

# Fish is Brain Food

## A DIVE INTO MENTAL HEALTH & DEPRESSION



Depression and anxiety are the most common mental health conditions in the world, and they are on the rise. Anxiety and depression affect at least 6% of adults in the United States – or 1 in 17 – with twice as many women as men affected, and it occurs across all ages.<sup>1,2</sup>

When we are depressed or anxious, we naturally resist self-care, including preparing and eating nutritious food. But good nutrition is more important than ever for those suffering from depression. **Research shows that our daily food choices influence our mental health, and evidence is strong that seafood is brain food.**

Feelings of anxiety and stress can be eased by regular consumption of fish.<sup>3,4</sup>

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Improving nutrition takes time. When we change our diet, it can take several weeks to feel any significant improvement. Other types of self-care are important, too, such as physical activity, getting fresh air, connecting with friends and family, rest and sleep.



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- **People who regularly eat fish are 20% less likely than their peers to have depression.**<sup>5,6,7</sup> Over the past 20 years, dozens of studies evaluating more than 20,000 cases of depression have shown that eating 8-12oz. of fish per week (about 2-3 servings) and/or consuming omega-3 fish oil supplements significantly reduces risk for major depression.<sup>5,6</sup> In fact, the American Psychiatric Association endorsed the fatty acids in fish as an effective part of depression treatment.<sup>8</sup>
- **People who live in countries that eat more fish have less depression.**<sup>9,10</sup> Diets rich in seafood, such as a Mediterranean Diet, are noted to reduce inflammation, one of the ways eating fish appears to reduce depression.<sup>11-13</sup>
- **Fish is like a multivitamin for your brain.** Fish is more than just an excellent source of lean protein and essential omega-3s, it provides other vitamins and minerals important for mental health. The nutrients that tend to be low in people who are depressed – vitamin D, magnesium, and zinc – are found in fish.<sup>14-19</sup>
- **Eating fish can reduce stress and distress for new parents.** Studies of pregnant women reported that eating 8-12oz., or 2-3 servings, of fish a week reduced psychological distress and post-partum depression. Interestingly, fathers felt less distress during the pregnancy when they regularly ate fish, too.<sup>20</sup>
- **If you are taking anti-depressant medication, research reports the nutrients in fish may make them work better.** Mental health medications work better in people with better nutrition. Getting complete protein from fish, along with omega-3s EPA + DHA and zinc, for example, have been shown to improve response to anti-depressants.<sup>5,10,21,22</sup> The American Psychiatric Association recommends that all Americans eat fish two or more times a week, preferably fatty fish such as salmon or trout.<sup>8</sup>
- **Eating fish shows promise for reducing migraine headaches.** Increasing omega-3s EPA + DHA while lowering omega-6 intake (often found in junk food containing soybean and vegetable oils) has been shown to significantly reduce frequency, duration, and severity of migraine headaches.<sup>23</sup>

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