Fruits and Vegetables Can Lower Depression Risk

A study published in *The European Journal of Nutrition* showed that people who eat more fruits and vegetables had a 20% lower risk of developing depression.

The 12-year study involved 4,105 men and women age 25 and older. The study surveyed the participants' fruit and vegetable consumption at the beginning of the study, five years later, and then again at the conclusion. The study did not include fruit juices, canned or dried fruit, or fried vegetables.

Other results from the survey revealed that:

- **Yellow, orange, red, and leafy green vegetables** had the strongest link to lowering depression risk.
- **Eating four to six different vegetables a day** was associated with a 24% to 42% lower risk of depression, compared to eating three or fewer vegetables each day.
- The greatest benefit was seen in participants who ate at least three servings of fruits and vegetables per day.

Source: verywellfit.com

Eating Well Could Combat COVID

According to a study published in the fall of 2021 by the journal *Gut*, eating healthier meals may be associated with a reduced risk of developing COVID-19 and its serious complications.

For seven months researchers followed the eating habits of 593,000 middle-aged and older adults. During that time, the researchers found that people who reported eating the most fruits, vegetables, and legumes (lentils, peas, beans, and peanuts) had a 9% lower risk of getting COVID and a 41% lower risk of developing severe COVID complications compared with people who ate the fewest amounts of fruits and vegetables.

While the study presented promising results, researchers noted that the study was observational and doesn’t prove conclusively that a healthy diet prevents COVID.

Source: Harvard Health Letter

Food for Thought

Eating raisins and other dried fruits is an easy way to add potassium and fiber to your diet. Dried fruits can also help you reach your goal of eating at least two servings of fruit daily.

Dried fruits are fairly high in calories, so watch your serving size by keeping it to a quarter-cup. The good news is that the nutrients are also highly concentrated. Besides potassium and fiber, dried fruits are rich in antioxidants and several vitamins and minerals. Be sure to purchase dried fruits that don’t contain added sugar to avoid additional empty calories.
Tis Better to Give Than to Receive

Several studies suggest that spending money on others rather than on yourself can boost your emotional well-being and provide other health benefits:

- Research published in 2016 in the journal *Health Psychology* found that three weeks of charitable spending was enough to lower blood pressure scores among a group of older adults.
- A 2019 United Nations world report found that donating money was one of the six strongest predictors of life satisfaction — none of which were directly linked to income.
- A 2021 *American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine* report found that giving behaviors may reduce stress and inflammation, both of which can cause mental and physical health conditions.

The studies focused on participants who used their own financial resources to help their family, friends, and even strangers. Some of the examples mentioned in those studies included buying coffee or lunch for a friend, buying a bike helmet for a niece or nephew, or donating money to help someone in need.

Other findings from the reports:

- Selfish acts of charity didn’t produce the same results in the well-being of the giver. In other words, charitable giving was less rewarding when done for self-interests rather than being done to benefit others.
- Giving to causes that were personally meaningful had greater health benefits than to causes where the giver felt pressured by others into donating.

Did You Know?

Research from the Harvard Medical School found that, on average, taking 4,400 steps per day is enough to significantly lower the risk of death in women.

You can reduce the risk by walking even more. A 2020 study conducted by the National Institutes of Health found that those who took 8,000 steps a day (compared to those who walked 4,000 steps per day) had a 50% lower risk of dying from any cause, and those who took 12,000 steps a day had a 65% lower risk of dying. These benefits were consistent across age, sex, and race groups. Step intensity did not seem to influence the outcome. Only an increased number of steps per day was associated with a reduced risk of death.

Lower Your Blood Pressure Numbers with Food

Research has shown that adding certain foods to your diet — especially those high in potassium and magnesium — can help you lower your blood pressure levels. According to the American Heart Association, potassium reduces the effects of sodium, and it alleviates tension is the walls of the blood vessels. Magnesium increases the production of nitric oxide which also helps relax blood vessels.

Consider adding the following foods to your diet to maintain and even lower your blood pressure numbers:

**Bananas** are particularly high in potassium. One medium-sized banana contains around 422 milligrams of potassium (adults should aim for 4,700 mg daily).

**Pistachios** contain potassium and nutrients essential for heart health and blood pressure regulation. A review of 21 studies found that among all the nuts, pistachios had the strongest impact on reducing both systolic and diastolic blood pressure numbers.

**Tomatoes and tomato products** are rich in potassium and lycopene. Lycopene has been significantly associated with heart health benefits. A review of 21 studies concluded that consuming tomato and tomato products improves blood pressure and may help reduce the risk of heart disease.

**Broccoli** is a good source of magnesium. A small study of 684 older women published in the British Journal of Nutrition found that higher consumption of cruciferous vegetables (such as broccoli, Brussels sprouts and cabbage) is associated with less extensive blood vessel disease.

**Berries** contain antioxidants called anthocyanins. Researchers conducted a study with more than 34,000 people with hypertension. They found that those with the highest intake of anthocyanins (mainly from blueberries and strawberries) had an 8 percent reduction in the risk of high blood pressure, compared to those with a low anthocyanin intake.

