



Step Into Wellness

Nutrition for the Mind and Body

Created by Jay Wilson, LCSW

This guide is for educational purposes only. Food is not a solution on its own but a tool that can support wellness. Always consult your doctor or another qualified health professional before making any major dietary changes.

Introduction

Welcome to Therapy and Sneakers. A unique guide to the intersection of mental health, culture, and everyday nourishment. This handout explores how the foods and drinks we choose influence mood, energy, focus, and overall wellbeing, through the lens of culture and clinical expertise.

Food can be part of healing and food can be a part of wholeness.

Why Food Matters for Mind and Body

Food sends messages to the brain and body every single day. Nutrients from meals shape emotions, thinking, and resilience. Blood sugar affects energy and mood stability. The gut has a direct line to the brain that influences anxiety and emotional health. Proper hydration and lower inflammation help keep us sharp and steady.

Choosing foods that work for you, both culturally and personally, is a powerful step toward mental wellness.

What is a Prevalence Rate

A prevalence rate explains how common a condition is during a set time. It tells us how many people are experiencing it either recently or at some point in life. For example, if 13 percent of people had symptoms of depression in the past two weeks, that means about 13 out of every 100 people felt those symptoms recently.

Prevalence Rates. How Many Are Affected

Condition	Prevalence in the U.S.
Major Depressive Disorder (MDD)	13.1 percent of people aged 12 and older in a two week measure. Lifetime 15.2 percent of adults. Higher rates in females and increasing in older age groups.
Situational Depression (Adjustment Disorder)	About 5 to 20 percent of mental health outpatients each year.
Disruptive Mood Dysregulation Disorder (DMDD)	2 to 5 percent of children and youth.
Anxiety Disorders	16 to 18 percent of adults which is about 42.5 million people. Up to 32 percent of adolescents and young adults report significant anxiety symptoms.
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)	6 percent of adults which is about 16 million. 9.8 percent of children ages 3 to 17.
Substance Use Disorder (SUD)	24.9 percent of people ages 12 and older in the past year. Alcohol use disorder about 21.5 percent of people who used alcohol in the past month.
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)	1 in 31 children which is about 3.2 percent at age 8. Higher in boys and rates are slowly rising.
Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)	Lifetime 6.8 percent of adults. Past year about 3.6 percent of adults.

Major Depressive Disorder (MDD)

Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) is more than sadness. It often brings low motivation, lower energy, and emotional instability. There is a difference between clinical depression and situational depression. Food can help in some cases, while professional care is essential in others.

Foods to Choose

Fatty fish and walnuts

Leafy greens

Whole grains

Why These Help

Omega 3 fats reduce brain inflammation linked to low mood. Leafy greens provide folate that supports serotonin production. Whole grains release energy slowly and help prevent crashes that worsen fatigue.

Foods to Limit

Refined sugar and sodas

Ultra processed meals

Alcohol

Quick Step. Add salmon or avocado to your lunch two times each week.

Mindful Step. A steady eating pattern can support your mood each day.

Meal Idea. Salmon with brown rice and leafy greens

Step Into Awareness. Which foods help your energy stay steady during the week

Situational Depression (Adjustment Disorder)

Situational Depression, also called Adjustment Disorder, happens after major life stressors such as a loss, a major change, or a crisis. It is usually short term but can deeply affect mood, motivation, and daily functioning.

Foods to Choose

Whole grains like brown rice and oats
Lean proteins such as chicken or beans
Leafy greens
Herbal teas

Why These Help

Whole grains and lean proteins help stabilize energy and mood. Herbal teas and leafy greens provide calming nutrients. Avoiding stimulants and processed foods prevents added stress on the body.

Foods to Limit

Caffeine
Alcohol
Highly processed foods

Quick Step. Replace one caffeinated drink with herbal tea in the evening.

Mindful Step. Steady meals and gentle routines can make stress feel more manageable.

Meal Idea. Grilled salmon with quinoa and steamed greens

Step Into Awareness. What foods or routines help you feel calmer after a stressful day

Disruptive Mood Dysregulation Disorder (DMDD)

Disruptive Mood Dysregulation Disorder (DMDD) involves frequent and intense mood swings that can disrupt relationships and daily life. Calm routines and supportive nutrition may help with steadiness.

Foods to Choose

Oats and sweet potatoes
Yogurt and fermented foods

Why These Help

Stable blood sugar from oats and sweet potatoes reduces sudden mood swings. Fermented foods strengthen the gut brain connection. Avoiding stimulants and processed fats keeps energy more consistent.

