



MoodHealing.com

# NUTRITION FOR MENTAL HEALTH

Written by

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**Congratulations! You have made a conscious  
decision to heal your mental health.**

I created this **Nutrition For Mental Health Handbook** to support you in making the dietary changes that have been shown to improve mental health symptoms. Though you may have tried many things to work with your depression, you may not have thought about how the food choices you make affect your mental health.

We have long understood the connection between what we eat and physical illness, like heart disease or diabetes, but are now only beginning to have an awareness of the relationship between the kinds of food that we are eating and how we feel mentally and emotionally. Research has show that following the diet outlined

below combined with existing therapies increases recovery rates from a variety of mental health symptoms including depression, anxiety and others.

This handbook is designed to simply describe what has been found to be an *optimal* mental health diet and to provide coaching tips to help you implement move towards a diet that includes more *good mood foods*. These are foods that support mental health, and foods we should be eating every day. The handbook also provides information about *Bad Mood Foods*, or foods that can contribute to symptoms and should be avoided as much as possible.

An important fact here is that these are just *guidelines*. This is what works for the *average person*, but you are not average. You are YOU. As you work with food and pay attention to your body, you will learn what works for you and what doesn't. *These recommendations are a starting point, a place to enter a process of self-discovery.*

The last point I want to make is to encourage you to be disciplined but patient and kind with yourself. Small changes, like an effort to avoid boxed and processed foods, avoiding sugar or cooking for yourself more, can lead big changes in how you feel. Remember that change is a step-by-step process that involves putting small steps together. Usually it means making a small changes and getting used to it before moving onto the next goal.

Finally I would like to acknowledge the teachers whose ideas have been informed my thinking. Books focusing on Nutritional Mental Health that provide the sourcing of much of the information in the handbook include: *The Mood Cure* by Julia Ross, MA, *UltraMind Solution* by Mark Hyman, MD, *Potatoes Not Prozac* by Kathleen Desmaisons, PhD, *The Anti-Anxiety Food Solution* by Trudy Scott, CN, and *A Mind of Your Own* by Kelly Brogan, MD



***General Guidelines- What To Eat Every Day:***

Protein	75 grams
Non-Starchy Vegetables	4 servings
Fruit	2-4 servings
Legumes	½ cup a few times a week (1 cup if vegetarian)
Starchy Vegetables	1 serving
Gluten-Free Grains	1 cup
Fats	¼ cup of oil/ghee, ¼ cup of nuts and seeds
Liquids	50 oz. or more of water, herb tea or veggie juice

Some recent research has supported the use of a more traditional or “Paleo” diet. This diet focuses on consuming foods that were available to before the farming began. It’s guidelines would be similar the diet above but would additionally restrict ALL grains and legumes because in many people with chronic illnesses, these foods can be inflammatory and can make depression worse. If you have mental health symptoms and know you have an autoimmune condition, significant GI issues (IBS, Crohn’s, Colitis, or Celiac etc.), systemic inflammation or if you implement the diet above for at least a month and noticed little or no changes in your depressive symptoms, I would recommend starting with a more restrictive Paleo diet. Go to [Whole30.com](http://Whole30.com) for more information on a simple and easy to implement version.

**1. Protein:** 75 grams of protein throughout the day (25 grams 3x a day, or a bit less if you're having snacks with protein between meals)- find a protein calculator on-line to know calculate protein grams in common foods.

**Meat-** 1 serving= 3 or 4oz.=palm of your hand= about 25g

**If you are a meat eater, eat *quality animal protein*** such as grass-fed beef, wild game, pastured poultry, eggs from pastured hens and wild fish (non-farm raised). Grass fed beef and pastured poultry (and eggs) are high in Omega-3 oils, containing the best composition of fats for optimal brain function.

## **Vegetarian/Vegan options:**

***Legumes:*** (mung beans, split mung, lentils (red, green, brown), adzuki, black beans, black eyed peas, garbanzo beans, hummus, lentils, pinto beans, split peas and others- beans combined with rice is a complete protein (has all of the amino acids necessary for life and is a staple in many cultures).

