the "if-then" of your decision -- *if I do this, then this will happen.*

Recognize that making a decision is just choosing one, among many, choices. The easiest way to make a decision is by the process of elimination.

### How to Make Responsible Decisions:

1. Don't make any decision that you're not qualified to make, or is not yours to make.
2. Don't feel pressured by others to make quick decisions. Tell them you

- need time to consider your decision.
3. Do your decision making on paper. List all possible choices, preferably at least 10. Be creative.
4. Review the principles you've chosen to live by, and then eliminate the choices which you know are not right, or those which will harm you or others.
5. From those remaining, determine the short-term "if-then" of each choice, and eliminate those with a negative outcome.
6. Evaluate the long-term consequences of your remaining choices. Eliminate those with negative consequences.
7. Research the remaining choices. Gather facts and information. Ask for input from those affected by your decision.
8. Evaluate all available information, and eliminate all choices but one. You've made your decision.

Make your decisions with seriousness. Even the small decisions, grouped together and repeated day after day, have a huge impact on the quality of your life.

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## Why Do You Behave in Ways You Hate?

Understanding why you engage in certain behaviors (habits) is your first step towards change. Think of one negative behavior that you engage in often, and write your answers to these questions. Your self-evaluation may be very revealing for you.

- ✓ What is it I like about my habit?
- ✓ What good does it do for me?
- ✓ What benefits do I get from this behavior?
- ✓ What am I afraid my life would be like if I did not engage in this behavior?
- ✓ What bad feelings (anger, frustration, stress, depression, etc.) does this help me deal with?
- ✓ How painful would it be to stop engaging in this behavior?
- ✓ To what extent does this behavior ease

- or reduce physical pain or discomfort?
- ✓ How much does this behavior help me fit in with others?
- ✓ How much do I need this behavior in order to feel normal?
- ✓ How much do I use this behavior to help me cope with conflicts with others?
- ✓ How much do I use this behavior to get back at others, the society or the world?

**Editors Note:** Full article on this subject coming next issue.

**GB**  
**BONKERISM**

If all you're remembered for is being a hard worker, then you've done a bad job with the rest of your life.