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## **Winter Blues? Try These 10 Food Tips to Help Ease Symptoms**

### **Alter your diet, improve your mood**

Seasonal affective disorder (SAD) is a type of depression that's believed to be caused by the changing seasons. Typically, symptoms begin to worsen around fall and peak during the winter months. Symptoms of SAD are similar to other forms of depression, including feelings of hopelessness, lack of concentration, social withdrawal, and fatigue.

Treatments include medication, talk therapy, exercise, and eating a healthy diet. Eat healthy foods to help you fight off SAD with your fork.

#### **1. Lean proteins**

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Besides being high in omega-3s, salmon is a great source of lean proteins. While a richly marbled rib-eye steak is undoubtedly delicious, the high saturated fat content may not be good for your mood or your body. Lean proteins, however, carry plenty of amino acids, which may positively affect your mood. They also increase energy levels to help fight off fatigue which accompanies the "winter blues."

#### **2. Omega-3 fatty acids**

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Sources that contain the highest levels of omega-3 fatty acids include flax seed, walnuts, and salmon.

### **3. Berries**

Stress aggravates depression symptoms and exhausts your body, Blueberries, raspberries, and strawberries may help prevent the release of cortisol, a hormone produced by the adrenal gland. During stressful situations, cortisol heads toward your hippocampus, a major portion of the brain that stores memories, provides emotional responses, and helps with navigation.

### **4. Limit sugar intake**

If you start looking at the ingredients of food labels, you'll notice various forms of sugar. They'll appear as syrups or words that end in "-ose."

Sugar may give you a little happy boost at first, but suggests that too much sugar and too few omega-3 fatty acids can functionally change your brain and slow it down. Research on how the brain works is always ongoing. But it's a safe bet to stay away from sugar — especially if you're feeling depressed. The crash after a sugar high can easily make you feel worse than before.

### **5. Folic acid**

Research on folic acid's effect on the brain has given insight into how it can boost your mood. There's some evidence that the body uses it to create serotonin — a neurotransmitter that affects mood — but there's no conclusive evidence as to how it works. Including it in your diet is a good idea regardless.

You can get high amounts of folic acid in leafy greens, oatmeal, sunflower seeds, oranges, fortified cereals, lentils, black-eyed peas.

### **6. Vitamin B-12**

Like folic acid, low levels of vitamin B-12 in the blood are associated with depression, but researchers can't find definitive evidence as to why.

There are lots of tasty ways to fit it into your diet. Food sources of vitamin B-12 include lean beef, clams, oysters, crab, wild salmon, eggs, cottage cheese, yogurt, and milk.

### **7. Vitamin D**

Vitamin D is known as the “sunshine vitamin” because your body can make it by using cholesterol and absorbing natural. Your mood may improve with as little as 10 minutes of sun exposure. This is why light therapy is an important treatment for SAD. Your body can also absorb vitamin D through food.

Food sources of vitamin D include milk, egg yolks, mushrooms, and fish that have bones. You can also get vitamin D in supplement form.

## **8. Dark chocolate**

Chocolate has always been a tasty and good way to self-medicate through down times. But a Hershey’s bar or pint of chocolate ice cream isn’t the best way to do it.

Participants in one study were given a dark chocolate mixed drink every day for a month. Results showed significantly improved mood, which researchers linked with a high polyphenol content. Polyphenols are a type of antioxidant.

When you’re feeling down, pick up a bar with the highest cocoa content you can find.

## **9. Turkey**

Turkey contains the amino acid tryptophan and melatonin, which are the calming and relaxing chemicals that make you tired after Thanksgiving dinner.

Tapping into turkey’s calming powers is a great, natural way to help your body cut

## **10. Bananas**

Like turkey, bananas contain tryptophan. Besides that, the carbohydrates from natural sugars and potassium in bananas help fuel your brain. Magnesium, also found in bananas, may improve sleep and reduce anxiety — two symptoms of seasonal depression.

For more help with a healthy food plan please contact me and I can work with you individually or in a small group to create a nutritious, satisfying plan of eating during these winter months. We can do together what we can’t do alone!! Bernadette McSweeney, LCSW 203-512-9518