***Other options:*** *rice protein powder, nuts and nut butters, seeds.* Grains have some protein (*quinoa* is the only grain that is a complete protein.) As plant based sources of protein are *not* complete proteins, food combining is essential (for instance, neither rice and beans are complete proteins, but combined, provide all the amino acids). Though slightly more difficult than eating meat, it is completely possible to meet you need for protein without consuming animal products. It just takes more effort and consciousness.

The Greek translation for protein is "*Of primary importance*" This is so true from a mental health perspective. Without protein, neurotransmitters cannot be made to provide positive and stable moods.

The most important dietary change anyone could make to improve depression has to be getting enough protein! I commonly see people who begin to increase their protein intake to 75mg a day, see their depression become a thing of the past. Often people are not aware that they are protein malnourished which can have significant negative mental health consequences.

## 2. Non-Starchy Fresh Vegetables

**4 servings or more per day**

**1 serving= 1 cup cooked veggies or**

**2 cups raw green leafy veggies and salads**

Artichokes, asparagus, avocados, bell peppers, bok choy, burdock, carrots, celery, Cilantro, cruciferous vegetables (such as broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, and cauliflower), cucumber, daikon, eggplant, fennel, garlic, ginger, green beans, green leafy vegetables and salad greens (such as arugula, beet greens, chard, collard greens, kale, lettuce, mixed baby greens, mustard greens, nettles, and spinach), mushroom, onions, parsley, radishes, sweet peas, summer squash, tomatoes, turnips and water chestnuts.

## 3. Good Fats: $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of good fats and about $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of nuts and seeds a day

Eat some form of good fat with each meal and snack. Cook with *Ghee* (clarified butter which can be found at health food stores or is quite easy to make, can usually be tolerated by those sensitive to dairy), *non-hydrogenated coconut oil*, and *palm kernel oil* for high heat. *Olive oil* for moderate heat cooking and for salads (buy olive oil that is "cold pressed" and organic and sold in dark bottles).



*Other good fats include:* coconut milk (think Thai cooking), avocados, flaxseeds, other raw seeds (sunflower seeds, sesame seeds, and pumpkin seeds), raw nuts and nut butters (raw almonds, brazil nuts, cashews and walnuts), and pemmican (healthy beef jerky)

## 4. Fruit

2-4 serving (less for higher sugar tropical fruit)

1 serving= 1 medium banana, 1 small apple or ½ cup of berries (if *Candida* is an issue  
elimination of fruit may be necessary for awhile)

Apples, apricots, bananas, blackberries, blueberries, cantaloupe, cherries, cranberries, figs, grapefruit, grapes, honeydew, kiwi, lemons, mangoes, melons, nectarines, oranges, papaya, peaches, pears, pineapples, plums, raspberries, strawberries, tangerines, and watermelon

**5. Legumes:** If you are eating meat as part of the plan, at least ½ cup to 1 cup, a few times week (if vegetarian, 1 or more cups a day)

Black beans, black-eyed peas, garbanzo beans, lentils, mung beans, pinto beans, split peas and others

**6. Starchy Fresh Vegetables:** At least 1 serving a day (unless you do not tolerate them)

Beets, corn, peas, potatoes, sweet potatoes, turnips, and winter squash (such as butternut and pumpkin)

## 7. **Gluten-Free Whole Grains:** 1 cup of cooked grains a day

Amaranth, brown rice (and other whole grain rice), buckwheat, corn, millet, quinoa, wild rice, gluten-free oats (Bob's Red Mill brand has a gluten-free version)

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### ***Foods to avoid***

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- 1. Processed Foods:** Boxed and packaged foods typically contain additives, preservatives, artificial colors, and flavoring agents such as MSG (other names for MSG are: hydrolyzed protein, autolyzed yeast, and sodium caseinate—MSG is a known *neurotoxin* that can worsen mental health symptoms. Commonly found in canned and instant soups, cheese spreads, breakfast cereals and frozen dinners.) Also steer clear of energy bars with lots of sugar and concentrated soy protein. *There are some better and healthier prepared foods that you can find at stores like Trader Joes or Whole Foods but you are usually better eating real whole foods made at home.*
- 2. Trans Fats:** Trans fats are not recognized by the body and are therefore experienced as *toxic*. They are common in margarine, processed foods and baked goods. **Stay clear of all vegetable oils (such as canola, corn, and soy) as they are dangerous to the body.** Avoid products that contain the following ingredients: "partially-hydrogenated vegetable oil", "hydrogenated vegetable oil", "shortening" as these contain dangerous trans-fats.
- 3. Sugar, Artificial Sweeteners, and Soda:** Avoid all forms of added and hidden sugar. Read labels carefully. The worst offender health-wise is high-fructose corn syrup. Just avoiding high-fructose corn syrup will provide significant health benefits. Hidden sugar also includes

