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NEW ZEALAND

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For Immediate Release

BREAKTHROUGH STUDY PROVES DIET CAN TREAT DEPRESSION

A new Deakin study proves simple dietary changes can be used as a possible treatment for depression.

Previous research has shown a link between diet and mental health disorders but the latest study is the first of its kind to confirm a healthy diet, which includes lean meats, significantly improves depression and anxiety symptoms.

The SMILES trial, published in BMC Medicine, was a 12-week randomised controlled trial looking at the effects of a healthy diet in the treatment of moderate to severe depression.

According to the study, a healthy diet includes wholegrains, vegetables, fish and lean red meats while limiting unhealthy extras such as sweets, refined cereals, fried foods and sugary drinks.

Interestingly, the healthy diet was based on a modified version of the Mediterranean diet and is higher in fat and lower in carbohydrates than current nutritional guidelines.

Study author, Felice Jacka says it's worth noting the diet recommended lean red meat 3-4 times per week as per Australian dietary guidelines.

"Clearly this study adds to the growing body of evidence that a healthy diet is an essential component of mental health," says clinical psychologist Julia Rucklidge.

The study trial involved researchers at Deakin University randomly assigning one group to eat a healthy diet for 12 weeks while the other group received social support.

One third of the healthy eating participants reported improved mood and depression symptoms with only 8% of the social support group having the same effects.

An earlier study by the same authors found women who ate a more traditional diet had a 30% reduced risk for major depression and anxiety disorders compared to those following a Western dietary pattern.

A traditional diet is rich in vegetables, fruit, wholegrains and high-quality meats whereas a typical Western diet is made up of junk food, white bread, sugar and alcohol.

High-quality meats such as beef, lamb and fish, contain selenium, zinc, iron, vitamin B₁₂, vitamin D₃ and omega-3's which are all known to play a role in brain function, behaviour and emotions.

Women who included these meats had more positive mental health outcomes than women who ate unhealthy, processed foods.

It is thought processed and "unhealthy" foods such as refined carbohydrates, increase inflammation in the body and may, in part, explain the link between diet and depression.

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But dietitian, Sarah Hanrahan, warns against obsessing over single nutrients and instead encourages an eating pattern that includes a variety of healthy foods.

“When we diet we often put too much focus on cutting out certain foods but this can lead to micronutrient deficiencies when we do not eat enough.”

“Deficiencies in essential nutrients can lead to worsening of symptoms of mood disorders,” says Hanrahan.

With many New Zealanders experiencing depression at some point in their lives, these latest results should encourage people to eat a healthy diet for their mental health.

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The study can be found here:

<http://bmcmedicine.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12916-017-0791-y>

The SMILES trial participants ate according to the following healthy diet plan:

Daily: Six servings of vegetables, five servings of wholegrains, three servings of fruit, two servings of unsweetened dairy, one serving of raw, unsalted nuts, and three tablespoons of olive oil

Weekly: Three to four servings of lean red meat, two servings of chicken, up to six eggs and at least two servings of fish

Extras: No more than three servings per week of sweets, refined cereal, fried food, fast food and soft drink

Alcohol: No more than two glasses of red wine a day, only with dinner

RECIPE SUGGESTION: Lamb Chops with Iceberg Lettuce and Avocado Dressing

<http://www.recipes.co.nz/shop/EVERYDAY/Lamb+Chops+with+Iceberg+Lettuce+%26+Avocado+Dressing.html>

Heat up the BBQ this weekend for a recipe rich in iron, selenium and zinc – a mood-lifting meal typical of a traditional, healthy diet. For more recipe ideas using lean red meat, visit recipes.co.nz

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