

*“Every time  
you eat is an  
opportunity to  
nourish your  
body”*

Unknown

In this month's newsletter:

**Good food for a  
good mood:** top  
5 mood boosting  
food categories

**Sleep and  
Workplace  
Productivity**

**Fact & Tip of  
the month**

## Good food for a good mood: top 5 mood boosting food categories

**There's a well-known saying; 'you are what you eat' but most of us interpret this to relate to our appearance rather than our mood.**

Without a steady source of fuel from the foods we eat, our mind and bodies don't function well. Blood sugar fluctuations and nutritional imbalances from unhealthy eating patterns can often cause mood swings, irritability, fatigue and worsen symptoms of depression and anxiety.

Beyond mood and general wellbeing, the role of diet and nutrition on mental health is very complex and has yet to be fully understood. However, research between the two is growing rapidly. In recent years, evidence shows that food can contribute to the development, prevention and management of mental health conditions including depression and anxiety.



### Ultra-processed foods and gut health

What we eat, especially foods that contain chemical additives and ultra-processed foods affect our gut environment. Ultra-processed foods contain substances extracted from food (e.g. sugar and starch), added from food constituents (hydrogenated fats), or made in a laboratory (flavour enhancers and food colourings). Ultra-processed foods are manufactured to be especially tasty by the use of such ingredients and are very common in the typical Western diet. Some examples include fizzy drinks, sugary or savoury packaged snacks, packaged breads, buns and pastries, frozen foods such as fish fingers or chicken nuggets and instant noodles.

#### **But what does this have to do with your mood?**

90% of serotonin (our happy hormone) receptors are in the gut. A recent study suggests that eating a healthy, balanced diet such as the Mediterranean diet and avoiding inflammation-producing foods may be protective against depression.

Another study outlines an Antidepressant Food Scale, which lists 12 antidepressant nutrients related to the prevention and treatment of depression. Some of the foods containing these nutrients are all fresh, whole foods such as oysters, mussels, salmon, watercress, spinach, romaine lettuce, cauliflower, and strawberries.

A better diet can help, but it's only the first step – just like you cannot exercise out of a bad diet, you also cannot eat your way out of feeling depressed or anxious.

## What should I eat to improve my mood?

A simple place to start is to eat whole foods and avoid or reduce your quantity of packaged or processed foods. These are often high in food additives and preservatives that disrupt the healthy bacteria in the gut.

### Probiotic foods

Probiotics are best known for their role in digestive health, tying into our previous mention about the link between gut health and our mood. You can increase your intake of probiotics by eating foods such as:

- Yogurt
- Kefir
- Sauerkraut
- Miso
- Tempeh

### Whole grain foods

Whole grains are important sources of B vitamins which are vital for brain health but can sometimes be confusing. For a food to be considered whole grain there should be at least 1 gram of dietary fibre per every 5 grams of carbohydrates.

Whole grain foods include:

- Oats
- Quinoa
- Brown rice
- Bulgur
- Wild rice

### Omega-3 fatty acids

Evidence suggests that omega-3 fatty acids may have a role in brain functioning, with omega-3 fatty acids deficiencies being linked to mental health problems. Foods containing omega-3 fatty acids include:

- Sardines
- Anchovies
- Mackerel
- Walnuts
- Flax and chia seeds

### Berries

Eating more fruits and vegetables is linked to lower rates of depression and although the mechanism isn't clear, a diet rich in antioxidants may help to manage inflammation that is associated with depression and other mood disorders.

Berries pack a wide range of antioxidants and phenolic compounds, which play a key role in combatting imbalances of harmful compounds in your body. Berries are particularly high in anthocyanins, a pigment that gives them their purple-blue colour and one study associated a diet rich in anthocyanins with a 39% lower risk of depression-related symptoms.

