

# What to Eat to Be Happy

Our brains and our bodies can often feel like they're operating on two different wavelengths: sometimes, your body tells you to take a nap when your brain knows you've still got work to do, or your belly just screams for a candy bar when your brain definitely knows better. However, when it comes to our mood, our food choices and our feelings go hand-in-hand more often than you might think.

While a greasy plate of fries or sugary snack may temporarily alleviate a bad mood, long-term happiness is rarely doled out at a drive-thru. Fortunately, there are plenty of foods with proven mood-boosting benefits that can help you get happier and healthier with every bite. So, before you dive headfirst into another value meal, add these foods that make you happy to your menu.

Here are 50 foods that make you happy and boost your overall mood.

## Black Beans



Beans are a magnesium-rich food that helps boost the happiness hormone, serotonin, and bloated feeling, too. As if that's not enough, these small but mighty guys are antioxidant-rich and loaded with other good-for-you nutrients like iron, fiber, copper, zinc and potassium.

# Halibut



One of the best choices of foods that make you happy? Halibut. A steamed piece of halibut has an impressive amount of protein and influences your serotonin levels. It's also ranked as one of the most filling foods, according to The Satiety Index of Common Foods, an Australian study published in the *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition*. The moral of the story? Bust out of a hungry mood with a little halibut.

## Whole Grain Bread



When your hormones are all over the place (PMS, stress at work, whatever), you wind up craving carb-rich foods because they help comfort your hormonal rollercoaster. But cookies won't make you nearly as happy (or thin) as a complex carb like whole grain bread. However, unlike cookies, those whole grains can improve the number of good bacteria in your gut, which can have a profound influence on your mood. When you can't stand the sight of another sandwich, the healthy sources of carbs will help you fill up and slim down.

## Beets



It's hard to beat the amazing beet. Beets contains betaine, which supports serotonin production in the brain, elevating your mood along the way. Beets also have a potent dose of folic acid in them, which stabilizes emotional and mental health, improving your chances of happiness with every bite.

## Seaweed



Seaweed—yes, like in your sushi or on the side as a salad—is packed with depression-fighting iodine, which isn't always so easy to find in food (and no, please don't start downing spoonfuls of iodized salt to get enough). Iodine is critical for your thyroid to function properly, which influences your energy, weight, and even your brain functions, leaving you feeling blue when you have too little, and a whole lot happier when you're meeting your goals.

## Chamomile Tea



Now that the temperature is dipping, your circadian rhythm may be thrown off by the decrease of (natural) light, making it harder to sleep at night and to stay on top of your game during the day. Research shows that chamomile tea not only brings on better sleep but improves your cognitive functioning during the day, too. Who hasn't felt a little worse for wear when they're running low on sleep?

## Blueberry Juice



Darkly colored berries lead to weight loss, decreasing the formation of fat cells by up to 73%—that alone will improve your mood. But berries also carry heavy doses of vitamin C. Too little C—a possibility when you're hunkering down on comfort foods and no longer enjoying a summer bounty of tomatoes, peppers, and fruit salads—can lead to fatigue, depression, low motivation, and the general feeling that you're sloshing around in wet snow boots 24/7. Blueberries just so happen to be a great source of resveratrol, an antioxidant pigment that research published in *Frontiers in Endocrinology* has linked to relief from depression.



## Red Wine



A few cocktails may make you feel giddy for the moment, but red wine can help make you happier in the long-term. Red wine is not only good for your heart health, researchers in Spain have also linked drinking the occasional glass of red wine with reduced depression risk. Red wine also happens to be a good source of resveratrol, a pigment found in grapes that has been linked to reductions in belly fat and improved mood. Salud!

# Eggs



Eggs are loaded with mood-promoting omega-3 fatty acids, zinc, B vitamins, and iodide, and because they're packed with protein, they'll also keep you full and energized long after you eat them. Need another reason to crack some shells in the morning? A 2008 study in the *International Journal of Obesity* found that people who ate two eggs for breakfast lost significantly more weight than those who chowed down on a bagel.

Pro tip: don't buy into unregulated supermarket-egg claims like "omega-3 enriched" or "free-range." If you're looking for the most natural eggs, hit up a local farmer. Make sure you're not being duped by food marketing by wising up to these nutrition myths!

