



"Where, how and what we live"

mentalhealthweek.org.au

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# BODY

## Nutrition & diet

**The right foods, vitamins, minerals and hydration fuel our bodies and minds so we can function properly** – Never underestimate how closely what you eat is tied to how we feel and think. Diet is now a recognised modifiable factor in the prevention and treatment of mental illness. Australia and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists' clinical practice guidelines for mood disorders have formally recognised the importance of diet to mental health. You may also like to explore natural supplements in your diet with vitamins, minerals and plant-based substances in either powder or tablet form to complement your meals.



## Movement & activity

**Movement matters** – When our bodies move, so do our brains, enhancing mental clarity, improved mood, better brain function, 'happy' hormone release and increased resilience. Find ways to move your body at times of day that work for you. Whatever our job or lifestyle, there is always an opportunity to move our body. Walking, dancing, cycling, sport, running, a gym session and house work are all ways to get moving!



## Gut-brain axis

**The gut-brain axis refers to the connection between your gut and your brain** – The human gut contains nearly 500 million neurons, which are connected to the brain through nerves. The vagus nerve is one of the biggest nerves connecting your gastrointestinal tract to your nervous system and plays many important roles in your body. Psychological stress has a particularly harmful effect on the vagus nerve and inflammation of the gut has been linked to causing several mental illnesses including anxiety and depression. Composition of healthy gut bacteria has a profound impact on mental health and functioning of the nervous system. A healthy diet and inclusion of probiotics plays a significant role in shaping the gut microbiome.



## General health check-ups

**Regular check-ups can help find potential health issues before they become a problem** – Preventative health care is becoming commonplace as people become more educated and empowered about their own health. Underlying physical ailments could be affecting your mental wellbeing more than you know. Early detection gives you the best chance for getting the right treatment quickly, avoiding any complications. Physical health issues may emerge when your body is facing mineral, vitamin or hormonal deficiencies often resulting in fatigue, pain and a heightened nervous system which influences how resilient and energised we feel. Factors such as low iron, lack of vitamin D, hormone imbalances, endometriosis, high blood pressure, inflammation, or other issues could be wreaking havoc on your mental wellbeing. Visit your GP!



## Meal planning, preparation & budgeting

**A balanced, bright, healthy diet does not need to be expensive** – If you can fill your trolley with the right foods, shop around at the markets and different shops for specials and plan your meals for the week; allocating time to prepare and freeze them in advance, you will be surprised how far your dollar stretches and how much better you feel! Self-care doesn't always need to mean indulging in relaxation or long holidays, it can be as simple in day-to-day life as fuelling your body with what it needs to perform optimally and keep you feeling energised, positive, balanced and content.

**More info, resources & support: [mentalhealthweek.org.au/body](https://mentalhealthweek.org.au/body)**



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## Toxins, sugar & alcohol

**Studies have shown a link between high sugar diets and depression, and the latest research has found sugar to be an addictive substance for the brain** – Alcohol consumption is increasingly being recognised as a major contributing factor to emotional, mental and physical health outcomes. Alcohol changes the brain and depletes chemicals which help reduce anxiety naturally, slowing down our central nervous system. Alcohol can negatively affect thoughts, feelings and actions, and contributes to the development of, or worsening of, existing mental health issues over time. Research has found self-medicating your mood or life challenges with alcohol or frequently turning to that wine or beer at the end of a difficult day to relax can increase your likelihood of alcohol dependence, and in the long-term, can contribute to increased stress, anxiety and depression.



## Breakfast choices & rising cortisol

**Starting your day eating the right combination of fats and protein means cortisol (stress hormone) doesn't rise too high throughout the day to levels which impact your anxiety and stress responses** – Cortisol plays many roles in the body including regulating sleep cycles, reducing inflammation, and when you're in a stressful situation, cortisol is the key to managing our flight or fight instincts, as a protective mechanism. However over supply of cortisol creates stress in the body. Going all day on an empty stomach or surviving on coffee all morning may unintentionally affect your ability to deal with stress, challenges and adversity later in the day.



## Stretching & breathing

**All exercise can boost your mood by lowering levels of stress hormones, increasing the production of feel-good chemicals (endorphins), and bringing more oxygenated blood to your brain** – Yoga may have additional benefits. It can affect mood by elevating levels of a brain chemical called gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA), which is associated with better mood and decreased anxiety. Meditation also reduces activity in the limbic system – the part of the brain dedicated to emotions. As your emotional reactivity diminishes, you have a more tempered response when faced with stressful situations. Yoga strengthens the body and the mind, while prompting you to focus on your breathing. Control your breathe - control your mind.



## Sleep & Rest

**Good sleep is essential for improving every function of your mind and body** – But sleep alone will not protect your mental health. The power of rest throughout the day to accompany a good night's sleep is also critical. According to the latest research, there are seven types of rest we need including physical, mental, emotional, sensory, creative and spiritual rest. People have different sleep needs at different stages of their lives and different circadian rhythms which influence their sleep habits, preferred bed-time and optimal windows of productivity in the day.



## Medications

**Medications may be prescribed by qualified mental health and medical professionals to treat serious, persistent and complex mental health issues** – If you have been prescribed medication for a mental health diagnosis, then it's a personal decision and choice between you and your healthcare provider team to determine if it's right for you. For some, medication can really help restore their quality of life, enabling better participation in the community and workforce, while others may prefer to use a combination of coping strategies and methods, alongside prescribed medication to manage symptoms. It's good to do your discover what works best for you, it will be different for everyone.

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