corn syrup, glucose, maltose, sucrose etc. Artificial sweeteners should also be avoided and include aspartame, saccharin, and sucralose.

- 4. Gluten and Dairy:** These are the two most common foods in the Standard American Diet that cause *delayed* food sensitivities. These sensitivities can lead to mental health and physical symptoms. The most definitive way to test for sensitivity is to remove all gluten or dairy (one at a time) for two weeks and then reintroduce and notice the changes that occur from getting off and then reintroducing. An accurate way of testing for delayed food sensitivities is called IgG Food Allergy Testing available through a number of labs that focus on Functional Medicine Testing including Genova Diagnostics and Great Plains Laboratory (most conventional MDs, even allergists, are unaware of the usefulness of IgG testing but more and more Functional Medicine, Naturopathic and Integrative practitioners use this test with great success.)
- 5. Genetically Modified Food (GMOs):** The research is piling up on the dangers of GMOs. As of 2016, 38 countries have already banned GMOs, not including the US, where most of the nonorganic corn, soy and canola is Genetically modified. As foods in the US do not need to be labeled if they are GM, the only way to assure that food is not GM is to buy organic.
- 6. Caffeine:** Avoid coffee (even decaffeinated), tea (except herbal, caffeine free, and green tea) and foods and beverages that contain caffeine. These foods squash healthy appetite, stress the adrenal glands which produce the primary stress coping chemical produced by the body (cortisol) and makes blood sugar instability worse.



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## *The Good Mood Meal*

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Now that you know what to eat throughout the day, the next step is to begin to zero in on what each meal should look like. The more clarity you have, the more likely you will be to work with changing your diet in positive ways.

*For balanced meals follow the following general guidelines:*

1. Start by looking at the palm of your hand. The palm represents the **protein** portion of the meal (about a quarter of the plate).
2. Next comes the **low carbohydrate vegetable** portion of your plate, which will take up a little over half of the plate.
3. The corner of your plate is reserved for **high carbohydrate veggies, grains, or fruit (if your body can tolerate these foods)**. *High carbohydrate* veggies include things like potatoes, squash and yams. This is going to be about 15-20% of your plate.
4. A small percentage of your plate will be for **oils or fats** used to prepare or season food, for instance a pat of butter on your potato, or a few tablespoons of olive oil to sauté vegetables in or on a salad; this is in addition to the fat in your fish, chicken or other foods, such as nuts or avocados.

There are a number significant differences between the Standard American Diet and the **Good Mood Meal**. First, the **Good Mood Meal** has way more veggies. Low carbohydrate vegetables are no longer a side dish but are much of what we consume. Second, the ratio of low carbohydrate veggies to high carbohydrate

veggies, grains and fruit is altered, so the **Good Mood Meal** contains 3 servings of low carbohydrate veggies for every serving of grain, fruit, or high carbohydrate veggies. This increase of low carb veggies helps to bring down the glycemic load (this is how much a given food raises blood sugar and can lead to blood sugar instability. Low and unstable blood sugar is one of the main dietary causes of depression, anxiety and other mood issues.) Third, the amount protein may be smaller than typical American meal but is included in every meal, as is fat. As protein is the only macronutrient that cannot be stored by the body for later use, our mood stability requires frequent and consistent ingestion of protein. Fourth, the **Good Mood Meal** is also gluten and dairy free, and sometimes grain and legume free, without caffeine or added sugar. The focus is on real foods and foods that are likely to promote mental health.

