

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

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Junk Food May Cause Depression

Current world-wide estimates of depression run from 120 million cases to 340 million cases. These numbers are staggering. Many factors trigger a risk of depression. Some of these factors — such as adverse life events, the loss of a loved one and family history — are difficult to avoid. However, your doctor at Hinterland Chiropractic wants patients to know that there is one simple change everybody can make that dramatically lowers the risk of developing depression: avoiding junk food.



Your doctor at Hinterland Chiropractic encourages patients to adopt the chiropractic lifestyle. This is a way of life that focuses on natural disease prevention, including regular chiropractic visits, exercise, stress-reduction and nutrition. All of these components ward off a myriad of diseases, including emotional problems like depression.

To motivate patients to adopt the chiropractic lifestyle, your doctor at Hinterland Chiropractic focuses on arming patients with researched-based information. Read on to learn the very latest on why avoiding junk food may keep you and your family depression-free.

The Latest Research

According to a study, eating fast foods — such as hamburgers, sausage and pizza — and commercial baked goods — such as muffins, doughnuts and pastries — may cause depression.

Researchers followed 8,964 people for an average of six years. At the start of

the study, none of the subjects had ever been diagnosed with depression or taken antidepressants. During the course of the six-year trial, 493 study participants developed depression (defined by either a physician's diagnosis or the use of antidepressant medication).

Published in the journal *Public Health Nutrition*, the results reveal that regular consumers of fast food, compared to those who eat little or none, are 51 percent more likely to endure depression.

In addition, a dose-response relationship was observed. "The more fast food you consume, the greater the risk of depression," explains Almudena Sánchez-Villegas, lead author of the study (*Public Health Nutr* 2012;15:424-32).

"Even eating small quantities is linked to a significantly higher chance of developing depression," points out Sánchez-Villegas.

Good Fat, Bad Fat

Your doctor at Hinterland Chiropractic is often asked why might junk food cause depression. Some evidence points to the types of "unhealthy fats" abundant in fast food, commercial baked goods and fried foods. These disease-causing fats, known as "trans-fats," produce destructive free radical chemicals in the body.

A study conducted in Spain demonstrates that a diet high in trans-fats triggers depression. On the other hand, consuming olive oil lowers the risk.

As part of the analysis, investigators followed 12,059 people in Spain for six years. At the start of the study none of the participants suffered from depression. During the course of the experiment, 657 developed the disorder.

Compared with people who did not consume trans-fats, those with a high intake of these unhealthy fats endured a 48 percent elevated risk of depression (*PLoS ONE* 2011; Epub).

In addition, the study demonstrated a dose-response relationship, "whereby the more trans-fats were consumed, the greater the harmful effect they produced in the volunteers," notes study lead author, Miguel Ángel Martínez-González.

The research team also analyzed the influence of polyunsaturated fats (abundant in fish and vegetable oils) and of olive oil on the occurrence of depression. "In fact, we discovered that this type of healthier fats, together with olive oil, are associated with a lower risk of suffering depression," adds Professor Martínez-González.



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Finally, the analysis suggests that both depression as well as cardiovascular disease are influenced in a similar manner by diet, and might share similar mechanisms in their origin. This hypothesis is further suggested by numerous studies that indicate the harmful effect of trans-fats and saturated fats on the risk of cardiovascular disease (*PLoS ONE* 2011; Epub).

Whole Foods for a Whole Mind

Another study, which pooled data on 3,486 middle-aged office workers, was published in the *British Journal of Psychiatry*. Dietary information was compiled at the study's onset. Five years later, the study participants were evaluated for depression.

Researchers from the University College London identified two dietary patterns on either extreme of the healthy/unhealthy eating spectrum. The "whole food" diet was heavily loaded with vegetables, fruits and fish. The "processed food" diet was packed with sweetened desserts, fried food, processed meat, refined grains and high-fat dairy products.

Findings showed that people who consumed a whole foods diet were 58 percent less likely to develop depression, compared with their peers who ate a primarily processed foods diet (*Br J Psychiatry* 2009;195:408-13).

A Concern for Youths, Too

It's not just adults who may suffer depression as a result of junk-food diets. Children and teens are at risk, too.

Researchers looked at 7,114 adolescents, aged 10 to 14 years. Food quality was derived from a dietary questionnaire. The youths also completed a standard assessment for depression.

After adjusting for various risk factors of depression such as socioeconomic status and family conflict, the scientists determined that those with the poorest quality diets were 79 percent more likely to be depressed, compared with those with the healthiest diets.

"Our results demonstrate an association between diet quality and adolescent depression that exists over and above the influence of socioeconomic, family, and other potential confounding factors," conclude the study's authors (*Aust N Z J Psychiatry* 2010;44: 435-42).

Another analysis tracked 3,040 girls, aged 11 to 18 years. They were evaluated two times, with a year between the assessments.

Results revealed that the better a girl's diet when the study began, the less likely she was to suffer from depression.

In addition, dietary changes over the study influenced mental health status: "Improvements in diet quality were mirrored by improvements in mental health over the follow-up period, while deteriorating diet quality was associated with poorer psychological functioning."

This association remained after researchers adjusted for other risks of depression, including age, gender, socioeconomic status, dieting behaviors, body mass index and physical activity levels (*PLoS ONE* 2011;6:e24805).

A diverse diet is key to staving off depression in children and teens, according to researchers at the University of Alberta.

Investigators sorted through dietary information on 3,757 children in Nova Scotia between the ages of 10 and 11 years.

Compared with children with little variety in their diets, children with greater variety in their diet were significantly less likely to develop depression or anxiety in the following years (*Public Health Nutr* 2012;14:1).

What to Eat Instead

Simply avoiding junk food can do wonders for keeping depression at bay. But for even more protection against the blues, adopting a "Mediterranean Diet Pattern" (MDP)

can exponentially increase your odds of avoiding depression.

The MDP is high in fruits, vegetables, nuts, legumes, olive oil, fish and whole grains. It may also contain small amounts of lean meats and dairy. On the other hand, it excludes fatty meats, processed foods, fried foods and processed grains. Researchers theorize that the MDP "is thought to reduce inflammatory, vascular, and metabolic processes that may be involved in the risk of clinical depression."

One analysis tracked 10,094 people free of depression at the study's onset. After an average of 4.4 years, 480 new cases of depression were identified. Findings showed that study participants with the strictest adherence to the MDP were nearly 25 percent less likely to develop depression, compared with those with the least adherence to the MDP (*Arch Gen Psychiatry* 2009;66:1090-8).

Besides being rich in healthy fats, such as olive oil, which have been shown to cut the risk of depression, the MDP is rich in B-vitamins. A wealth of research shows that B-vitamins boost brain health.



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