### Leafy greens

Spinach and other green vegetables contain the B vitamin folate. Although the connection isn't fully understood, low folate levels have been consistently associated with depression in research. Folate deficiency may impair the metabolism of serotonin, dopamine and noradrenaline – all of which are important for mood regulation, but further research is needed to understand the exact role of folate and mental health. Folate-rich vegetables include:

- Spinach
- Edamame
- Artichokes
- Broccoli
- Avocado

Folate is also plentiful in beans and lentils with a cup of cooked lentils providing 90% of the recommended daily allowance.

### Good food for a good mood

Feeling good comes from a diet that has enough healthy choice carbohydrates at regular times to keep blood glucose levels stable and diets should contain a wide variety of protein and vitamin and mineral containing foods to support the body's functions.

As a rule, plenty of fruits, vegetables and wholegrain foods with some proteins including oily fish, will support a good supply of nutrients for both good health and good mood.

Some top tips include:

- Increase your intake of fresh fruits and vegetables
- Eat enough fibre and include wholegrains and legumes in your diet
- Include probiotic-rich foods such as plain yogurt without added sugars
- Reduce sugar intake at breakfast
- Add fermented foods such as unsweetened kefir, sauerkraut or kimchi to your diet to maintain a healthy gut
- Eat a balance of seafoods and lean poultry and less red meat each week



## Nutrition Webinars

At Healthy Performance we have a brand-new series of OnDemand webinars, including 2 topics around nutrition and healthy eating.

These webinars are available to access 24/7/365 and with no booking required, they are suitable for large workforces, remote workers and multi-site organisations.

To enquire about our OnDemand webinars please visit: <https://www.healthyperformance.co.uk/ondemand/>



# Sleep and Workplace Productivity

Do you often lay there staring at your bedroom ceiling counting sheep? Have you felt worried and anxious that you have a busy day at work and aren't sure how you'll cope? If this sounds familiar, then you are amongst the one in three people in the UK who suffer from a lack of sleep.

## The importance of sleep on your mind and body

In this article we'll discuss the key factors which can make it difficult to achieve the recommended seven to nine hours of replenishing sleep that are essential for every aspect of our lives, including workplace productivity.

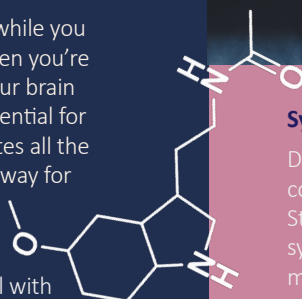
### Long-term memories

Your brain sorts and processes the days information while you are sleeping, so don't be fooled into thinking that when you're asleep, your brain has shut off too! The process of your brain sorting and storing information while you sleep is essential for creating long term memories as your body consolidates all the information it's picked up during the day and files it away for later use.

### Hormone regulation

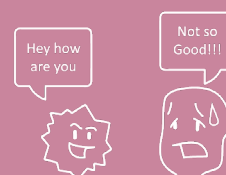
There are several hormones released during sleep, all with different purposes. Melatonin, released by the pineal gland, controls your sleep patterns. Levels increase at night helping you to feel tired. While sleeping, your pituitary gland releases the growth hormone which helps your body to grow, repair and recover.

Not only this, but a regular lack of sleep is associated with increased levels of the hormone Ghrelin, which stimulates hunger. If levels of Ghrelin are raised then there can be a tendency to overeat and make poor food choices, opting for processed snacks over nutritious foods. Over time, these poor choices and tendency to overeat could lead to obesity and type-2 diabetes. So, next time you notice your food consumption increasing and/or food choices decreasing in quality, take a moment to consider the quality of your sleep over recent weeks and make a conscious effort to take some control in this area.



### Sympathetic nervous system

During sleep, your sympathetic nervous system (which controls your fight or flight response) gets a chance to relax. Studies have shown that when we're deprived of sleep, sympathetic nervous system activity increases which is mirrored by an increase in blood pressure. Scientists studying coronary heart disease are currently investigating whether there is a relationship between decreased sleep duration and increased risk of heart disease. So, play it on the safe side and get plenty of sleep in order to reduce your risk!