## Red Peppers



Why red? Aren't all peppers the same? In fact, red bell peppers—which have been allowed to ripen on the vine and not picked when still green—have considerably higher nutrient scores than their underdeveloped brethren—more than double the vitamin C and up to 8 times as much vitamin A. In a recent survey of nutrient density, researchers at William Paterson University ranked red peppers as second only to leafy greens as the most potent of vegetables. The higher concentration of vitamins helps to improve your mood directly, as well as boost your immune system and lessen cold symptoms.

Stir-fry or roast them if you're not down with nibbling them raw to get the most of their vitamins and nutrients.

# Coconut



Coconut is chock-full of medium-chain triglycerides, fats that fuel better moods; a joint study from researchers at Yale and SUNY Albany even found this tasty treat has a neuroprotective effect. And although coconut is commonly found in high-calorie desserts, you don't have to (and shouldn't) stuff your face with macaroons to get your fix. Try using some coconut cream in your coffee, adding some unsweetened flakes to your favorite baked good, or just crack a fresh one open and go to town.

## Dark Chocolate



Turns out chocolate's delicious taste isn't the only reason it makes you feel so warm and fuzzy. The cocoa treat also gives you an instant boost in mood and concentration, and improves blood flow to your brain, helping you feel more vibrant and energized. Research conducted by the British Pharmacological Society even reveals that cocoa flavonols can boost your cognitive performance, making it easier to keep killing it at work. Sadly, Snickers bars don't count. Cocoa is the chocolate ingredient that does your body good, so pure dark chocolate is your best bet if you want the mood-boosting benefits minus the extra belly flab. Just make sure you don't overdo it: A study published in the *Journal of Clinical Psychopharmacology* found that a few ounces of dark chocolate a day is all you need to reap the benefits. Make sure that when you're indulging your inner chocoholic, you choose from the best dark chocolates!

## Pumpkin Seeds



Pumpkin seeds are like crunchy little nuggets of happiness. They're one of the best food sources of tryptophan, an amino acid that helps promote the production of serotonin in your brain. Tryptophan can also have a calming effect, making it easier to hit the hay at night and wake up feeling refreshed.

## Mussels



Mussels are loaded with some of the highest naturally-occurring levels of vitamin B12, a vitamin countless adults are missing out on. So, what's B12's mood-saving trick? It helps insulate your brain cells, keeping your brain sharp as you age. Mussels also contain the trace nutrients zinc, iodine, and selenium, which keep your thyroid—a major mood regulator—on track. Another benefit? Mussels are high in protein and low in fat and calories, making them one of the healthiest, most nutrient-dense foods that make you happy out there.

## Swiss Chard



This leafy green is packed with magnesium—a nutrient essential for the biochemical reactions in the brain that increase your energy levels. A 2009 study in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* also found that higher magnesium intake was associated with lower rates of depression. On those days you're feeling charded-out, try grabbing some of the magnesium-rich foods to get that boost.



## Blue Potatoes



Blue potatoes aren't a common supermarket find, but they're worth looking out for on your next trip to the farmer's market. The spuds get their color from anthocyanins, powerful antioxidants that provide neuroprotective benefits like bolstering short-term memory and reducing mood-killing inflammation. Their skins are also loaded with iodine, an essential nutrient that helps regulate your thyroid, staving off exhaustion and depression along the way.

## Grass-Fed Beef



Animals raised on grass pastures boast much higher levels of healthy conjugated linoleic acid (or CLA), a "happy" fat that combats stress hormones and blasts belly fat. Grass-fed beef also has a lower overall fat count and contains higher levels of heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids compared to grain-feed beef. Another great grass-fed option: lamb. It's packed with iron, a nutrient vital for a stable mood — the areas of the brain related to mood and memory contain the highest iron concentrations and iron-deficiency anemia can be a major contributor to a poor mood.

## Greek or Icelandic Yogurt



This dairy pick is packed with more calcium than you'll find in milk or regular yogurt, which is good news for your mood. Calcium fires the starter's pistol for the neurotransmitters in your brain, which can increase feelings of contentment and well-being. As a result, inadequate calcium intake can lead to anxiety, depression, irritability, impaired memory, and slow thinking. Greek yogurt also contains more protein than regular yogurt, making it a terrific stay-slim snack.

