



MENTAL HEALTH & FOOD

MENTAL HEALTH AND FOOD

The connection between mental health and diet is a burgeoning field of study that has garnered increasing attention in recent years. Emerging research underscores the profound impact of our dietary choices on our psychological well-being, highlighting the intricate relationship between what we eat and how we feel.

First and foremost, diet plays a pivotal role in brain function. Nutrients like omega-3 fatty acids, found in fatty fish, flaxseeds, and walnuts, have been linked to improved cognitive function and reduced risk of depression. Additionally, a balanced intake of vitamins and minerals, such as B vitamins and magnesium, supports the production of neurotransmitters like serotonin and dopamine, which are key players in regulating mood and emotion.

Furthermore, the gut-brain connection has come into sharp focus. The gut microbiome, a complex ecosystem of trillions of microorganisms residing in our digestive tract, has been shown to influence mental health. A diet rich in fiber, fruits, vegetables, and fermented foods fosters a diverse and healthy gut microbiome, which, in turn, has been associated with reduced symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress.

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Conversely, an unhealthy diet, high in processed foods, sugar, and saturated fats, has been linked to an increased risk of mental health disorders. Excessive sugar consumption, for example, can lead to fluctuations in blood sugar levels, resulting in mood swings and irritability. Additionally, diets high in trans fats and processed foods have been associated with inflammation, which is increasingly recognized as a contributor to conditions like depression and anxiety.

The interplay between mental health and diet is intricate and multifaceted, reflecting the complexity of the human body. While diet alone cannot replace professional mental health treatment, it can certainly complement it. Making informed dietary choices and adopting a balanced, nutrient-rich diet can be a proactive step in supporting mental well-being. Moreover, a holistic approach to health that includes both mental and physical well-being is essential for overall vitality and happiness.

Recognizing the connection between what we eat and how we feel empowers individuals to take control of their mental health and live their best lives.

The following worksheet is a mental health exercise to make connections between your food intake, mood, hydration, and physical symptoms.

FOOD REFLECTION LOG

Date _____

Physical Symptoms

Emotions

Mood     

Stress Level ____/10

Water Intake     

Medications _____

Supplements _____

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| ☐ Bloating | ☐ Sore Throat |
| ☐ Cramping | ☐ Phlegm |
| ☐ Pass Gas | ☐ Heartburn |
| ☐ Diarrhea | ☐ Joint Pain |
| ☐ Constipation | ☐ Lethargy |
| ☐ Headache | ☐ Trouble Sleeping |
| ☐ Congestion | ☐ Skin Rash |
| ☐ Runny Nose | ☐ Itchiness |

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| ☐ Interest | ☐ Bored |
| ☐ Joy | ☐ Excited |
| ☐ Surprise | ☐ Overwhelmed |
| ☐ Sadness | ☐ Calm |
| ☐ Anger | ☐ Content |
| ☐ Fear | ☐ Drained |
| ☐ Shame | ☐ Anxious |
| ☐ Shyness | ☐ Stressed |
| ☐ Guilt | ☐ Frustration |

Breakfast



AM
PM

Lunch



AM
PM

Dinner



AM
PM

Snacks



AM
PM

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Self-limiting beliefs are negative self-perceptions in our conscious or subconscious mind that we learn from past experiences, a comment from someone, the values of our parents, cultural influences, social media, or societal standards. The messages that lead to our self-limiting beliefs can be stated outright or implied through actions, nonverbals, or advertising.

Self-limiting beliefs usually hold us back from reaching our potential or prevent us from pursuing a goal in the first place. Self-limiting beliefs are more than just fleeting thoughts; they are things we keep repeating to make ourselves feel safe.

If this sounds like you, you will benefit the most from the following:

- Journaling exercises to help identify self-limiting beliefs and the emotions connected to them
- Talking with a mental health counselor to help uncover self-limiting beliefs
- Improving their cooking skills
- Gaining more knowledge about food and macronutrients so they can make better decisions

The following few pages go over examples of self-limiting beliefs.

SELF-LIMITING BELIEFS

EXAMPLES OF SELF-LIMITING BELIEFS

Take note of your feelings or any kind of physical or emotional reactions while reading these.

