

# Food for Thought: Boosting Mood through Nutrition

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# Today's presenters



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# Agenda

- Recap
- Gut brain axis
- Mood boosting foods
- Healthy snacking
- Food for thought
- Q & A



# Polling question

**Which of the following activities helps boost your mood the most?**

- a) Exercise
- b) Spending time with loved ones
- c) Practicing mindfulness and meditation
- d) Engaging in a creative hobby
- e) Getting 7–9 hours of sleep
- f) Enjoying a favorite meal or treat
- g) None of the above
- h) All of the above



# Did you know:

- **35.2%** of all adults in the U.S. report sleeping on average for less than seven hours per night
- More than **50%** of Americans will be diagnosed with a mental illness or disorder at some point in their lifetime
- More than 1 in 3 adults aged 45 and older in the U.S. feel lonely
- An estimated **4.7%** of adults 18 or over in the U.S. have regular feelings of depression



# Recap New Year, New You

- Physical activity and exercise
- Sleep essentials
- Nutrition: Fiber, antioxidants, protein, real foods and hydration
- Social connections
- Spiritual health
- Self-care

**“Feed your body  
well, and your  
soul will dance  
to the tune of a  
joyful mood.”**

**Author unknown**



# What helps boost your mood naturally?

- Good gut health
- Food for mood
- Stress management
- Moving more
- Eat the rainbow



# Gut and brain connection

- Exploring the link between gut health and mood
- The role of prebiotics and probiotics
- Foods that promote a healthy gut-brain connection



# Importance of well-being

- Physical activity
- Mindfulness and stress reduction
- Social connections
- Creativity and hobbies
- Laughter
- Gratitude and positive thinking
- Quality sleep
- Setting achievable goals



**“Your mood doesn’t have to match your circumstances; it’s a choice you make regardless.”**

**Author unknown**



# Emotional eating

- Stress can cause emotional eating
- Emotional eating is the consumption of more comfort foods (higher calorie, lower nutrients)
- Emotional eating is a way to cope with feelings
- Find healthy coping habits