Foods to Limit

Excessive caffeine
Trans fats and processed snacks

Quick Step. Swap one soda with kefir or kombucha two times this week.

Mindful Step. Better gut health supports better emotional control.

Meal Idea. Sweet potato with yogurt and berries

Step Into Awareness. What foods help you feel steady and grounded

Anxiety Disorders

Anxiety Disorders are more than worry. They affect the body as well as the mind. Routines and specific nutrients can steady nerves and ground energy.

Foods to Choose

Spinach, seeds, and beans
Chamomile or green tea

Why These Help

Magnesium rich foods calm the nervous system. Herbal teas promote relaxation and reduce the stress response. Limiting caffeine and sugar prevents spikes that worsen anxious feelings.

Foods to Limit

Caffeine
High sugar treats

Quick Step. End your night with a calming tea and a handful of pumpkin seeds.

Mindful Step. Calmer nerves allow a smoother stride.

Meal Idea. Chamomile tea with whole grain toast and nut butter

Step Into Awareness. Which foods or drinks help you feel calm in the evening

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) affects focus, routines, and impulse control. Structure and eating that is free of additives can make a meaningful difference.

Foods to Choose

Eggs or Greek yogurt for breakfast

Whole grain tortilla with nut butter for a snack

Why These Help

Protein helps regulate dopamine which supports focus and motivation. Balanced snacks keep blood sugar stable and prevent crashes. Avoiding artificial additives removes potential triggers for hyperactivity.

Foods to Limit

Artificial colors and sweeteners

Refined flours and energy drinks

Quick Step. Prepare snacks with nuts, berries, or apples so they are ready to go.

Mindful Step. Protein at breakfast can be a game changer for attention.

Meal Idea. Scrambled eggs with whole grain toast and fruit

Step Into Awareness. What breakfast helps you focus best

Substance Use Disorder (SUD)

Substance Use Disorder (SUD) recovery is about healing the body and the mind. It is not only about stopping substances. Nutrition repairs, restores, and builds resilience.

Foods to Choose

Lean proteins like chicken, tofu, or fish
Bananas, whole grains, and berries

Why These Help

Protein supports healing and repair after substance use. Whole grains and fruits restore nutrients and provide steady fuel. Avoiding alcohol, sugar, and processed foods prevents setbacks in recovery.

Foods to Limit

Sugary drinks
Highly processed foods
Alcohol and excess caffeine

Quick Step. Set reminders for three balanced meals each day so your body has steady fuel.

Mindful Step. The right nutrition is like fresh laces. It helps hold your recovery together.

Meal Idea. Grilled chicken, quinoa, and steamed vegetables

Step Into Awareness. Which meals leave you feeling restored and clear

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) reflects unique sensory and nutritional needs. Gentle and patient changes matter. Small steps make a big difference over time.

Foods to Choose

Omega 3 rich foods

A variety of fruits and vegetables

High quality proteins and probiotics

Why These Help

Omega 3 rich foods may support brain development. A variety of fruits and vegetables provide essential nutrients without overwhelming the senses when introduced gently. Reducing additives lowers overstimulation.

Foods to Limit

Artificial colors and other additives

High sugar snacks

Quick Step. When trying new foods, pair a new item with a familiar favorite.

Mindful Step. One small step is still a step. Go at a pace that feels right for you.

Meal Idea. Yogurt parfait with fruit and flax seeds

Step Into Awareness. What foods feel safe and enjoyable to try

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) shows up in both the body and the brain. People often face poor sleep, muscle tension, and mood swings. Trauma informed nutrition strategies can support healing.

Foods to Choose

Leafy greens, walnuts, and salmon
Herbal teas and cherries

Why These Help

Anti inflammatory foods calm the stress response. Herbal teas and cherries naturally support rest. Avoiding stimulants prevents added tension and disrupted sleep.

Foods to Limit

Caffeine
Highly processed snacks

Quick Step. Choose tart cherries or herbal tea as an evening snack to support rest.

Mindful Step. Recovery is a journey. Each bite can help restore balance.

Meal Idea. Herbal tea and tart cherries before bed

Step Into Awareness. Which evening foods support your rest

Conclusion

At Therapy and Sneakers, food is more than a prescription. It is culture, creativity, and personal power. Every meal is a chance to support your mind and your movement toward wellbeing. Lace up and step into your strongest self.

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