



Nutrition News - January 2022

Nutrition's Role In Preventing Depression

The holidays have come and gone, the days are short, spring seems a long way away - it's a recipe for a form of depression called "seasonal affective disorder," or SAD for short.

It can occur during any time of the year, but it typically affects people during the winter. The cold, along with longer periods of darkness, can bring on symptoms of depression including loss of energy, changes in appetite and sleeping habits, irritability, and loss of interest in participating in social activities.

Like many forms of depression, SAD can be treated with antidepressant medications - but there's a catch, especially for seniors. Many antidepressants have specific risks in older adults that have not been observed in younger adults, according to the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Potential issues for seniors include a higher risk of falls, osteoporosis and fractures, especially when older types of antidepressants are used, the NIH reports. Additionally, as with many medications, antidepressants can take time to work, and the best time of year to use them to prevent the onset of symptoms may have already passed.

Additionally, seniors who already take multiple medications may not want to add yet another one to the mix, given the well-documented uncertainties of drugs interacting with other drugs, commonly known as "polypharmacy." One example: A University of South Australia study released in December 2021 finds that older people on antidepressants are twice as likely to suffer postoperative delirium after hip and knee surgery.

Addressing Depression Differently

According to the New York State Office for the Aging (NYSOFA), low levels of vitamin D have been found in people with SAD. It is unclear whether this is linked to SAD, but Vitamin D deficiency is particularly dangerous for older adults.

Symptoms of vitamin D deficiency are very subtle and can include muscle and bone pain, excessive fatigue, and depressed mood. Older adults are more at risk for being vitamin D deficient due to changes in diet which result in eliminating foods rich in vitamin D; additionally, aging bodies have more difficulty converting and absorbing vitamin D from foods. Older adults deficient in vitamin D are at increased risk for health maladies including negative impacts on bone and heart health, increased risk of cognitive decline, heart disease, hypertension, cancer, diabetes, and decreased immune function.

Using Nutrition To Address SAD

Food influences our emotions, as anybody who's tasted something wonderful would know. Certain foods affect mood-modifying brain chemicals known as neurotransmitters.

You can obtain vitamin D by increasing intake of foods where vitamin D is naturally found such as: eating beef liver, egg yolks, cheeses, and fatty fish like salmon. You can also increase intake of vitamin D fortified foods including: milk, yogurt, cereals and juice.

You can take a vitamin D supplement - but should only do so if recommended by your physician.

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Nutrition / Depression (continued)

Did you know?

- Women are four times as likely to be diagnosed with SAD
- Vitamin D levels tend to drop during the winter months
- Certain medications, such as the anti-inflammatory prednisone, can inhibit the ability to produce and metabolize vitamin D.
- Seasonal affective disorder can occur in spring and summer as well
- Those who suffer from depression or bipolar disorder may see symptoms worsen with seasons changing

Depression-Agravating Foods To Avoid

Alcohol is the big one here. There's a clear link between alcohol use and mental health problems, and alcohol use can also hinder the effectiveness of the medications commonly taken by seniors.

Foods high in sugar and refined carbs, like many processed foods, can contribute to higher risk of depression. These foods might give you a slight, short-lived bump in energy levels - but after that comes the "crash."

A Little Coffee or Tea May Be Okay

The caffeine in coffee and tea has stimulant properties - that's why so many drink it in the morning - but coffee and tea also have antioxidant properties, when used in moderation. Still, you'll want to avoid caffeine after midday, when it can start to affect sleep patterns.

Get That Exercise

Physical exercise may help ward off depression. For those who are online, the Office for the Aging offers many remote senior exercise class options. Contact us at ofa@dutchessny.gov or **845-486-2555** to find out more.

Easy Recipe: Caldo Verde (Green Soup)

(Serves 6)

Ingredients

3 pounds Yukon gold or russet potatoes, peeled and chopped

8 cups low-sodium chicken stock (or water)

1 bunch kale or collard greens (about $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 pound), stemmed, coarsely chopped, and washed

2 to 3 precooked chicken or turkey sausages, cut into $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch slices (or 1 cup cooked and rinsed red beans)

Directions

Put the potatoes in a large pot and cover with water or chicken broth. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Reduce the heat to a simmer and cook, partially covered, until tender, about 15 to 20 minutes. Remove from heat and use a potato masher to crush them in the pot. Return to the heat and add the sliced sausages or beans. Stir in the greens, a few handfuls at a time, just before serving.

*Adapted from Visiting Nurse Service of New York
"Caregiver Cookbook"*

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The Dutchess County Office for the Aging is funded under Title III of the U.S. Older Americans Act, the New York State Office for the Aging, and the county of Dutchess.