

If you've got the summertime blues (or the blues at any time of year, for that matter), don't fear—these mood-boosting food secrets can help put a little extra pep in your step!

Strategy #1: Have oatmeal for breakfast (or for any meal).



Why it works: Eating oatmeal naturally changes your brain chemistry. Carbohydrates prompt the release of serotonin—your body's “feel-good” chemical—which is a neurotransmitter that combats pain, decreases appetite and produces calm or sleep. Oatmeal is one of the best foods for boosting mood because the fiber in oatmeal slows digestion, releasing energy gradually and causing a long-lasting mood-boost. Other good options include brown rice, whole grains, berries and fruit.

Try these morning mood-boosters for a twist on your traditional oatmeal—each one has protein that takes longer to digest than carbohydrates alone and will extend oatmeal's happy boost:

[**Savory Eggs and Oatmeal**](#)

[**Wake-up Sunnyside Pineapple Berry Oatmeal**](#)

[**Matcha Oatmeal Craisin Muffins**](#)

Strategy #2: Get plenty of vitamin D.



Why it works: Research shows that people who are low in vitamin D have higher rates of depression. In recent years, we've had many new clients who have come to us after their doctors tested their blood and found that they were low in vitamin D. According to the 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, vitamin D is a nutrient of public health concern as people seem to struggle to get enough. Vitamin D is known as the “sunshine vitamin” because your body converts sunlight into vitamin D if it's exposed to unprotected skin; however, it's not recommended to get extended exposure to sunlight without sunscreen because of the risk

for skin cancer. So, here's what we tell our clients to ensure they get their dose of this "happy" vitamin:

- Eat a diet rich in vitamin D. The Recommended Dietary Allowance is 600 IU daily. Here are some good sources:
 - Vitamin D-fortified skim milk or vitamin D-fortified soy milk (1 cup = 100 IU = 25% Daily Value)
 - Salmon, canned with bones (3 ounces = 425 IU of Vitamin D)
 - Eggs (The yolk contains vitamin D) 1 yolk = 25 IU.
 - Eat other vitamin D-fortified foods such as string cheese or yogurt.
- Take a walk in the morning sun. (Note to those who live north of Philadelphia or Denver—this will work only work in the summer!)
- Consider taking a vitamin D supplement. Because many people are low in vitamin D, unless you've had your vitamin D level tested and know it's within the normal range, you may want to consider taking 800 or 1000 IU vitamin D3 supplement daily. (Note: The level to supplement is still being debated among lead experts.)

Strategy #3: Get a daily dose of omega-3s.



Why it works: People who battle with depression often have low blood levels of omega-3 fatty acids. Make sure your omega-3 levels are up to snuff by eating omega-3-rich foods on a daily basis. Try these recommendations:

- Eat 3 ounces of omega-3 rich fish several times a week. The fish with the most omega-3s are halibut, salmon, herring, mackerel, oysters, sardines, trout and fresh tuna. Here are some recipes to try:
 - [Soy Ginger Salmon](#)
 - [Grilled Spice Halibut/Tuna](#)
 - [Spicy Tuna Tacos](#)
- Include omega-3-rich seeds and nuts in your diet. Chia seeds, flaxseeds, pumpkin seeds and walnuts are all rich in omega-3s.
- Look for foods fortified with omega-3s such as eggs, yogurt and milk.

Bonus mood-boosting combo: Enjoy an omega-3 protein source such as salmon or tuna at dinner with serotonin-boosting brown rice. The combination will give you a quick mood boost from healthy brown rice and an extended boost from the salmon's slower digesting protein. Plus, you'll get the anti-depressant found in salmon.

Strategy 4: Eat at least one colorful (green, red orange or yellow) veggie or one colorful fruit at every meal.



Why it works: Folic acid deficiency has been found in people with depression. Like vitamin B6, vitamin C, zinc and carbohydrates, folic acid is needed to make the feel-good brain chemical serotonin from the tryptophan found in foods. Good sources include oranges, grapefruit, broccoli, strawberries and green leafy veggies.

Strategy 5: Have a cup of tea with a touch of honey 45 minutes before bed for a good night's rest and reduced irritability.



Why it works: There's nothing like a good night's rest to make you feel healthier and happier. Tea calms you down, thanks to its amino acid theanine, which alters brain chemistry 20 minutes after it's consumed, creating a feeling of calm. Plus, the warm tea also soothes you. The carbohydrates in honey release serotonin, enhancing relaxation, while the small sweet treat will help you to feel like you aren't being deprived, which can help improve your mood. Research also shows that honey creates a more restorative sleep by contributing to the release of melatonin, the hormone required for recovery and rebuilding of body tissues during rest.