### Immune System

While sleeping, your immune system releases a type of small proteins called cytokines. These cytokines help your body to fight inflammation, infection, and trauma when you are sick or injured. Without enough sleep, your immune system may not be functioning at it's best and could therefore hinder your recovery process.

We've included a simple table below to outline the mental and physical impacts of not spending enough time snoozing:

Physical	Mental
Elevated risk of diabetes	Reduction in cognitive performance
Weight gain – Obesity	Increased stress levels
Heart disease	Memory issues
Lower life expectancy	Mood swings
Fatigue	Productivity reduced
	Reduced concentration

As you can see, sleep is important for us as humans and something we need to pay more attention to.





## So, how can sleep affect our workplace productivity?

Insufficient sleep can significantly impact our work performance. Nodding off during a meeting, muddled thoughts, procrastinating and yawning at your desk can all be a sign that you are sleep deprived. This then results in lost productivity at work due to below par performance, with the potential to snowball and lead to additional stress on oneself, poor eating habits and even possible job performance declining which may result in disciplinary action or even dismissal.

This is a sure sign we are sleeping poorly and messing with our bodies in built sleep wake cycle, otherwise known as the circadian rhythm.

So what is it, exactly? Your circadian rhythm is basically a 24-hour internal clock that is running in the background of your brain and cycles between sleepiness and alertness at regular intervals. This of course works best when we have regular sleep patterns, if not we then begin to suffer.

### Quality or quantity

So how much sleep do we need in an ideal world, and does the quality matter? Current research suggests that for most adults, between 7-9 hours of sleep is adequate.

Moreover, quality is of high importance so the research states that to class sleep as good quality we must aim to be:

- **falling asleep in less than 30 minutes**
- **waking once in the night**
- **falling back to sleep in less than 20 minutes if we wake**
- **sleeping around 85% of the time we are in bed**

How can we track this?

There are many apps available that claim to monitor sleep, fitbit for example produce watches that give an estimate of your sleep time and quality of it. Also there are much simpler ways to know if we are sleeping enough:

- **improvements in skin**
- **not craving caffeine or junk foods**
- **feeling more energised**
- **clearer mental functioning**
- **better productivity at work and home**
- **feeling happier and less mood swings**

## What can we do to sleep better?

There are numerous things we can personally do to help get a better quality of sleep:

- **Make the bedroom sleep friendly so you associate it with only sleep – blackout curtains, no tech zone, comfortable mattress, tidy, earplugs if needed.**
- **Do not exercise vigorously close to bed time – not for all but, this can impact sleep due to a raise in body temperature and the release of stimulating hormones opposite to those which relax us.**
- **Keep a diary – monitor your sleep schedule and patterns, this may pick up on stress, foods that may have a negative impact and then you can work against them.**
- **Avoid caffeine after lunch – caffeine is a stimulant which stays in the body for up to 8 hours so ditch that afternoon coffee and swap for a decaff drink instead.**
- **Wind down before bed – try a warm bath, read a book, turn off phones and TV 60mins prior, and let the body naturally wind down ready for sleep.**
- **Consistency – consistency is key so keep it up, it may take time but stick to it and the bodies circadian rhythm should normalise in 2-3 weeks**

Sleep and productivity appear to go hand in hand, therefore companies must strive to understand what they can do to help employees. This can then result in better productivity of the employees which is a big plus for all.

As employees, we must also strive to sleep better to produce better quality work and be honest with supervisors if you are feeling work is suffering due to sleep deprivation. It is only then action can be initiated.

For some great information and tips, check out the national sleep foundation website which is updated regularly with all the latest sleep information.



## Fact of the month

**Caffeine has a half-life of 3-5 hours.** Avoid caffeine for 6-10 hours before bed to minimise sleep disruption

## Tip of the month

**Follow a consistent sleep schedule daily to maintain a healthy circadian rhythm**