Our Greek yogurt pick: Fage Total 2%, which packs an impressive 10 grams of protein per serving.

# Asparagus



Your mom was onto something when she made you finish those green spears at the dinner table. This vegetable is one of the top plant-based sources of tryptophan, which serves as a basis for the creation of serotonin—one of the brain's primary mood-regulating neurotransmitters. Asparagus also boasts high levels of folate, a nutrient that may fight depression; in fact, research suggests that up to 50 percent of people with depression suffer from low folate levels.

# Honey



Honey, unlike table sugar, is packed with beneficial compounds like quercetin and kaempferol that reduce inflammation, keeping your brain healthy and warding off depression. This sweetener also has a less dramatic impact on your blood-sugar levels than regular sugar, so it won't send your body into fat-storage mode the way the white stuff can, or lead to one of those unpleasant sugar crashes that can make you feel like all your energy has been drained. Honey also boasts antibacterial properties, helping you fend off illnesses that can make you feel blue.

## Cherry Tomatoes



Tomatoes are a great source of lycopene, an antioxidant that protects your brain and fights depression-causing inflammation. And because lycopene lives in tomato skins, you'll get more of the stuff if you throw a handful of cherry tomatoes into your next salad instead of slicing up one full-size tomato. Want to take your happiness up a notch? Drizzle those tomatoes with a little olive oil, which has been shown to increase lycopene absorption. Although it can be a pricey habit, try to go organic whenever possible: researchers at the University of California-Davis found that organic tomatoes have higher lycopene levels.

## Olive Oil



Enjoying a better mood could be as simple as drizzling some olive oil on your salad. Researchers at Kyushu Nutrition Welfare University found that healthy fats, like those found in olive oil, were more effective at improving the mood of animal test subjects than unhealthy trans fats.

# Spinach



Iron deficiency—a problem many women face—can sap your energy. "Iron deficiency is common and can result in feelings of exhaustion, weakness, and irritability," says Cassie Bjork, RD, LD. Bjork says remedying the situation requires a two-part approach: "If you think your diet lacks iron, focus on eating more spinach, grass-fed red meat, and liver, all foods rich in the nutrient. Then, ensure sure your body can utilize the iron," she says. "Consuming probiotic-rich yogurt, fatty fish and an L-glutamine supplement can improve gut health and help your body to absorb iron more efficiently," explains Bjork.

Certain foods are more powerful together than alone. Did you know that eating a tangerine with your spinach salad is a brilliant move because the tangerine helps your body absorb the iron from the spinach? Now you do.



## Green Tea



Swap out that sugary latte for a cup of green tea and you'll be improving both your physical health and your mood in one fell swoop. Not only can the naturally-occurring caffeine in green tea give you a boost, the epigallocatechin-3-gallate, or EGCG, found in green tea has been linked to improvements in mood.

Researchers at Northwest A&F University's College of Food Science and Engineering found that mice given green tea supplementation alongside a sugary, high-fat diet lost fewer neurons than those who ate the unhealthy diet alone. Over time, this could reduce the risk of memory loss and neuron-death-related emotional health issues.

# Flaxseed



We've got some good news for all you fish-phobes out there: you can still enjoy all the benefits of omega-3s without ever digging into a meal that lives in the briny deep. Flaxseed, whether in its whole form, ground into flax meal, or pressed into oil, is an amazing source of mood-boosting omega-3s, too.

Just a single one-ounce serving of flaxseeds packs 6,338 milligrams of ALA, as well as eight grams of fiber, which can help improve the health of your gut, making your whole body healthier and happier along the way.

# Salmon



If you've been favoring fish over higher-fat cuts of meat, you might be on track toward banishing those blues. Salmon is a great way to load your diet with omega-3 fatty acids, which can help reduce inflammation throughout your body, improving your mood in the process.

Research published in the *Journal of Affective Disorders* reveals that depressed study subjects whose diets had omega-3s added to their diets had significant improvements in their symptoms.

