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# NEWSLETTER



*Functional Foods Photo by Judy Doherty Photography*

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## Professional's Research Corner:

- 9-10. Ultra Processed Problems, by Lisa Andrews, MEd, RD, LD

## Editor's Note:

Here are great recipes, handouts, and research updates about highly processed food and high fat diets. Check out the shopping tips!

Let us know if you need anything! Just click "Contact Us" at the top of [foodandhealth.com](http://foodandhealth.com)

# Summer Farro Salad

This delicious soup has a beautiful color from the turmeric.

## Ingredients:

2 cups cooked farro, cooled  
4 cups spring lettuce mix  
1 avocado, peeled, pitted, diced  
1 beet, peeled and sliced thin  
1 scallion, sliced  
1 cup sliced radishes  
1 cup sliced cucumbers

## Dressing:

Zest and juice of 2 lemons  
Zest and juice of 1 orange  
2 tablespoons olive oil  
Salt and pepper to taste  
1 tablespoon chopped parsley  
(optional)



## Directions:

1. Prepare all of the ingredients.
2. Place the greens in the bottom of a large salad bowl.
3. Top with the cooked farro.
4. Pour the dressing over the top and toss slightly.
5. Add all of the veggies on the top.
6. Serve family style.

Serves 3-4. Each 1 cup serving: 365 calories, 19 g fat, 3 g saturated fat, 0 mg cholesterol, 125 mg sodium, 35 g carbohydrate, 10 g fiber, 6 g protein.

# Vegetarian Stuffed Peppers

## Ingredients:

### Stuffed peppers:

- 1 tsp oil
- 1/2 cup diced red onion
- 2 cloves minced garlic
- 1 can black beans, low sodium, rinsed
- 1 cup cooked corn kernels (fresh or frozen)
- 1 cup diced tomatoes
- 1 tsp cumin
- 1 tsp chili powder
- 1 cup cooked quinoa
- 4 peppers, cut in half lengthwise and seeds removed

### Garnish:

- Chopped cilantro
- 1/4 cup feta cheese, crumbled
- Limes

## Directions:

1. Make the stuffing. Sauté the onion and garlic in oil in a large skillet. Add the beans, corn, seasonings, and tomatoes. Stir and heat. Add the quinoa. Stir well, then spoon the filling into pepper halves in a large rectangular baking dish. Cover the dish and bake for 40 minutes at 350 degrees or until the peppers are soft.
2. Garnish with chopped cilantro and crumbled cheese. Serve fresh lime wedges served on the side.



## Nutrition Facts:

Serves 4. Each serving: 259 calories, 5 g fat, 2 g saturated fat, 8 mg cholesterol, 620 mg sodium, 43 g carbohydrates, 12 g fiber, 8 g sugar, 12 g protein



# Functional Ingredient Spotlight: Turmeric

We choose what we eat for a variety of reasons: taste, convenience, cost, and health concerns. Food manufacturers capitalize on consumers' desire for healthy foods by adding ingredients that are marketed to help protect our immune system, improve mood, and increase energy levels.

According to a market analysis report, these added ingredients, known as functional ingredients, are expected to grow by 6.4% annually over the next seven years. While whole foods like fruit, vegetables, and whole grains are essential for good health, today's consumers are shifting toward fortified convenience foods and beverages that contain functional ingredients.

Three popular functional ingredients you'll find in various foods and beverages are turmeric, collagen, and green coffee extract.

Let's talk about turmeric...

Turmeric is a plant native to Southeast Asia, primarily India, where it is used as both a spice and also traditional medicine for skin disorders, joints, digestion, and upper respiratory tract issues. Curcumin is the primary component of turmeric that provides both the yellow color and the health benefits.

Snacks with turmeric or curcumin in the ingredient list accounted for 9% of all new turmeric product launches in both 2015 and 2019. Frozen breakfasts, microwaveable meals, and tea/juices are other popular foods to which food manufacturers add turmeric in order to boost consumer appeal.

Research shows that curcumin may reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease and diabetes by reducing inflammation and oxidative stress. There's also some research that shows curcumin may help improve memory and mood by modulating serotonin and dopamine production. However, the amount of turmeric or curcumin used as a functional ingredient is typically much smaller than the dose used in research studies so there is no way of knowing if there is any health benefit.



# Healthy Gets a Reboot

## The Way the “Healthy” Definition Would Work

Here are a few results of the proposed new definition for the claim “healthy.”

- Foods like salmon, avocados, and olive oil, which do not qualify for use of the “healthy” claim under the current regulations would qualify under the proposed definition.
- Foods like sweetened cereals and yogurt that exceed the amount of allowed added sugars would no longer qualify.
- Plain, non-carbonated water and plain, carbonated water could be labeled “healthy” as well. Under the current regulation, water cannot be labeled “healthy.”

