

The
GUT / BRAIN
Solution

TOP 10 FOODS

to Eat & to Avoid
for Anxiety



TOP 10 FOODS

Good:



SPINACH & SWISS CHARD

Nutrient-dense foods such as spinach and Swiss chard have fantastic anxiety-relieving, mood-boosting superpowers. They're a great source of magnesium, which some researchers have shown may help you feel calmer. They're also rich in folate, which helps your body produce neurotransmitters like serotonin and dopamine, both influential in mood regulation.



PUMPKIN SEEDS

Foods rich in zinc, like pumpkin seeds, have been tied to lower anxiety levels. Pumpkin seeds are also a source of tryptophan, an essential amino acid that is converted by the body to serotonin.



BERRIES

A low-calorie fruit packed with antioxidants, berries are known to offer both vitamin C and antioxidants. When we're anxious, our bodies crave vitamin C and antioxidants to help protect the body against stress.



AVOCADOS

This versatile fruit is a serious superfood when it comes to boosting mood. It contains tryptophan, folate, omega-3 fatty acids AND it's chock full of B vitamins, which are tied to stress reduction. Vitamin B6 is a cofactor in the synthesis of neurotransmitters, including dopamine and serotonin.



CHIA & HEMP SEEDS

Omega-3s fatty acids are healthy fats found in chia and hemp seeds. These may help mitigate anxiety symptoms in mental health sufferers.



ORGANIC OATS

A triple threat to anxiety, oats contain B vitamins, magnesium and fiber. Each of these nutrients are extremely important in reducing anxiety, making oats one of the best foods for increasing the production of serotonin in the brain. Make sure to choose organic when possible.



TURMERIC

A bold, yellow spice commonly used in curries, the active ingredient of turmeric is curcumin, which is a compound with antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties that may help lower anxiety.



BRAZIL NUTS

Getting adequate selenium appears to play a role in regulating mood by reducing inflammation, which is often elevated when someone has a mood disorder. Brazil nuts are super high in selenium, making them a helpful way to alleviate anxiety.



DARK CHOCOLATE

Eating dark chocolate can help in relieving anxiety and calming down symptoms of clinical depression because it's enriched with phenylalanine, a neuromodulator that helps in mood regulation.



CHICKPEAS

Garbanzo beans, aka chickpeas, contain both tryptophan and slow-burning carbohydrates, which are both excellent for lowering stress levels. They are also abundant in folate and magnesium.

TO EAT & TO AVOID FOR ANXIETY

Bad:

People often reach for sugary foods like candy or cookies when dealing with anxiety, but added sugar is actually a contributor to anxiety as it causes spikes and drops in blood sugar levels, which can exacerbate anxiety symptoms and cause panic attacks.

For a lot of people, coffee is their first thought upon waking, but it can be a major anxiety-inducer. Coffee has been shown to increase cortisol levels, which creates a stress response even if there's no stressor. Caffeine, the key ingredient in coffee, is a known stimulant and psychoactive drug that can make you feel jittery, nervous and very anxious.

Many people are unaware that they have a sensitivity to gluten that manifests as anxiety and panic attacks. This is because eating a food that you're intolerant to damages the intestines and compromises the integrity of the gut, which leads to mental health issues, including anxiety.

Many consume alcohol in an effort to "unwind" and calm the nerves, but it can backfire, instead causing you to lose sleep and induce symptoms of anxiety. Alcohol is a toxin that changes levels of serotonin and neurotransmitters in the brain, which makes anxiety worse.

Because it's an inflammatory food, dairy has been linked to increased symptoms of anxiety. Dairy cows are also often injected with added hormones, which can also affect our mood.

An artificial sweetener found in chewing gum and diet soda, aspartame blocks the production of serotonin, which causes changes in mood, headaches and depression.

Highly processed carbohydrates like white flour, white bread, white pasta and white rice digest quickly and their high glycemic index causes unhealthy blood sugar spikes and crashes that are associated with anxiety.

These beverages can get your heart racing, causing anxiety and sleep issues. That's because energy drinks often contain loads of sugar or artificial sweeteners, and pure, concentrated caffeine hidden in ingredients like guarana.

Sometimes called "hydrogenated fats", trans fats in foods like fried foods, packaged snacks, cakes and cookies are not only bad for your waistline but for your mood as well. Check your labels! These bad fats are linked to depression and anxiety.

Consuming cured meats like salami, jerky, and hot dogs have been linked to serious psychiatric problems, including manic episodes.



SUGAR



COFFEE



GLUTEN



ALCOHOL



DAIRY



ASPARTAME



REFINED CARBOHYDRATES



ENERGY DRINKS



TRANS FATS



SALAMI AND CURED MEATS

1 SPINACH AND SWISS CHARD

Spinach and Swiss chard are rich in *magnesium*, which has been shown specifically to reduce anxiety. In studies involving mice, researchers have shown a relationship between magnesium and anxiety, whether these levels are depleted naturally or experimentally.¹



2

PUMPKIN SEEDS

Pumpkin seeds contain both **zinc** and **tryptophan**. In a study, individuals with anxiety had lower plasma zinc levels compared with control participants.²

Additionally, zinc antioxidant supplementation was shown to improve anxiety symptoms.