# Crab



A little crab on your menu can make you feel a whole lot less crabby in the long run. This seafood is a serious mood-booster, packing 351 milligrams of omega-3s per three-ounce portion, thus reducing painful inflammation that can sap anybody's happiness.

For those whose suffer from depression-promoting anemia, crab is a particularly good choice; it's high in iron, helping you say so long to that low mood in seconds.

# Bananas



Satisfying that sweet tooth doesn't have to mean a sugar high and the subsequent low mood following a crash. Bananas are considered a low-glycemic food, meaning they're less likely to trigger an insulin spike than your average sugar-loaded treat, and they also happen to be an excellent source of that old happiness helper, potassium.

In fact, a study published in the *British Journal of Nutrition* in 2008 reveals that diets with ample potassium helped reduce symptoms of depression and stress. Need something to pair with that banana?

# Peas



Whether you like them mushy, whole, stir-fried, or just eat them right out of the freezer, peas are a pretty great way to put happiness back on your menu. Peas are a vegan-friendly source of iron, which can help you combat those bummed-out feelings that often accompany iron-deficiency anemia. All that iron can also help reduce feelings of exhaustion, a surefire happiness killer.

## Brussels Sprouts



You might have side-eyed Brussels sprouts as a kid, but as a savvy adult, you should know that they're a potent prescription for a better mood. Brussels sprouts are not only a good source of potassium, which has been linked to reduced symptoms of depression, they also pack more than a day's worth of vitamin C per cup, supplementation with which a study published in the *Pakistan Journal of Biological Sciences* has found effective at combatting stress.

# Chicken



When it comes to eating your way to a better mood, chicken is pretty hard to beat. Chicken is a great source of mood-boosting, energizing nutrients like B6, potassium, and zinc. Better yet, Australian researchers at the University of Adelaide and the Queen Elizabeth Hospital found that high-protein diets, like those with plenty of chicken on the menu, improved self-esteem and reduced depression in female study subjects.



## Raisins



Giving your mood a makeover is as easy as adding some additional iron to your diet, and luckily, raisins just so happen to be a great source of the stuff. Just one itty-bitty box of raisins packs four percent of your daily iron requirement, as well as plenty of magnesium, B6, and vitamin C.

# Oysters



Oysters may be best known for their purported aphrodisiac properties, but they're also pretty stellar at making people happy north of the navel, too. This mollusk is loaded with omega-3s, iron, potassium, and magnesium, all of which have been shown to have mood-boosting benefits.

# Avocado



Sure, millennials are allegedly spending cash that should have been used to buy real estate on avocado toast, but hey, at least they're some of the foods that make you happy. Fortunately, all those monounsaturated-fat-rich avocados are doing more than just pleasing palates; research published in *Physiology & Behavior* reveals that diets loaded with healthy fats decreased symptoms of anxiety in rats.

## Collard Greens



This southern staple is good for more than just satiating your appetite. A cup of cooked collard greens packs more than half of your RDA of vitamin C, which can not only help you fight off those colds and flus going around your office, but has been linked to improvements in mood disorders, like anxiety and depression.

# Apricots



Apricots may be small, but they're a mighty weapon when you're waging war on a bad mood. These stone fruits are loaded with vitamin C and beta-carotene, which researchers in India have linked to reduced symptoms of depression and anxiety.

## Chia Seeds



Whether you're tossing them in a smoothie or using them to add some extra crunch to your favorite salad, chia seeds are a way to get happy in a hurry. Chia seeds pack more depression-busting omega-3s per ounce than salmon, and their high fiber content can help you enjoy a healthier gut (and a happier mood along the way).

# Broccoli



Getting happier could be as simple as adding some broccoli to your next stir-fry. Those teeny-tiny trees are not only a good source of anemia-defeating iron, they also pack more than a day's worth of that old immune system defender and mood-booster, vitamin C, per cup.

# Lemon



Listening to "Lemonade" isn't the only way citrus can make you happier. The results of a Japanese study published in the *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* reveal that just the scent of citrus fruits, like lemon, can improve a person's mood. When you couple that with the high vitamin C content in lemons, you've got a prescription for a happier you.