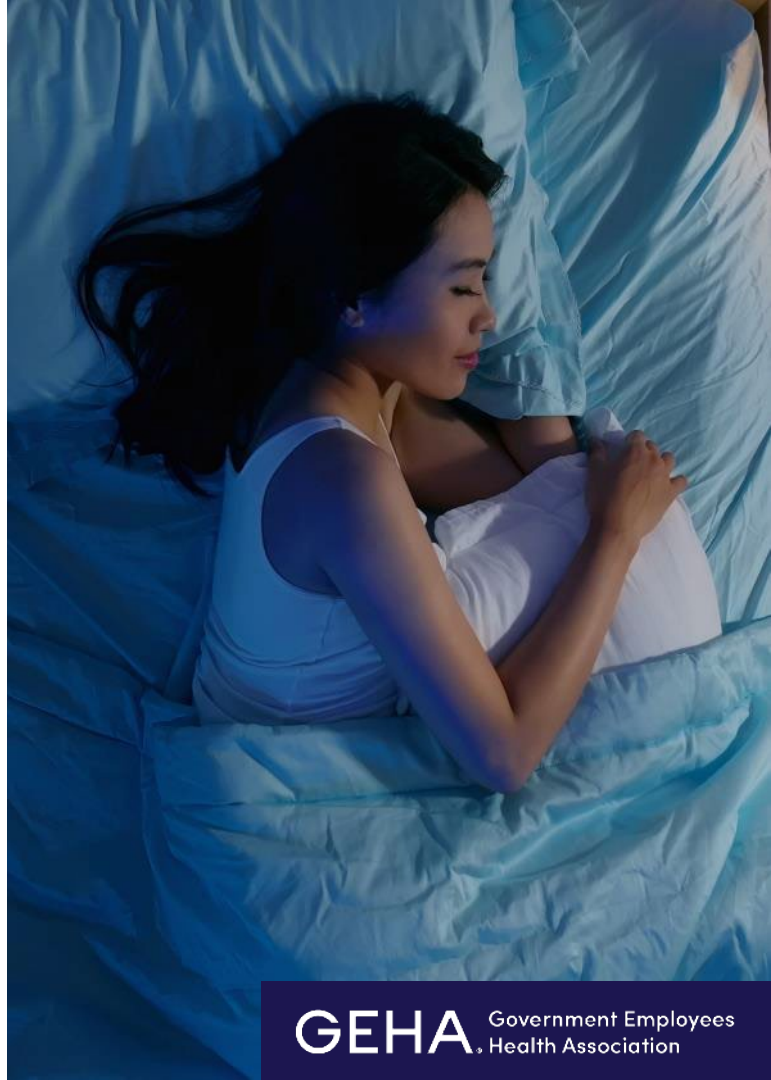
# Stress affects eating habits

- Stress can suppress the body's appetite hormones
- Stress can affect the body's food preferences — higher fat, sugar or both
- When we are stressed, our bodies need more B and C vitamins, calcium, iron, zinc, omega-3FA, amino acids, probiotics and antioxidants



# Sleep and mood

- Quality of sleep: Sleep hygiene is key
- Emotional regulation
- Cognitive function
- Risk of mood disorders and physical health
- Daytime sleepiness
- Positive affect and immune health
- Sleep cycles and mood



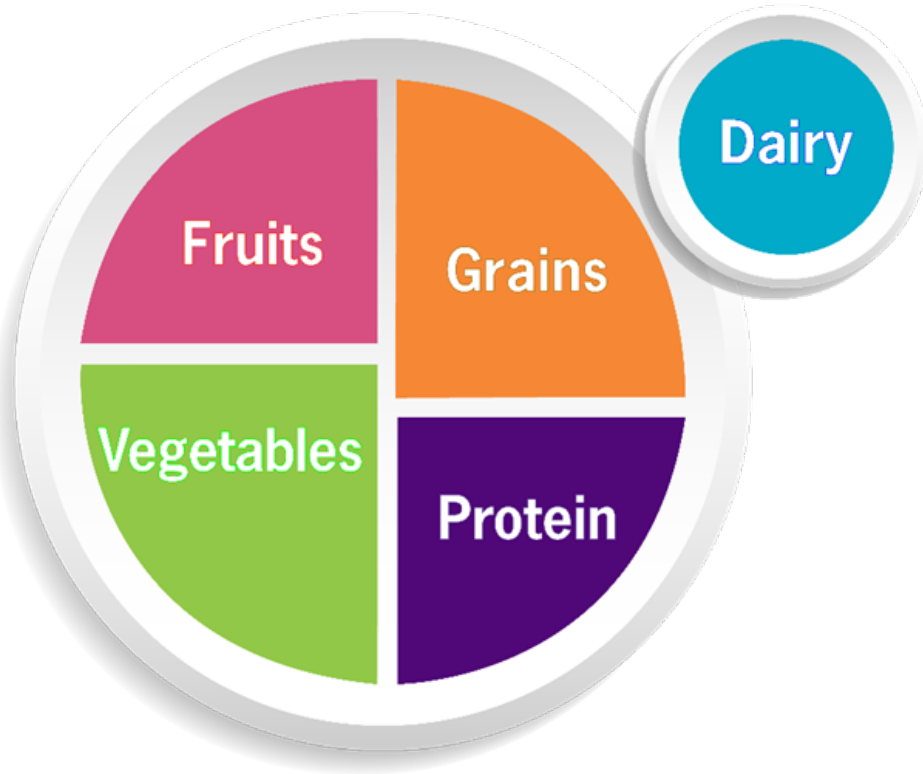
# Melatonin producing foods

- Fruits like cherries (or cherry juice), grapes, bananas and kiwi
- Nuts and seeds
- Oats and rice
- Milk and dairy products
- Leafy greens
- Fish like salmon, tuna and mackerel
- Herbs and spices like ginger, turmeric and cardamom



# Mood Boosting Foods

# Balance “MyPlate”



- Use the USDA MyPlate to help create balance for all meals
- $\frac{1}{2}$  fruits and vegetables
- $\frac{1}{4}$  whole grains
- $\frac{1}{4}$  lean protein
- Low-fat dairy options

# Healthy fats: Omega 3's

- Reduce risk of depression and anxiety
- Mood stabilization
- Anti-inflammatory properties
- Improve cognitive function
- Enhance response to antidepressants
- Improve sleep
- Good sources: Fatty fish, avocados, oysters, dark green leafy vegetables, brussels sprouts, nuts and seeds





