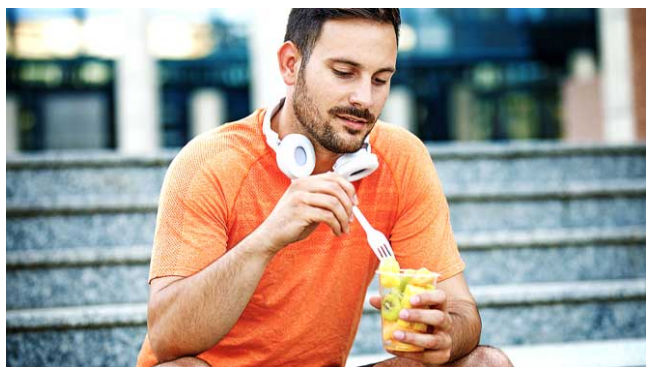




Frequent Fruit Intake Linked to Better Mental Health

By Megan Edwards
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Feeling down in the dumps? Your snacking habits may be to blame. A [recent study](#) published in the *British Journal of Nutrition* found that eating fruit on a regular basis decreased levels of depression and anxiety regardless of the portion size or type of fruit. On the flip side, frequently consuming savory, processed snack foods (like potato chips and crackers) was directly linked to increased [mental health](#) challenges.

Researchers gathered a group of 428 healthy adults and measured their eating patterns, psychological health, and lifestyle behaviors through a series of questionnaires. One unique aspect of the study involved a Cognitive Failure Questionnaire (CFQ), which measured lapses in attention, memory, and action-related tasks to assess how diet might impact poor cognition. CFQ questions included prompts such as: “Do you leave important emails unanswered for several days?” and “Do you often walk into a room and forget why you entered it?” Additionally, researchers separated the participants’ fruit intake from their vegetable intake to look at the two food groups separately.

After accounting for age, BMI, general health, and smoking status, the researchers discovered that frequently consuming fresh fruit, irrespective of the amount eaten, improved psychological well-being and was not associated with mental lapses measured by the CFQ. Surprisingly, vegetable consumption had neither a positive nor negative association with mental health and cognitive functioning.

“Both fruit and vegetables are rich in antioxidants, fiber, and essential micronutrients which promote optimal brain function, but these nutrients can be lost during cooking,” explains Nicola-Jayne Tuck, lead study author and PhD student at Aston University. “As we are more likely to eat fruit raw, this could potentially explain its stronger influence on our psychological health.”

In contrast, savory snacks were associated with higher levels of anxiety, depression, and cognitive lapses. The researchers noted that many people cope with stress by snacking on [nutrient-poor processed foods](#), so further work needs to be done to assess the exact relationship between savory snacks and mental health.

Snack Smarter

Why might savory snacks negatively impact mental health? The study explains that diets low in micronutrients, antioxidants, and fiber may reduce neurotransmitter regulation and increase inflammatory pathways in the brain, which leads to poorer psychological health.

“It is possible that savory snacking has a negative link with psychological health ... due to saturated fat content,” says Tuck. “Forming a habit of eating fruit regularly can be a helpful tool to boost psychological well-being.”

A [2019 research review](#) found that older adults who consumed large amounts of saturated fat were at a higher risk for cognitive impairment and Alzheimer’s disease. Additionally, a 2021 study published in [Clinical Nutrition](#) looked at a sample of more than 8,600 adults and found that those with the highest fruit and vegetable intake scored 10% lower on Perceived Stress Questionnaires compared to those who ate the least amount of fresh produce.

The bottom line: If you’re trying to give your mental health a boost, eating fresh fruit on a regular basis may lead you to a clearer, calmer mind.

To learn more about a whole-food, plant-based diet, visit our [Plant-Based Primer](#). For meal-planning support,

(continued)

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check out [Forks Meal Planner](#), FOK's easy weekly meal-planning tool to keep you on a healthy plant-based path.