

## My son's story

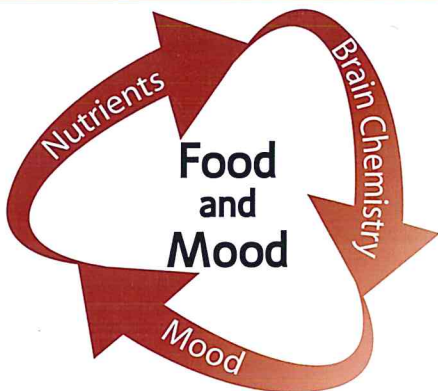
My son Michael is in high school. Over the past year, he and his new friends have spent a lot of time eating fast food and watching TV. Michael stopped skiing and cycling because his friends didn't do these activities. When he and his girlfriend broke up, he told us that he was feeling really low, and didn't have much confidence in himself anymore. His doctor suggested that he try to change his eating, activity and sleep patterns to see if that would help. As a family, we are supporting him by eating together and he's gone on a few bike rides with his Dad and brother. He is eating less junk food and started cycling to school. The other day, he actually said he has been feeling better. He seems happier and more like himself!

## The Food and Mood Connection

The effect of food choices on mental health is sometimes called the 'food-mood connection.' There is not very much research in this area. We don't know all the answers yet but we do know that:

- A healthy diet may help your teen feel better emotionally and physically.
- Brain chemicals (neurotransmitters), such as serotonin, dopamine and norepinephrine affect the way we think, feel and act.
- Food and brain chemicals work together to give us energy throughout the day.
- Eating a variety of healthy foods is important for mental health.

What we eat can affect how we feel, and how we feel can affect what we eat.



## What foods provide all these nutrients?

**Foods that are higher in the nutrients that affect brain function and mood are:**

### *Vegetables and Fruits*

- Choose at least one dark green and one orange vegetable each day
- Choose berries, citrus fruits and melons each day

### *Grain Products*

- Choose a variety of whole grain products

### *Milk and Alternatives*

- Choose a variety of milk products or fortified soy beverages that have calcium and vitamin D in them

### *Meat and Alternatives*

- Choose a variety of meat, poultry, fish, legumes, tofu, eggs, nuts and seeds

**To get omega-3 fatty acids in your diet, choose:**

- fatty fish (salmon, mackerel, sardines, trout)
- vegetable oils (canola, flaxseed, soybean, olive)
- nuts and seeds such as flaxseeds, walnuts, soy nuts, pecans, almonds, peanuts
- eggs, milk, yogurt and non-hydrogenated margarines with added omega -3 fatty acids
- whole grain flax bread or crackers

## Are nutrition supplements a good idea?

Some teens are not able to get all the nutrition they need from food. Talk to a healthcare provider before your teen takes any vitamins/mineral, herbal or natural healthcare products. Ask to speak to a registered dietitian to help your teen manage their eating habits for good health.

Research results are mixed as to whether fish oil supplements help manage depression and other mental health concerns. The best source of omega-3 fatty acids is from food.

## As a parent, you can help your teen to:

- Eat breakfast every day and avoid skipping meals.
- Limit highly processed foods, fast food, high sugar drinks, and high fat, sugar and salt snack foods.
- Drink water. Dehydration affects your energy level and mood.
- Limit caffeine from coffee, tea, soft drinks and energy drinks. These drinks can make you feel anxious, nervous or depressed. Limiting them may promote better sleep.
- Avoid alcohol. It can cause low mood, irritability and aggressive behaviour.
- Be involved and take part in family meals. This helps create family connections.
- Learn what to eat, how much to eat and how to prepare healthy foods.
- Model healthy eating habits, a healthy weight and a positive self-image.

## Useful websites

[hc-sc.gc.ca](http://hc-sc.gc.ca)

*(Search: food guide; just for youth)*

[albertahealthservices.ca](http://albertahealthservices.ca)

*(Search: school nutrition)*

[healthyalberta.com](http://healthyalberta.com)

*(Search: healthy eating and active living teens; healthy eating and active living teens smart goals)*

[eatracker.ca](http://eatracker.ca)

[dietitians.ca](http://dietitians.ca)

If you need more information call:  
Health Link Alberta  
Toll Free: 1-866-408-LINK (5465)  
Calgary: 403-943-LINK  
Edmonton: 780-408-LINK

Mental Health Screening & Early Identification  
10101 Southport Road SW  
Calgary, AB, T2W 3N2  
[HPDIP.MH.earlyID@albertahealthservices.ca](mailto:HPDIP.MH.earlyID@albertahealthservices.ca)

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## Healthy Eating and Your Teen's Mental Health

