

7. Understanding Food and Mood

What we eat and our pattern of eating affects our mood, so eating healthily is very important for your mental and physical wellbeing.

Check out how your eating habits may be affecting your mood, for better or worse.

What to Eat and Drink:

Each day, try to include:

- Five **fruit and vegetables** a day.
- **Protein** e.g. pulses, soya products, fish, dairy.
- Complex **carbohydrates** e.g. wholegrain bread, pasta, rice, oats.
- Essential **fatty acids** in oily fish, seeds, nuts etc.
- Plenty of **water**.

Eating Habits:

- Eat **regularly** and try to have breakfast.
- Include foods that release energy slowly such as wholegrains
 - This will help keep energy levels stable throughout the day and smooth negative effects of fluctuating blood-sugar levels.
- Take time to **taste**, digest and enjoy your food.
- Be **moderate** – eating healthily doesn't mean depriving yourself of things you like.

Why We Eat:

Food isn't just a source of nutrition: we use food to help us manage the ups and downs of life.

Sometimes normal emotional eating develops into disordered eating patterns, and we start over- or under-eating whenever we feel a negative emotion.

This indicates that we need to find other ways of managing our emotions and looking after ourselves. If this is the case for you, don't be hard on yourself.

Respect yourself for doing the best that you could, and look for support in helping you find other coping strategies, such as:

- **Express** your feelings by talking to someone you trust or writing them down.
- Find things you can do to **calm yourself** – take a bath, listen to music, go for a walk, write a poem, craft, something you find works for you.
- Write down **positive** qualities about yourself and things you are grateful for:
 - When you feel you're struggling read through these positive thoughts.
- Keep busy after mealtimes.
- Try not to compare yourself to others; you are an **individual** and you will find your own path.

[Visit the Student Counselling & Wellbeing Website for helpful online resources on Food and Mood.](#)