Tryptophan is the only amino acid that produces serotonin.³



BERRIES 3



Berries are bursting with **antioxidants** and **vitamin C**, which have been shown to provide anxiety relief.⁴ One study found that taking vitamin C daily reduced anxiety symptoms after 14 days and that antioxidants may be useful for both the prevention and reduction of anxiety.⁵



Avocados are rich in stress-relieving **B vitamins**.

Supplementation of these vitamins have been linked to improved mood in some people.⁶

AVOCADOS

4



Chia seeds and hemp seeds contain high levels of **omega-3** fatty acids, which have been shown to reduce inflammation and anxiety in medical students during exams⁷.

Hemp seeds were also shown to reduce anxiety in postmenopausal rats.⁸

5 CHIA AND HEMP SEEDS

ORGANIC 6 OATS

Researchers have found that eating **high fiber foods** may reduce the effects of stress on our gut and behavior.⁹

Levels of stress and anxiety-like behavior were reduced when short-chain fatty acids (produced when friendly gut bacteria ferment fiber in the colon) were fed to mice.



7

TURMERIC



Turmeric contains curcumin, a compound studied for its role in preventing anxiety disorders.¹⁰ In one study, **20 mg/kg** of curcumin produced significant anti-anxiety effects in stressed mice compared to those given a lower dose.¹¹

8 BRAZIL NUTS

Brazil nuts are high in **selenium** – repletion of selenium to normal levels reduced anxiety scores in clinical trials.¹² Brazil nuts are also a good source of **vitamin E** – some research has suggested that low levels of vitamin E may be associated with increased anxiety at adulthood.¹³



Chocolate has been *deemed beneficial for anxiety and irritability.*¹⁴

A study of high anxiety volunteers showed that eating dark chocolate reduced stress hormone levels and relieved feelings of anxiety.¹⁵

9

DARK CHOCOLATE





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CHICKPEAS

As complex carbohydrates that are abundant in tryptophan, chickpeas have been proven to be a healthier way than drugs to *naturally raise serotonin levels* in the brain.¹⁶

Bad

1

SUGAR

Sugar is one of the biggest contributors to **poor mental state**. Levels of brain – derived neurotrophic factor, which is a neurotransmitter modulator, have been found to be reduced in rats fed a high sugar diet.¹⁷



COFFEE



According to research, patients with anxiety disorders seem to be particularly sensitive to the anxiety-inducing effects of caffeine.¹⁸ Too much caffeine intake has been linked to an increase in self-reported stress, depression, and anxiety.¹⁹ A study found that participants who drank **300 milligrams of caffeine a day** reported nearly twice as much stress.²⁰

2

GLUTEN 3



There is evidence that gluten intake affects mood disorders in certain individuals.²¹ A study found that people with **gluten sensitivity** are more prone to anxiety after eating wheat.²²

4

ALCOHOL

Alcohol is a common form of self-medication for anxiety disorders. About 25% of people with panic disorder have a history of ***alcohol dependence***.²³

Research suggests that there is a link between alcohol consumption and anxiety.²⁴



5 DAIRY

Research shows that intake of whole fat dairy products is associated with increased depression, anxiety, and stress.²⁵
Dairy also reduces **magnesium levels** in the body.



6

ASPARTAME

Aspartame has been linked to **neurophysiological symptoms** such as irritable moods, anxiety, depression, and insomnia²⁶. It has also been suggested that aspartame ingestion might be involved in compromised learning and emotional functioning.²⁷





7 REFINED CARBOHYDRATES

Evidence suggests that there is a relationship between **high glycemic index diets** consisting primarily of refined carbohydrates and the development of anxiety symptoms.²⁸ A study of women with no history of mental illness showed that eating refined carbohydrates increased blood sugar levels and the risk of depression.²⁹



Research suggests that energy drink consumption may increase the risk of undesirable mental health outcomes, including stress, anxiety, and depression.³⁰ A study of over a thousand 20-year-olds showed that those who drank **at least one energy drink a day** reported higher anxiety, and as their consumption became more frequent, their anxiety worsened.³¹

8 ENERGY DRINKS

TRANS FATS 9



Researchers have found a link between greater trans fats consumption and greater **aggression and irritability**.³² A study also observed the brains of older rats and found that prolonged consumption of trans fats favored the development of anxiety-like symptoms.³³



Researchers report that the nitrates used to cure meats like salami may be associated with manic episodes, probably because the **nitrates influence the gut microbiome.**

Researchers also found that rats who were fed nitrate-cured meats experienced **hyperactivity and irregular sleeping patterns.**³⁴

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SALAMI AND CURED MEATS

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