



Food and Mood Handouts

Our brains are fuelled by the food we eat.

2% of your body weight the brain uses a whopping 20% of the calories eaten.

If you go to school or work without breakfast and skip lunch you don't break your fast until tea time, don't be surprised if you can't think as well as others, are grumpy and don't have much energy.

What to eat? In your diet you need protein, carbohydrates, fats and a good range of vitamins and minerals.

Proteins

You need protein to grow and to repair any damage. They are the building blocks of the system.

Proteins help fight off disease and infections when thinking about mental health,

The most important thing is protein's role in regulating mood.

Experts are encouraging us to ensure we have a portion of protein with every meal.



Carbohydrates

Come in two forms: simple and complex.

Simple carbs are one or several sugar units and as such are super easy to digest. The glucose in our blood, often referred to as blood sugar levels, goes up very quickly – which is often referred to as a spike.

Our bodies respond by producing insulin which wraps up the glucose and takes it to our cells, knocking on the cell wall to deliver the glucose into the cell which can then be used for energy.

When we get too much too quickly it can be a problem because once our cells are full they don't open the cell wall. The excess gets stored as fat AND our blood sugar drops.

Low blood sugar leads to feeling hungry .

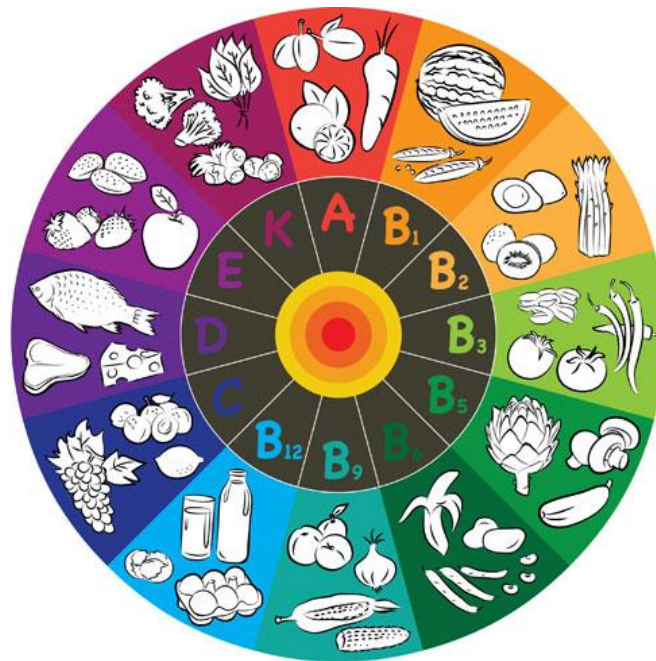


You can avoid spikes in blood sugar by eating wholegrain carbohydrates, lots of complex carbs including raw and cooked veg, wholemeal bread, rice, quinoa, couscous and pasta.

Vitamins and Minerals

Water soluble and fat soluble micronutrients are important in regulating metabolism, heart rate, cellular pH and bone density. They also help prevent certain diseases, such as rickets.

The less processed a food is, the more likely the micronutrients are to be intact and available to you if you eat it. We know that some micronutrients e.g. zinc and magnesium are important in protecting against depression.



The best way to ensure that your diet contains everything you need is to eat a varied diet of whole food.

How a food has been treated before being cooked, and what it is eaten with, will affect how accessible the micronutrients are so; a cherry tomatoes, a salad tomato, a beef tomato, tinned tomatoes and tomatoes that have been cooked in a sauce would all be counted as a different food because the micronutrients would be a little different in each of them.

Recap

To stabilise your blood sugar, leading to more balance in your mental state and the capacity to think clearly, include complex carbs and protein in your diet.

Everyone is slightly different so you may find you have to play around with what you eat and when, but one thing is for sure:

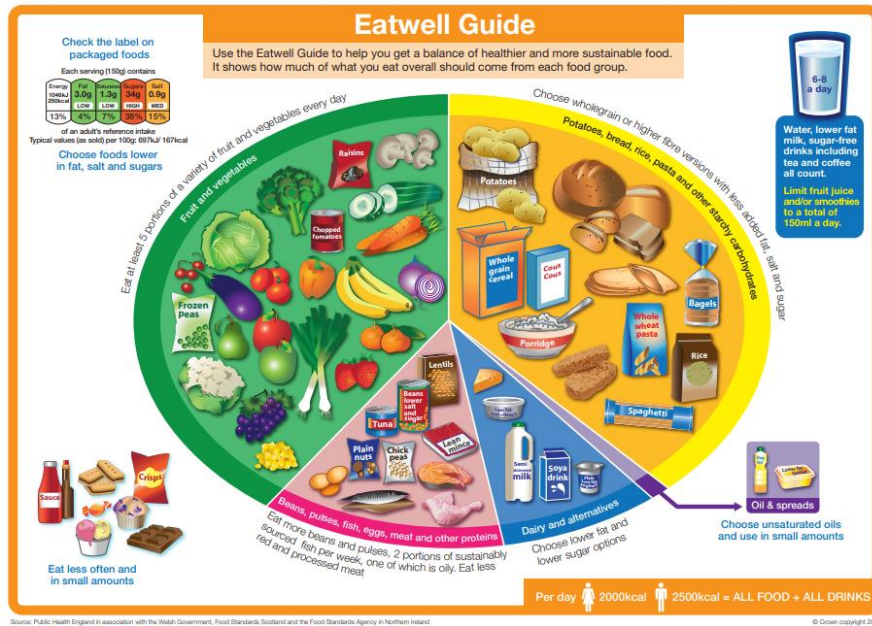


If you have a can of Coke and a Mars bar, within an hour:

- your blood sugar will have spiked,
- your body will have responded and
- your blood sugar will drop again.

It's not good for your mental health – it's a roller coaster ride.

If you put all the food you eat in a day on a plate it should look pretty much like this.



As a guide for how much protein you need each day, the size of your clenched fist is equivalent to how much protein you need.

Questions you might want to think about:

- How much variety is in my diet, could I improve it?
- Am I reluctant to try new things and are there ways I could work on that?
- When do I eat and with whom?
- Do I need to pay more attention to what I'm eating both before and while I'm eating it? (mindful eating)
- Does my family miss out on what could be a fun part of the day, a time to catch up and strengthen relationships if we don't sit down and eat together sometimes?
- Am I going too long between meals or making food choices that make my blood sugar rise and fall in a way that is not good for my mental health?
- Do I fuel myself properly? – You wouldn't put diesel in a sports car, would you?
- Am I getting my 5 a day?