SOCIETAL IDEAS FOR WOMEN

- (INSERT PERSON) is the ideal standard of beauty
- Women aren't strong
- Women need to be skinny to be attractive
- Women with muscles are gross
- Women can't compete with men
- Women will get bulky if they lift weights
- It's unattractive when a woman eats a lot of food
- Women should eat less than men
- A woman should order a salad so she doesn't look like a pig

SOCIETAL IDEAS FOR MEN

- (INSERT PERSON) is the definition of a tough guy
- Men need to be muscular to be taken seriously
- If a man eats a salad, he is a sissy
- Men should eat foods like steak and potatoes to be masculine
- Skinny guys are wimps
- Nice guys finish last

HEALTH

- No one in my family is healthy so I can't be healthy either
- My parents were overweight their whole life so I'm going to be overweight my whole life
- I've been overweight my whole life and always will be
- I can't do anything to get out of pain
- I don't deserve to be healthy
- I have a disease and life will never get better

RELATIONSHIPS

- If I look a certain way, people will like me more
- Once I look a certain way, I will get a boyfriend/girlfriend
- If I look a certain way, my partner will find me attractive
- I am not worthy of love
- No one wants me so it doesn't matter what I look like
- People will be disappointed if I gain weight
- I use food to give or receive love

SELF-LIMITING BELIEFS

EXAMPLES OF SELF-LIMITING BELIEFS (CONT.)

Take note of your feelings or any kind of physical or emotional reactions while reading these.

FOOD SUPERIORITY

- I am better than others because I am (vegan, vegetarian, follow keto, carnivore, low carb, do intermittent fasting, etc.)
- Food is either clean/healthy or dirty/unhealthy
- Buying organic foods makes me a better person
- If I eat clean food, I am a clean person or morally superior
- If I eat dirty food, I am an unclean person and morally inferior
- Carbs are bad
- Fat is bad, fat will make me fat

FOOD AND MONEY

- I need to order the most expensive thing to prove that I have money
- Buying the most expensive food will make me healthier
- I can't buy expensive food because I'm not worth it

FOOD AND ANXIETY/DEPRESSION

- Food will always be there for me, even when no one else is
- I need to eat this food alone because I am ashamed of eating it in front of others
- Food is the only way I can cope with stress
- I can't control myself
- I can't believe I did that
- What's the point

OVEREATING

- This is a special occasion/holiday so I shouldn't hold back
- You only live once (YOLO)
- Today is my cheat day so I should live it up
- I need to eat what I can before it's all gone
- I need to finish everything on my plate
- I can't waste food
- I will be rude if I don't try everything
- I'm a big guy/girl and people expect me to eat a lot

SELF-LIMITING BELIEFS

EXAMPLES OF SELF-LIMITING BELIEFS (CONT.)

Take note of your feelings or any kind of physical or emotional reactions while reading these.

PERFORMANCE

- I am too (INSERT ADJECTIVE) to compete in (SPORT/EVENT)
- I need to lose weight before I can compete
- I don't look like the other competitors so I shouldn't compete at all
- I would win if I were skinnier

PERFECTIONISM

- I have very high standards for myself because of my upbringing, culture, etc.
- I should do better
- If I can't be perfect, I don't want to do it at all
- If things don't go the way I intended, then I should give up

These are only examples and not an exhaustive list of all self-limiting beliefs someone can hold. Hopefully, this list provides you with a place to start.

The next page is a worksheet to help you dissect your self-limiting beliefs and replace them with healthier thoughts.



EXAMPLE WORKSHEET

BYE, BYE SELF-LIMITING BELIEFS

STEP 1: IDENTIFY ANY SELF-LIMITING BELIEFS AND WRITE THEM HERE:

**FOOD IS THE ONLY WAY I CAN COPE
WITH STRESS**

STEP 2: IDENTIFY HOW THESE SELF-LIMITING BELIEFS HAVE IMPACTED
YOUR HABITS, BEHAVIORS, OR GOALS

**I SPEND THE EVENINGS UNWINDING
WITH A PACKAGE OF M+M'S EACH
NIGHT**

STEP 3: IDENTIFY WHERE THIS SELF-LIMITING BELIEF CAME FROM AND
FORGIVE YOURSELF, THE PEOPLE INVOLVED, OR LET GO OF THE EVENT

**MY PARENTS WOULD GIVE ME M+M'S
AFTER WE LOST SOCCER GAMES OR AS
A REWARD FOR GOOD BEHAVIOR**

STEP 4: HOW WOULD YOUR HABITS, BEHAVIORS, OR GOALS CHANGE IF
YOUR SELF-LIMITING BELIEFS WEREN'T TRUE?