# Antioxidants and mood

- Vitamin C & E
- Beta-carotene
- Selenium
- Flavonoids
- Polyphenols
- Turmeric
- Resveratrol

Source: Harvard Health



## Fiber for gut health

- Aim for 25–38 grams of fiber per day
- Good sources: Fruits and vegetables, beans, nuts, seeds and whole grains
- Helps to support and feed good gut bacteria to help:
  - Regulate blood sugar and stabilize mood
  - Reduce inflammation
  - Lower cholesterol
  - Regulate digestion

Source: [US Dietary Guidelines](#)





## Amino acids and protein

- If your meal/snack has inadequate protein, you can end up feeling anxious, depressed and tired
- Consuming up to **35%** of your total daily calorie from protein can:
  - Build muscle
  - Reduce cravings
  - Promote weight loss with increased metabolism and satiety
- Good sources: Lean meats, Greek yogurt, cottage cheese, beans, eggs, nuts, seeds and seafood/fish

Source: Harvard Health



# Cocoa and dark chocolate

More antioxidant activity, polyphenols and flavanols than any other fruit

- The source of all chocolate is the cacao fruit
- White and milk chocolate have added sugar and fats, so they do not offer the same benefits

Source: Harvard Health

# Polling question

How many times a week do you eat out?  
(fast food or restaurant)

- a) 5+ times
- b) 3–4 times
- c) 2–3 times
- d) 0–2 times





## Foods to avoid

- Lower-quality foods
  - High glycemic index
  - Highly processed foods
  - Sugar-sweetened beverages
  - Refined (white) grains/ breads
  - Refined sugar
  - Fried foods
  - Foods high in saturated and trans fats

Source: Cleveland clinic



## Keep hydrated

- Good hydration helps you feel your best physically and mentally
- Prioritizing your water intake is an easy and effective way to stay hydrated
- Carry a water bottle everywhere you go
- Replace high-calorie beverages with water

Source: [National Institutes of Health](#)



# Sunlight and vitamin D

- Sunlight and vitamin D production
- Vitamin D and mood
- S.A.D.
- Circadian rhythms and sleep
- Outdoor activity

Source: National Institutes of Health

# Polling question

What type of snacks do you tend to eat?

- a) Chips, crackers or cookies
- b) Fruit or veggies
- c) Fruit with nut butter or yogurt
- d) Cheese and crackers or trail mix
- e) I don't eat snacks





## Keep healthy snacks handy

- Fiber + protein = healthy, balanced snacks
- When we're hungry, we grab what is in sight
- Mindful eating habits
- Portion out
- Easy grab-and-go examples:
  - Fresh fruit with nut butter
  - Crackers and cheese
  - Hummus, veggies and pita chips
  - Trail mix

Source: [myplate.gov](https://myplate.gov)



## Social determinants of health for food

- Income and socioeconomic status
- Food insecurity
- Geographic locations
- Cultural and social norms
- Education and health literacy
- Social support networks
- Marketing and advertising
- Healthcare access
- Employment and working conditions
- Transportation

Source: Healthy People 2030



# Importance of exercise

- Brain chemical balance and release of endorphins
- Reduction of stress hormones
- Improved sleep
- Enhanced cognitive function, self-esteem and confidence
- Social interaction
- Distraction from negative thoughts
- Long-term mood benefits
- Enhanced overall well-being

Source:

[ACSM.org](https://www.acsm.org/); [American Psychological Association](https://www.apa.org/)

# GEHA member resources

- Elevate and Elevate Plus plans
  - Rally digital health platform
  - Learn more at [geha.com/Elevate-Rewards](https://geha.com/Elevate-Rewards)
- High, Standard and HDHP plans
  - GEHA Well-being portal
  - Learn more at [geha.com/HDHP](https://geha.com/HDHP)
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  - Healthy recipes and health and wellness articles
  - Learn more at [geha.com/Blog](https://geha.com/Blog)
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# Wrap-up

- Natural ways to boost your mood
- Foods to help
- Foods that hinder
- Resources
- Q & A



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# Q&A



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