***Meat Eaters Example:*** Chicken breast, potatoes, and a salad. Make the chicken breast the size of your palm, about  $\frac{1}{4}$  your plate. Instead of the typical American side salad, have a big salad (3-4 times the size of the meat-make the salad chock full of colored vegetables, like carrots, cabbage and red peppers, “eat the rainbow”. If instead of salad, you were having cooked veggies, you would make them twice the size of the piece of meat. Have a medium sized potato. For fat, have some olive oil or ghee on the potato and some dressing on the salad.

***Vegetarian example:*** Vegetarian chili (loaded with vegetables and about a cup of black beans per serving.), 6 spears of asparagus drizzled in olive oil, and a  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of quinoa with chopped almonds and raisins. Because food groups are often mixed in vegetarian cooking, ratios of food groups are more difficult to determine. In terms of the low carbohydrate vegetables, about half comes from the chili and half from the asparagus (6 spears of asparagus=  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of veggies). The cup of beans and the nuts in the quinoa make up the protein part of the meal. The  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of quinoa account for the

High carbohydrate grain and the olive oil on the asparagus and oil used to sauté the veggies for the chili account for the fat. One note, because many the protein sources in the vegetarian diet are also contain carbohydrates, vegetarian diets are often higher in carbohydrates. Don't worry. Just shoot to increase low carbohydrate vegetables while making sure that you get enough protein.

## ***Meal Planning***

Now that you have an idea of the proportions of your plate and what to include and not include. What are we going to eat? The options are really endless. I will give you some examples of balanced meals that you can try. There are many whole foods, gluten free (and dairy free), or Paleo recipes readily available on the web.

More than anything keep it simple! Preparing nutritious and tasty food does not have to be complicated. Set aside an hour during the weekend to think about what you are going to make for the coming week (if you can plan a 7 day list of what you will make for breakfast, lunch and dinner, this will likely help as you are beginning to make the changes outlined in the handbook). As you are thinking about meals for the week, make a shopping list of the things you will need from the market. This way you will have what you need when you come home tired from work. This thinking ahead really makes a difference here.

Remember cooking gets easier with practice. A teacher of mine once said "To learn to cook you have to be willing to burn the rice". Practice, practice, practice. For most, starting with simple recipes is the way to go, while for others going the intuitive route seems best.

### **Breakfast**

If you want to control craving and stabilize mood, breakfast is the most important meal. Grabbing a muffin and coffee or a bagel makes us vulnerable to blood sugar instability along with depression, anxiety and cravings for sweets a few hours later. The challenge with breakfast in America is to eat something that is balanced with enough protein and fat and not too much processed carbohydrates. Pancakes, waffles and donuts are a mood disaster.

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## *Good Mood Breakfast Ideas*

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1. **Smoothies**- delicious and nutritious meal in a glass, which can be a great balanced protein-carbohydrate-fat drink. See recipe included in this packet
2. Cream of rice or soft hot polenta with a dash of cinnamon or nutmeg plus one or more of these sources of protein (rice protein powder, seeds or nut milk, or raw nuts and seeds). Quinoa hot cereal is a great option because it higher in protein than most grain based cereals.
3. Scrambled eggs with veggies. You can sauté 3-4 cups of veggies in pan in broth, a little water, butter or olive oil (they will cook down in size). After they are done, scramble in the 3 eggs. Serve with nitrate-free bacon or sausage or organic turkey bacon. Can also have polenta with a bit of tomato sauce as a side:
  - (a). You can also include the same ingredients in a frittata. If you're in a rush, a few hard-boiled eggs will be better than coffee and a donut. The idea is to move things in a balanced whole foods direction.
4. Gluten-Free oatmeal (Bob's Red Mill has a certified organic gluten free variety) with some fresh fruit on top and almond butter and almond milk mixed in.
5. Think dinner or lunch for breakfast—left over stew or soup with some sautéed greens. Any dinner food can work for breakfast even if other people with think it's weird

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## *Good Mood Lunch Ideas*

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1. **Leftovers:** from dinner the night before. Cook enough dinner to be able to bring it for lunch.

Joshua Rosenthal, nutrition educator, says “cook once, eat twice.” Best if heated at home and stored in an insulated container so that you do not have to use a microwave it, but it’s OK if you have to as well. Just make sure the meal is balanced.