**I COULD FIND A MORE MEANINGFUL
WAY TO UNWIND, MAYBE START
PLAYING THE GUITAR AGAIN**

EXAMPLE WORKSHEET

BYE, BYE SELF-LIMITING BELIEFS

STEP 5: CREATE A NEW BELIEF SO IT IS NO LONGER SELF-LIMITING
REFRAME OR REWRITE IT TO CHANGE YOUR OUTLOOK

**I AM CAPABLE OF DE-STRESSING
WITHOUT USING FOOD AS A CRUTCH**

STEP 6: HOW CAN YOU CHALLENGE YOUR SELF-LIMITING BELIEFS TO
PROVE THEM WRONG

**I CAN DEAL WITH STRESS IN HEALTHIER
WAYS LIKE PLAYING THE GUITAR,
READING, OR TAKING A BATH**

STEP 7: CREATE A MANTRA TO MOVE PAST YOUR SELF-LIMITING BELIEFS

STRUM THE STRESS AWAY

STEP 8: REVISIT THIS BELIEF IN 30 DAYS AND CHECK YOUR PROGRESS
(CREATE A CALENDAR REMINDER RIGHT NOW SO YOU DON'T FORGET)

**SET CALENDAR REMINDER FOR NOV. 7TH.
UPDATE: I STARTED PLAYING GUITAR ONE NIGHT
PER WEEK INSTEAD OF SNACKING. I ALSO TRIED A
BATH ONE NIGHT TOO, BOTH HELPED**

BYE, BYE SELF-LIMITING BELIEFS

STEP 1: IDENTIFY ANY SELF-LIMITING BELIEFS AND WRITE THEM HERE:

**STEP 2: IDENTIFY HOW THESE SELF-LIMITING BELIEFS HAVE IMPACTED
YOUR HABITS, BEHAVIORS, OR GOALS**

**STEP 3: IDENTIFY WHERE THIS SELF-LIMITING BELIEF CAME FROM AND
FORGIVE YOURSELF, THE PEOPLE INVOLVED, OR LET GO OF THE EVENT**

**STEP 4: HOW WOULD YOUR HABITS, BEHAVIORS, OR GOALS CHANGE IF
YOUR SELF-LIMITING BELIEFS WEREN'T TRUE?**

BYE, BYE SELF-LIMITING BELIEFS

**STEP 5: CREATE A NEW BELIEF SO IT IS NO LONGER SELF-LIMITING
REFRAME OR REWRITE IT TO CHANGE YOUR OUTLOOK**

**STEP 6: HOW CAN YOU CHALLENGE YOUR SELF-LIMITING BELIEFS TO
PROVE THEM WRONG**

STEP 7: CREATE A MANTRA TO MOVE PAST YOUR SELF-LIMITING BELIEFS

**STEP 8: REVISIT THIS BELIEF IN 30 DAYS AND CHECK YOUR PROGRESS
(CREATE A CALENDAR REMINDER RIGHT NOW SO YOU DON'T FORGET)**

SEEKING HELP

WHEN TO SEEK HELP

If you are a person who has had a very traumatic event alter the course of their life. When I coach someone like this, I hear phrases like, "I was fine until (EVENT) happened" or "I wasn't the same after (EVENT)."

The events I'm referring to are abuse, a toxic relationship, the unexpected death of a partner or loved one, or any other traumatic event that has radically shifted your life.

This person will benefit the most from the following:

- Mental health counseling from a professional who specializes in the type of trauma you experienced

Dealing with these issues is beyond the scope of this guide, so if you need help processing a traumatic event or dealing with a mental health condition, please reach out to a qualified mental health professional or your healthcare provider.