# Tuna



Tuna is one of the foods that make you happy because it's nutritionally good for you and it's good for your wallet (it's cheap!). This fatty fish is more than just a sandwich staple; albacore tuna just so happens to be one of the best mood-boosters on the market. Research published in *European Neuropsychopharmacology* has found that omega-3 supplementation has a significant effect on mood, and luckily, tuna just so happens to pack more than 1,000 milligrams of the stuff in a three-ounce serving. Just make sure you're limiting your tuna consumption to a few sandwiches or sushi rolls a week; it's recommended that men eat no more than 14.5 ounces of the stuff, and that women consume no more than 12.5 ounces to keep mercury levels to a minimum.

# Walnuts



Crack open a few walnuts and you might just crack the code for happiness in the long term. Walnuts are a source of happiness-promoting omega-3 fatty acids, as well as being loaded with heart-healthy mono- and polyunsaturated fats. Even better, researchers at the University of New Mexico found that young men who added a half-cup of walnuts to their daily meal plan experienced significant improvements in their mood over just eight weeks.

## Chanterelle Mushrooms



Vitamin D, AKA the sunshine vitamin, can make your disposition a whole lot sunnier too, thanks to its happiness-boosting effects. Luckily, each cup of chanterelles boasts nearly a third of your daily vitamin D, a deficiency in which has been linked to depression and fatigue. While many vitamin D-rich foods are meat- or dairy-based, chanterelles also have the added benefit of being vegan-friendly (and delicious, too).

# Clams



Steam up a batch of clams and you'll be as happy as one in no time. Clams are a surprising source of happiness-promoting, immune-boosting vitamin C, as well as being loaded with more than 1000 percent of your daily vitamin B-12. Considering that a lack of dietary B-12 has been linked to everything from brain fog to depression, there's no time like the present to gear up for an old-fashioned clam bake.

# Coffee



Your daily Starbucks habit may be making your bank account sad, but it's sure to brighten your mood. A 2016 study published in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* found that caffeine consumption was inversely correlated with symptoms of depression and anxiety.

# Lentils



Making lentils a staple on your menu is the first step toward a happier you. Lentils are a good source of anemia-fighting iron and energizing B-6, and they also happen to be a great way for vegans and vegetarians to boost the amount of protein in their diet. Studies have linked high-protein diets to reduced anxiety and depression, so there's no time like the present to break out your best dal recipe.

## Brown Rice



The first step on the path toward a happier you could be swapping out some of your favorite gluten-laden carbs for brown rice. Research published in *BMC Psychiatry* reveals that study subjects who adhered to a gluten-free diet enjoyed relief from their depression and anxiety. Brown rice can also help fight mood-depleting conditions like iron-deficiency anemia, thanks to its healthy helping of iron.

# Kefir



Drink to your health and happiness by making kefir a staple in your better living routine. Kefir is an easy way to pack your meal plan with probiotics, boosting the amount of good bacteria in your gut. A review of research published in the *Annals of General Psychiatry* even found a strong correlation between probiotic supplementation and improvements in mood. When you consider that better gut health can also bolster your immune system and help keep you from getting sick, you'll definitely have something to smile about.



# Mackerel



Grill up some mackerel and get ready for a happier you. Mackerel is one of the best sources of omega-3s. As mentioned earlier, this fat is linked to reduced symptoms of depression, anxiety, and inflammation. Mackerel is an excellent source of vitamin B-6, which is good news for happiness-seeking people. Aarhus University Hospital researchers linked a vitamin B6 deficiency to an increased risk of depression.

# Oranges



Have a craving for something sweet? Try grabbing an orange: one of the most popular foods that make you happy. Not only will you satisfy your sweet tooth, you'll be loading your diet with vitamin C. This vitamin has been linked to reduced anxiety and depression. In fact, a 2016 *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* study found a connection between citrus consumption and depression. Women who consumed two or more servings of citrus daily reduced their risk of depression up to 18 percent.

# Kale



Just a single cup of kale contains more than a full day's worth of mood-lifting vitamin C. Kale also possesses plenty of potassium, iron, and B-6, all of which have been shown to be serious happiness helpers. Make every meal healthier by packing your menu with the [30 Best Anti-Inflammatory Foods](#)