

Wellbeing in the workplace,
thriving business.

Food and Mood

Ripple&Co

Bolton
Council

Eating a healthy balanced diet is a vital part of maintaining good wellbeing and being able to perform at your best. It also supports a stronger immune system, quality sleep and improved mood and energy levels.

It is recommended you eat five portions of fruit and vegetables a day, as well as drinking plenty of water across the day to make sure you stay hydrated – but very few are actually able to do this consistently.



A healthy diet provides the nutrients needed to keep everything in your body working smoothly. Recent studies have found a link between bacteria in our gut, our immune system and our brains. Eating a lot of “junk” or processed foods can create bad gut bacteria, generating chemicals that can affect the brain.

It's hard when you are running low on energy reserves, grabbing a quick fix of snacks can seem like the thing that you need the most. More often than not, food and drinks that give you an immediate energy boost will wear off just as quickly, leaving you hungry for more.

They tend to be high in sugar and calories, making you more likely to gain weight over time.

Healthy gut foods include:



Fruits, vegetables and wholegrain cereals, nuts, and seeds



Beans, pulses, live yoghurt and other probiotics



Foods rich in omega-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids such as fish or flaxseed oil.

Healthy fat

Our brains need fatty acids (such as omega-3 and -6) to keep it working well. Fatty acids have been shown to improve our stress response, lower anxiety and improve brain function. So rather than avoiding all fats, it's important to eat the right ones.

Healthy fats are found in: oily fish (salmon, mackerel), poultry, nuts (especially walnuts and almonds), olive and sunflower oils, seeds (such as sunflower and pumpkin), avocados, milk, yoghurt, soy, cheese and eggs.



TOP TIP

Aim to eat at least 2 portions (around 140g, that's about 170g before cooking) of fish each week (including one portion of oily fish) and / or 2tbsp mixed seeds daily.

Protein

Protein is essential at each meal. Neurotransmitters involved in mental wellness require amino acids (from protein) for their production.

Protein also helps stabilise your blood sugar. Blood sugar highs and lows can lead to changes in mood and influence focus and concentration.



TOP TIP

Aim to include a portion of protein (palm size portion or around 2-3 eggs) at each meal, including breakfast. Good protein foods include lean red meat, poultry, eggs, fish and shellfish, soy, beans, pulses, nuts, seeds and dairy.

Insufficient intakes of certain proteins L-tryptophan, L-phenylalanine, or L-tyrosine are associated with increased symptoms of anxiety / depression.

Ditch the sugar

Sugar and refined processed foods can promote inflammation throughout the body and brain, which may contribute to mood disorders, including anxiety and depression.

Imbalances in blood sugar levels can also make you feel irritable. Your brain is an energy demanding organ (20-30%) but needs a balanced blood sugar throughout the day.



TOP TIP

Avoid refined carbohydrates (white rice and pasta, white breads, cakes, cookies) and sugars (including sugary drinks, juices and alcohol).

Switch to slow releasing carbohydrates: wholegrain rice and pasta, oats, quinoa, buckwheat, sweet potato, carrots, swede, parsnip, butternut squash, baked potato, peas, beans and lentils.

Snacking

Ideally do not snack through the day unless you are really hungry or are very active

Reach for a glass of water / herbal tea first before food

Aim to keep snacks to 100-200 calories

Focus on nutrient rich snacks (protein + healthy fats + slow releasing carbs)

Choose foods that release energy slowly as this will help to keep your sugar levels steady.

Examples: protein shake, peanut butter and oat cakes, cooked chicken slices, handful of nuts, yogurt with berries, hummus with pre-packaged vegetables, piece of fruit



Alcohol

It may be tempting to open a bottle of wine in an attempt to unwind, however ...

Alcohol can cause imbalances in blood sugar, disruption of neurotransmitters that affect mood and thinking. It is high in calories, therefore unhelpful if you are watching your weight.

Drinking alcohol before bed is linked with more slow wave sleep patterns called delta activity, it also switches on alpha activity which inhibit restorative sleep. Alcohol blocks REM sleep. So even if you fall asleep faster you are more likely to wake up in the night.

Units of
alcohol
1 unit =



Standard
4% beer
(250ml)



Standard
40%
whisky
(25ml)



Standard
13% wine
(76ml)



Standard
4%
Alcopop
(250ml)



Standard
4.5%
cider
(218ml)

Watch the caffeine

As you probably know, caffeine is a stimulant, which means it will give you a quick burst of energy.

Some caffeine can support cognitive health, but then it may make you feel anxious and depressed. It can spike your stress hormones, which increase anxiety and disturb your sleep (especially if you have it before bed), or can give you withdrawal symptoms if you stop drinking it suddenly.

Caffeine is in: tea, coffee, chocolate, cola and other manufactured energy drinks.

The half-life of caffeine is around 5-6 hours Three 8 oz. cups of coffee (250 milligrams of caffeine) per day is considered a moderate amount of caffeine.

Caffeine Content (mg) =



Filtered
200ml
140mg



Coke - 375ml 50mg
Pepsi 375ml 38mg



Espresso
100ml
80mg



Chocolate-
Dark 50g 33mg
Milk 50g 12mg



Weak tea 200ml - 20mg
Strong tea 200ml - 70mg

And don't forget to drink plenty of water!

It's easy to overlook, but choosing healthier drinks is a key part of getting a balanced diet. It is suggested that you should drink 6 to 8 glasses of fluid a day. Remember as well as water, lower fat milk and sugar-free drinks, including tea and coffee, all count.

Having a balanced diet of food and drink, with regular exercise and restorative sleep are the key to maintaining good wellbeing.



TOP TIP

If you drink tea, coffee or cola, try switching to decaffeinated versions.

Stock up on alternatives such as herbal teas, green tea or redbush tea. Drink plenty of water through the day. The brain is so sensitive to dehydration that even a minimal loss can cause symptoms such as brain fog, fatigue, dizziness and poor concentration.

You might feel noticeably better quite quickly if you drink less caffeine or avoid it altogether.

Plan your food as much as possible and carry healthier choices of drinks and snacks with you to work.

Check the nutrition labels on food, especially for those hidden sugar and calorie levels – all foods should be labelled with a clear guide as to what they contain.

Have a look at the NHS Live Well, Eat Well guides to find the advice that suits your lifestyle and dietary needs the most.

