

# Good food approach to maintain mental health

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**PETALING JAYA:** Everybody knows that good food equals good mood.

Apart from keeping you in shape, good food also has positive effect on mental well-being.

A well-balanced diet is important for the maintenance of mental health, said Universiti Putra Malaysia Department of Nutrition, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences senior lecturer Dr Mohd Redzwan Sabran.

The connection between food and mental capacity has been well documented and, according to a recent article on *scmp.com*, focusing on nutrition optimises brain fitness.

The article quoted Harvard-trained nutritional psychiatrist Dr Uma Naidoo as saying that the right food helps to optimise brain health to prevent and even treat anxiety, depression, insomnia and fatigue, among others.

Mohd Redzwan said there is a link between the gut and mental health, known as the gut-brain axis.

“There are microbes that exist in

➤ Well-balanced diet important as adequate nutrition facilitates ‘gut-brain axis’ to help optimise brain fitness, say experts

the gut, and an imbalance in the composition of these micro-organisms leads to depressive-like behaviour,” he told *theSun*.

“Consuming probiotics, mainly live bacteria and yeasts, fermented food as well as prebiotics, which are a form of dietary fibre, has a beneficial impact on addressing psychological stress.”

Mohd Redzwan said people should eat more fruits and vegetables as they are not only a source of vitamins and minerals but are also high in dietary fibre.

He also agreed with health experts that people should go easy on processed and sugary foods.

According to recent studies, the deterioration of mental health has become a pandemic that has been overlooked as the world focuses on Covid-19.

Covid-19 has adversely affect mental well-being, according to the *scmp.com* article, as people experiencing boredom and overall inertia seek stimulus foods.

Universiti Malaya Specialist Centre dietetic services head Rozanna M. Rosly said research has shown that there is a link between what we eat and how we feel.

“It is a complex relationship but we know that our diet can affect our brain, and some foods can help us feel better,” she said.

For instance, a Mediterranean diet and the traditional Japanese diet, which consist of a lot of vegetables, fresh fruits, fish, fresh herbs and spices as well as healthy fats, nuts and seeds, can reduce symptoms of depression,” she said.

Foods that have a negative impact on brain health can be

divided into two groups.

In the first group are items such as caffeinated beverages and sugary snacks that trick the brain into believing that the body is not tired.

The second group comprises processed foods, used cooking oil and coconut milk, as well as butter, lard and ghee that prevent the conversion of other foods into nutrients for the brain.

Rozanna also cited recent research showing that the gut and brain are physically linked by the vagus nerve that relays messages between the two organs.

“The gut can influence emotional behaviour, and the brain can alter the type of bacteria living in the gut,” she said.

It is believed that 95% of the body’s supply of serotonin, a mood stabiliser, is produced by gut bacteria.

But maintaining good mental well-being is more than just eating the right food.

“We can take care of ourselves by tending to our relationships, physical activity, career, spirituality and creativity,” Rozanna added.