2. **A big salad:** Start with one or more kind of lettuce (try to avoid iceberg lettuce and it deficient in vitamin and minerals found in more “green” lettuces, like red leaf, romaine or arugula); Add 1 cup or more of low carbohydrate veggies, ½ cup of beans, corn, or high carb veggies, and ¾-1 cup of sliced meat (stay away from “luncheon meats” which usually have nitrates and other harmful substances in them, organic sliced meats found at Whole Foods and Trader Joes is OK), or raw nuts/seeds, or cheese (if dairy works for you). Dress with 2 tablespoons of salad dressing without sugar (one idea is to make a dressing at home with 3 parts olive oil, 1 part Bragg’s Organic Apple Cider Vinegar (a time honored remedy which has a variety of vitamins and minerals. It helps with digestive health and helps to stabilize blood sugar levels) with added spices and mustard.

3. **Soup or Stews:** Heat at home and bring in a thermos. Can be veggie, beans or meat. Ideas include Split pea, lentil, black bean, or chicken or turkey soup etc. Challenge yourself to find a recipe that you love. Make it a few times until you’ve got it down and then try another one. Before you know it, you will have a variety of soups that you look forward to preparing and eating. When thinking about soups make sure that you are getting enough protein per serving. If not, you can supplement with some easy protein. Chicken breast, a piece of salmon, nuts or seeds.

4. **Sandwiches:** Just avoid gluten-containing grains. Visit the gluten free section of any grocery store and see the variety of options including rice bread and Potato bread. They don't always hold up as well as wheat or rye breads but they are surprisingly good (if you are preparing a sandwich at home try open faced and toasted). Make it a tuna, chicken or turkey sandwich (can be from last night's dinner) or from hormone and nitrate free deli meat. Load the sandwich with veggies like tomatoes, carrots, celery, peppers, and avocado).
  
5. **Non-gluten pasta:** (rice or quinoa etc.) are good options. Can be prepared with red sauce, loaded with veggies, and some sort of protein. Shrimp or chicken or tofu would be good options or make it a meat sauce with grass fed ground beef or organic ground turkey. You could also use beans in this dish. Instead of pasta you could use polenta here.

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## ***Good Mood Dinners***

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Dinner is often the biggest meal of the day in America. Many traditions have their biggest meal at lunch, which provides more time for digestion. You might want to try a bigger lunch and smaller dinner as an experiment. This said, dinner is the meal that most of us take time to prepare, compared to breakfast and lunch which we are more likely to eat on the run. Planning and thinking ahead can often make the difference whether our dinner is a *balanced mind meal* or whether we throw something frozen in the microwave. You can do this by knowing what simple dish you will be making before you get home, maybe even having made part of it in previous days. For instance maybe you have a sweet potato that is already baked or veggies that are cut up and ready for a stir-fry or salad.

If you are a meat eater it is good to get used to easy ways prepare beef, fish and chicken as they are often an important part of dinner:

## Fish

Hearty fish that are relatively easy to cook include: wild salmon, tuna, sea bass, halibut, red snapper, mahi-mahi swordfish, blue marlin or any white fish like flounder or haddock (sole and trout are more delicate and cook much faster.) The simplest preparations include pan searing and baking in the oven (simple directions can be found on the internet).

## Chicken

Can be prepared many ways. It can be roasted in the oven as a whole bird or breast (can feed a whole family or have leftovers for lunch the next day), boneless breasts can be pan fried with or without gluten free bread crumbs or even boiled in soup and of course on the grill if you have one. Turkey can also be prepared in similar ways.

**Beef, Pork** Can be roasted, grilled, or pan-fried depending on the cut.

*With all meat it is important to buy antibiotic and hormone free. For chicken, buy pastured chicken and for beef buy grass-fed. It makes a huge difference in quality.*

## Vegetables

Vegetables are the food group most sorely missing from the Standard American Diet. Our mothers were right, we *need* to eat our veggies. They provide the vitamin and mineral cofactors necessary for every metabolic process in the body including making the mood stabilizing hormones and neurotransmitters. So, low veggie consumption can lead actually lead to *bad moods!*

An easy way to prepare many veggies is to take a pan with 1/8 inch of water, crumple up 1/2 a veggie or meat bullion cube in it and put the veggies you want to cook in it. Heat uncovered. When the water evaporates take the veggies for doneness. If it needs more cooking add a little more water. When veggies are done put some butter in the pan to melt and cover the veggies or drizzle with olive oil. Steaming, boiling, sautéing and other methods you will discover along this path also work well. Don't forget roasting. There is nothing better than a winter roast of root veggies. After a plate of sweet roasted vegetables you won't miss the artificial sweetness of candy.