Shoppers will simply have to look for the claim “healthy” or other terms such as “healthier” or “healthiest” on food packages to recognize they’re buying items that meet the FDA’s definition of “healthy”.

## Are There Potential Benefits?

The leading causes of death and disability in the US are heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, some cancers, and overweight and obesity, which are all related to diet and lifestyle. Minority groups are at a higher risk to develop these conditions. As an example, over 4 in 10 American adults have high blood pressure but the number jumps to nearly 6 in 10 in non-Hispanic African American adults.

Revamping the definition of “healthy” is a positive step towards giving the public information to assist them in making better food choices to reduce chronic diseases and improve health equity. In addition, updating the definition of “healthy” may encourage more nutritious foods in the market if some companies choose to produce new products or reformulate products to match the definition.

Consumers can make healthier choices by doing the following:

- Choose foods in their whole form. An orange versus orange juice. Fruit instead of fruit snacks.
- Include fresh, frozen, and canned fruits and vegetables in your diet. Frozen and canned offer convenience and longer shelf life.
- Limit fast food, fried foods, and ultra-processed meat and snack foods. Cut out sugar-sweetened drinks and limit alcohol.
- Go meatless for a few meals per week. Use beans and lentils in salads, soups, or main dishes.
- Swap refined grains for whole grains including rolled oats, brown rice, whole wheat pasta, and other grains.
- Use the 5 and 20% rule on labels. Choose ingredients with 5% or less of unwanted ingredients such as sugar, sodium, and saturated fat. Aim for foods containing 20% or more fiber, calcium, iron, and potassium.
- Choose non-fat or low-fat dairy products when possible.
- Include healthy fats in your diet from avocados, nuts, seeds, and plant-based oils.

## FMI:

<https://www.fda.gov/consumers/consumer-updates/fresh-take-what-healthy-means-foodpackages#:~:text=%E2%80%9Cto%20make%20healthier%20food%20choices,sodium%2C%20or%20added%20sugars.%E2%80%9D>

By Lisa Andrews, MEd, RD, LD

# Mediterranean Diet for Better Mental Health



We've all experienced anxiety or depression at one time or another in our lives. According to the CDC, 11.7% of adults over 18 experience anxiety or worry regularly while 4.8% have feelings of depression. These numbers grew even higher during and after the pandemic. Estimates as high as 25% of adults have been recorded for the prevalence of anxiety.

Chronic worrying and stress may have long-term effects on your physical health. According to the American Psychological Association, constant anxiety and stress may raise your risk for cardiovascular disease, infertility, arthritis, and metabolic disorders such as diabetes and obesity.

A Western-style diet is considered more pro-inflammatory and may impact mental health. A meta-analysis of studies of 157,409 participants found that those in the highest inflammatory diet group had a significant association with the incidence of depression and anxiety. Those in the lowest inflammatory diet group experienced a lower risk for anxiety and depression.

The good news is that a Mediterranean-style diet may put you in a better state of mind. One study in over 150 adults with depression found that individuals attending a 3-month Med-diet cooking class along with the use of fish oil supplements had better fruit, vegetable, legume, nuts, and whole grain intake and reduced intake of red meat and unhealthy snacks. Depressive symptoms were kept at bay for 6 months after the intervention.

In addition, a randomized control trial in young men with depression (aged 18 to 25 years) also indicates that a Mediterranean-style diet may alleviate depressive symptoms. A 12-week intervention of a Mediterranean diet or "befriending" (control group), found better adherence to a Mediterranean diet and more change in the Beck Depression Inventory Scale. Quality of life scores was also higher in the Mediterranean group.

While vegetables, legumes, and whole grains are a big part of the Mediterranean diet, a vegetarian diet was not correlated with a reduced risk of depression, anxiety, or stress. A recent systematic review and meta-analysis of observational studies found no link between a vegetarian diet and depression or anxiety. Further research is needed in this area.

See list of references online.

By Lisa Andrews, MEd, RD, LD



# Top 8 Foods to Improve Mental Health

There are lots of great foods to consume to reduce the risk of depression. Here are the top 8:

1. **Whole grains** like rolled oats, brown rice, or whole wheat couscous. These provide complex carbohydrates as well as tryptophan, a neurotransmitter associated with good mood.
2. Add **fruits and vegetables** to all meals. Higher intakes of fruits and vegetables have been found to be beneficial in reducing the incidence of depression in middle-aged and older adults in a recent systematic review and meta-analysis. <sup>8</sup>
3. **Beans**, including soybeans. Beans contain plenty of dietary fiber, which has been found to reduce the risk of depression. <sup>9</sup>
4. **Fatty fish**. Salmon, tuna, and mackerel are sources of omega-3 fatty acids, a healthy fat linked with a reduction in inflammation. A meta-analysis of studies indicates that fish higher fish intake is linked with reduced rates of depression. <sup>10</sup>
5. **Leafy, green vegetables**. Leafy greens provide the B vitamin folate. One study found that subjects with normal levels of folate and B12 (versus low levels) had lower rates of depression. <sup>11</sup>
6. **Nuts and seeds**, especially walnuts. Walnuts are a plant source of omega-3 fatty acids. A recent study found that nut eaters had lower depression scores than non-nut eaters. The impact was strongest in women. <sup>12</sup>
7. **Yogurt** and other fermented dairy foods. A recent meta-analysis of cohort studies indicated that fermented dairy intake was associated with lower rates of depression. The authors believe this is related to the gut-brain axis. <sup>13</sup>
8. **Extra virgin olive oil**. It's not just good for your heart. The use of EVOO was found to reduce symptoms of depression in those dealing with severe depression, but not mild to moderate depression. It certainly can't hurt to use it in place of other oils. <sup>14</sup>



# Ultra-processed Problems

Lather, rinse, repeat. Sometimes poor eating habits become a vicious cycle. We're anxious, disappointed, or sad about something so we "treat ourselves" to a bag of chips or a big candy bar.

We're not really hungry, we're just feeding an emotion. But that habit of grabbing processed food when we're feeling blue may exacerbate those negative feelings, especially anxiety, and depression.



## Ultra-Processed Defined

What is processed food? In theory, any food that ends up in the grocery store goes through some processing. According to the Department of Agriculture, processed foods are any foods that are changed from their natural state. This can include food that was simply cut, washed, heated, pasteurized, canned, cooked, frozen, dried, dehydrated, mixed, or packaged. It can also include food with added preservatives, nutrients, flavors, salts, sugars, or fats. <sup>1</sup>

Ultra-processed food includes foods that are typically the result of intensive manufacturing processes. They're made from foods plus additives and may not contain much of the original whole food.

These foods usually contain more sugars, oils, fats, and salt. They may also have ingredients extracted from other foods, like casein, lactose, gluten, whey, hydrogenated oils, protein isolate, maltodextrin, invert sugar, and high-fructose corn syrup. They could even have nutritious ingredients added such as fiber, vitamins, or minerals. <sup>1</sup>

## Processed Food, Disease, and Mental Health

Too much ultra-processed food has been found to raise the risk of heart disease, obesity, and certain cancers. There are plenty of studies that show this connection. <sup>2</sup>

A systematic review of processed food intake finds an increase in waist circumference, low HDL levels, and increased risk for metabolic syndrome. <sup>3</sup> Most ultra-processed foods are high in saturated fat, sugar, and sodium—the very nutrients the US Dietary Guidelines advise us to limit. <sup>4</sup>

More research suggests that the risk for anxiety and depression is linked to poor dietary habits and a Western Diet. This could be related to the gut-brain axis and disruption in gut microbiota or highly processed foods' impact on inflammation and blood sugar. <sup>5</sup>

A recent Italian study found a relationship between the consumption of ultra-processed foods and symptoms of depression in young adults. The study used food frequency questionnaires in nearly 600 adults aged 18 to 35 years of age and discovered a positive link between intake of ultra-processed food and symptoms of depression. Results were adjusted for adherence to a Mediterranean diet, which has been found to be protective. <sup>6</sup>

A meta-analysis of observational studies also supports the association between ultra-processed foods and worse mental health. Higher intake of ultra-processed foods was linked with increased odds of depression and anxiety in 17 observational studies. These associations were seen both together (anxiety and depression) and separately (anxiety or depression) with ultra-processed food intake. <sup>7</sup>



# Ultra-processed Problems

## How to Kick the Processed Problem

- Start your day with a solid meal, not a bar or fast food sandwich. Peanut butter on toast, Greek yogurt, cottage cheese with fruit, or a hard-boiled egg with crackers are good starters.
- Keep seasonal fruits and veggies on hand and include at least one in each meal and snack.
- Do Meatless Monday more often. Canned beans or lentils make quick meals when you're in a hurry. Skip fast food when possible.
- Take inventory of your pantry. How frequently do chips, cookies, or other processed snacks end up on the shelves?
- Don't shop when you're hungry, upset, or stressed out. You're more likely to pick up snacks or "comfort" foods.
- Ignore coupons for boxed pasta mixes or other processed foods that you normally wouldn't buy.
- Get your ZZZs. Poor sleep raises cortisol levels, increasing cravings for salt, fat, and sugar. Aim for 7 to 8 hours per night. 8
- Learn to deal with stress and anxiety in healthy ways. Exercise, meditate, journal, or seek a mental health professional if needed.

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