

© Liz Pearson, RD

Website: www.lizpearson.com

Dietary Prescription for Optimal Mental Health & Happiness

Consume a diverse, plant-rich, fibre-rich diet

- Variety matters. Aim for at least 30 different plant foods each week.
- Choose whole grain, high-fibre breads, cereals, pasta, and rice. Less processed is best (for example, choose steel-cut oats, instead of instant oats).
- Eat a wide variety of colourful fruits and vegetables (with the skin on when possible), including plenty of berries and dark leafy and green vegetables. Aim for at least 7 to 8 servings daily.
- Use herbs, spices, onion, and garlic liberally when preparing and cooking food.
 - * Consider a daily supplement containing 500 to 1000 mg of curcumin.
- Enjoy a handful of nuts and seeds daily.
- More beans please! Enjoy daily or every other day (serving size: $\frac{3}{4}$ cup to 1 cup).
- Eat two to three servings of higher fat fish each week, such as salmon, rainbow trout, or sardines.
 - * If you don't eat fish regularly, consider taking 1000 to 2000 mg (EPA + DHA) of fish oil daily.
- Use extra virgin olive oil for cooking & salad dressings.
- Drink 6 to 8 cups of fluids daily. Water, tea, and coffee are all good options. Limit caffeine to 400 mg daily.
- Enjoy fermented foods daily, like yogurt and kefir.
- Consider taking a multivitamin, especially if you are female, follow a vegan or vegetarian diet, or are over the age of 50. Make sure it contains adequate Vitamin D (adults need 600 I.U. daily, if age 70 or over 800 I.U.).
- Leave some room for chocolate! Enjoy 2 to 3 squares of dark chocolate daily and add 1 Tbsp/15 mL cocoa to smoothies or lattes.

Limit the following:

- Ultra-processed foods, including fast food, many snack foods, and candy.
- Foods high in sugar, especially sugary drinks. Limit "added sugar" to no more than 6 tsp/day for females and 9 tsp for males. Divide grams of sugar on a food label by 4 to determine how many teaspoons of sugar a product contains.
- Refined grains, like white bread and white rice.
- Eat lean, red meat in small quantities (3 servings/week or less, deck of cards serving size). Minimize your intake of processed meats.
- Foods high in saturated fats (butter, coconut oil) and those containing sugar substitutes.

In addition: Aim for 7 to 9 hours of quality sleep each night. Aim for at least 30 minutes of physical activity daily (more is better and walking counts!). Break up sitting time (for every 30 to 45 minutes of sitting time, move for 2 minutes). Have a regular mindfulness/meditation practice. Stay social and nourish your relationships. This includes enjoying meals at the table with family and friends.

Please note:

- Talk to your doctor before adding supplements to your diet, including curcumin and fish oil.
- In terms of probiotic supplements for mental health, more research is required (supplements that look promising include Calm Biotic, Probiotic Sticks, Cerebiome, and Zenflore). For more information on research-backed probiotics, go to www.probioticchart.ca.