**Carrots** contain compounds that help relax blood vessels and reduce inflammation, which may help lower blood pressure levels. A study that included 2,195 people ages 40-59 found that eating raw carrots was associated with lower blood pressure levels.

Adding these foods to your diet along with other lifestyle modifications (such as reducing your intake of salt) can help lower your blood pressure levels and reduce your heart disease risk.

*Source: healthline.com*
New Aspirin Guidelines

The United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) recommends that adults age 60 and older who are at risk for heart disease should not start taking a daily low dose of aspirin to prevent a heart attack or stroke. The USPSTF is a panel of 16 independent experts appointed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

At this writing, the recommendation is not yet finalized. The recommendation is based on years of evidence that shows that the benefit of preventing a heart attack doesn’t outweigh the risk of potentially fatal internal bleeding caused by regular aspirin use.

The task force provides further details surrounding the recommendation:

- If you have had a heart attack or stroke, or have a stent in an artery — you should remain on aspirin as prescribed by your doctor.
- If you take aspirin because you have heart disease, you should not stop taking aspirin.
- If your doctor has you taking aspirin for any other reasons, don’t stop taking it without first talking with your doctor.
- If on your own you began taking aspirin for the primary prevention of heart disease, talk to your doctor to see if you really should be taking aspirin.

Source: everydayhealth.com

Exercise Can Lessen Risk for Certain Cancers

A new study suggests that just a few hours each week of moderate exercise may reduce your risk of cancer.

The study, published in the journal *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise* reported that if Americans were to get the recommended five hours per week of moderate-intensity physical activity, more than 46,000 cancer cases could be prevented in the United States each year.

The researchers concluded that about 17% of stomach cancers, 12% of endometrial cancers, 11% of kidney cancers, 9% of colon cancers, 8% of esophageal cancers, 7% of breast cancers and 4% of urinary bladder cancers were associated with lack of exercise.

Adair K. Minihan, an associate scientist at the American Cancer Society who led the study was quick to point out that the study was not meant “to shame people for not exercising.” There are many factors that go into who ultimately develops cancer. Being inactive is one of those factors. She also stressed that exercise is not a guarantee – many active people still develop cancer.

Because walking is one of the factors that most people have within their control, the report is meant to be an encouragement to find a way to fit in 45 minutes of walking each day to try and lessen the risk of developing cancer. That 45 minutes doesn’t have to be all at once, but can be divided up throughout the day.

Source: American Cancer Society

Money Management

Consider using cash in certain budget categories to keep spending under control. Choose one part of your budget such as buying coffee or lunch and pay only in cash. Take out a set amount each week and when it’s gone, it’s gone – make coffee at home and make/bag your own lunch.

Better yet, challenge yourself not to spend your budgeted amount each week. Make your own coffee and/or lunch and then set aside the money you didn’t spend to pay off a loan, start an emergency fund, add to your retirement savings, or purchase an item you really need.
Nothing Fishy About It

We enjoy going to the St. Louis Missouri Botanical Garden and especially visiting the 14-acre Japanese garden. Once there, we often stop to watch people feed the large Japanese carp, called koi. They look like giant goldfish, and it’s fun to see these carp go after food pellets in a feeding frenzy.

An interesting fact about koi is that their growth is dependent upon their environment, specifically the quality of the water and the size of the pond. Typically, koi can grow to about three feet in length, but that growth can be stunted if the fish are kept in a confined pond with poor water quality. Saying it another way, if you give koi the right environment for growth and keep them immersed in a good water source, they will grow.

That’s an apt comparison to us as Christians. We have many opportunities to “...grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...” (2 Peter 3:18). Unfortunately, our sinful natures often tempt us to chase after other options that not only hinder our growth, but also cause us to drift away from God.

Every Sunday, for example, is an opportunity to immerse ourselves in the hearing and learning of God’s word through worship and Bible study. In that environment, we are joyfully reminded that even though we sin daily, God forgives for Jesus’ sake. We are tempted every day to seek out unhealthy “growth” substitutes – ones where we could find ourselves beached and doing nothing at all beneficial, or floundering in less-than-healthy waters that could lead us to get snared by the hooks of our sinful desires.

At those times when we find ourselves like carp swimming aimlessly, or being drawn to feed on harmful pellets that tempt us, don’t forget to grasp what it truly means to be a CARP: by God’s grace we are Christ’s Atoned and Redeemed People. We are CARP swimming in the cleansing waters of baptism that have washed away our sins. Through Christ’s atoning sacrifice on the cross, we live as redeemed people in God’s eyes.

Here’s the other comparison we have with carp: they are typically at the bottom of the fish hierarchy. They are the bottom dwellers of ponds and rivers and aren’t considered much of a delicacy when it comes to mealtime. We can relate: being poor miserable sinners also places us at the bottom of humanity, but thanks be to God that He looks past our lowly state and through His love we are Christ’s Atoned and Redeemed People.