

# Nutritional Considerations for Depression

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Many families raising children on the spectrum are affected by depression. Depression is a serious health condition affecting over 350 million people worldwide. A growing number of individuals are seeking a pro-active approach to supporting the body through the physical and mental demands of life's stressors. Some natural approaches to preventing or managing depression include:

## Omega 3 (EPA/DHA)

A growing body of evidence suggests that the omega 3 fatty acids EPA and DHA may be extremely helpful in preventing and managing depression. A Norwegian study of 22,000 participants found those who took cod liver oil regularly had a 30% less chance of having symptoms of depression. Studies have shown a reduction in aggression as well as improved mood with EPA and DHA supplementation. Average US intake is around 130 mg per day. Many studies suggest a combined EPA and DHA consumption over 1000 mg per day to aid depression.

## Cholesterol

Research dating back to the early 1990s shows that serum cholesterol is significantly lower in many patients with major depressive disorder than in non-depressed individuals. A large case-control study published in 2004 in the American Journal of Preventative

Medicine suggests that total serum cholesterol levels are inversely related to severity of depressed mood. The researchers found that non-suicidal individuals with depression tend to have total cholesterol levels around 180 mg/dL, and severely depressed suicidal patients tend to have cholesterol levels around 150 mg/dL or lower. Have your cholesterol monitored by your physician for high cholesterol, but also be concerned with very low cholesterol.

## Magnesium

The average US intake of magnesium is less than 250 mg per day. Daily recommendations for most adults are approximately 400 mg. Processed foods contain little to no magnesium. However, leafy greens, almonds, and pumpkin seeds are good sources. Magnesium has many important jobs within our bodies. It is most notably involved in the production of serotonin, a neurotransmitter that conveys positive sensations of satisfaction and relaxation. Studies suggest that magnesium should be considered in depressive disorders as higher magnesium intake has been linked to lower incidence of depression.

## Good Bacteria or Probiotics

The importance of beneficial bacteria in our gastro-intestinal tract is often underestimated. Microbes in the gut affect metabolism of mood regulating



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minerals like zinc and magnesium. Even more interesting is the copious amounts of research being done in this field. A 2012 study at UCLA confirmed that probiotics can and do influence our mood and emotions. Another study published in August of 2014 showed the correlation between human fecal microbes and depression. Those interested in supporting the digestive tract can consume fermented foods or probiotics regularly.

There are many factors affecting our ability to cope with stress and depression. Consult with your healthcare provider if you suspect you suffer from depression or before beginning any dietary supplement.