## ***Topping for Vegetables***

If you aren't used to eating a lot of veggies here are some ideas to top your veggies from Julia Ross, mental health nutrition guru:

- *Tomato sauce with sheep or goat feta cheese and/or pumpkin seeds and/or crumpled tofu. Good with steamed zucchini or other squash*
- *Olive oil (great on everything)*
- *Ghee and lemon juice (great with broccoli and asparagus)*
- *Fresh herbs (try dill with carrots and mint with peas)*
- *Garlic. Spinach and other greens are great sautéed in oil with minced garlic (start sautéing the garlic first then add greens).*
- *Almond, cashew or sesame butter (make it a sauce by blending it with a little water (great on green beans)*
- *Mustard or horseradish sauce (mix powdered mustard or horseradish with a little water and oil (nice with asparagus or broccoli especially when served with beef.*



*-Greek yogurt with fresh herbs, salt pepper and garlic. Good with green beans, broccoli pieces and onions.*

*-Avocado dressing. Make in a bowl by mashing an avocado with a fork. Add 2 Tbs. olive oil, a little garlic salt, pepper, cilantro or parsley and lemon juice to taste. A thinner dressing can be made by adding more yogurt and/or using a blender*

*-Brag's Liquid Aminos (healthy alternative to soy sauce, that is low sodium, gluten free), and pepper*

*-Brag's liquid Aminos and lemon juice*

*-Homemade oil and vinegar (can use balsamic or raw apple cider). Mix it up with different spices and Dijon mustard.*

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## ***A few Good Mood Dinner Ideas***

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1. Meatloaf with gluten free bread crumbs, a large salad with a variety of veggies, and a medium sweet potato with butter
2. Chicken stir-fry with loads of different veggies (the more the merrier) atop basmati rice or rice noodles. You can serve it with a bowl of miso soup with tofu and spinach.
3. Large bowl of Indian spiced Dahl over basmati rice. Plate of greens like rainbow chard sautéed in butter with added crushed tomatoes. End the meal with a baked apple with nuts and raisins.
4. Meal in a bowl- big bowl of Thai coconut milk rice noodle veggie soup with either tofu or chicken.

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## ***Steps in the Process***

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For many people eating the standard American Diet (SAD), transitioning to a diet that supports mental health can be daunting. Where to start? The basic steps below might help you organize your experience. Try to master each step before going onto the next one.

1. Start by eating a breakfast every day that contains at least 25g of protein (protein counters are easy to find on the web).
2. Begin to have 3 meals a day with at least 25g of protein.
3. Focus on adding a serving or 2 of low carbohydrate veggies to each meal.
4. Remove all gluten containing grains from your diet. Experiment with non-gluten containing grains as additional sources of carbohydrates in the proportions laid out in this handbook, if grains are tolerated.
5. Work to remove all sugar, artificial sweeteners, caffeine and alcohol from your diet.

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## ***Closing Thoughts***

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As Hippocrates said: *“Let Food be your medicine and your medicine be your food”*. This handbook was developed to help inspire you to take your mental health healing into



your own hands. Though doctors may be helpful in many ways, they do not have all of the answers. They do not live in your body. Only you have a direct experience of how your body responds to different foods.

Could it be possible that some simple but consistent dietary changes could quell your anxiety or depression? I think that many feel so.

Take 25 year old Janie whose depression lifted after getting off of gluten containing grains, or 36 year old Louis who's anxiety leveled after eating more regularly and stabilizing his blood sugar by staying away from sugar laden sweets and soda

The only way to know is to know for yourself. Make a conscious choice to make changes and observe and then to make more changes and observe again. Do so with consistency, compassion and patience.

And now we begin...