



10 FOODS TO FIGHT **DEPRESSION** & ANXIETY IN KIDS

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10 Foods to Fight Depression & Anxiety

What we put into our **MOUTHS** can make us feel

comforted when

we are sad, give us

energy when

we are tired, and

solve a **BAD CASE OF**

THE "HANGRIES" when

our body makes it

clear *we haven't had*

enough in a while.

The gut and the brain, although halfway down the body from one another, are partners in more than we realize. Communication goes both ways, from stress cravings and butterflies in the stomach (brain talking to the gut) to the many messages the gut sends to the brain.

For some people, kids especially, **foods can send them into a rage**, make them lose control of their emotions, or cause hyperactivity (watch a classroom of kids who have just had a holiday party and you'll see what I mean).

Sometimes it's obvious – the immediate reaction to something you've just eaten. But sometimes **foods can impact our mood over time**, reducing inflammation or providing a necessary nutrient that, if deficient, hinders body functions and causes mood disorders **like depression and anxiety**.

That sounds scary – **but it's really good news!** If food can affect our mood, we can make choices about what to eat that can be protective of our brain and **build our resilience to disorders like anxiety and depression**, even if we have a genetic tendency toward them.

More on how to fight depression and anxiety at kitchenstewardship.com/depression

Here are some everyday, normal foods that we all should be eating more of for brain health:

Salmon



Why it helps:

Our brains are made of 60% EPA/DHA (omega 3s), and **salmon is one of the highest sources!** Plus omega 3s are the opposite of omega 6s, the inflammatory kind of fats AND salmon is high in tryptophan, which is needed by the body to make serotonin.

How to use:

Look for wild caught salmon (not hard to find frozen at ALDI and most cans) because you don't want salmon that ate all corn (Atlantic, farmed salmon). We just pan fry thin pieces with spicy seasoning, less for the kids, and dip it in mustard (hot sauce for Dad). [Instructions here.](#) Or try [salmon patties](#) with the cans = very inexpensive!

Easy button:

If your kids aren't ready for fish (yet), it's worth investing in a good fish oil supplement. Carlson brand comes recommended by Sheila Kilbane, MD.

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Flax and/or Chia

Why it helps:

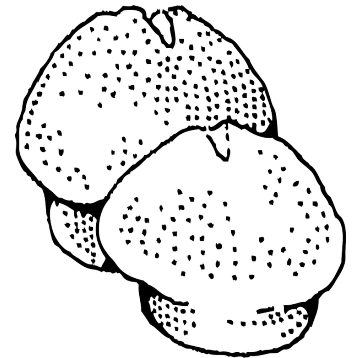
Another good source of omega-3 healthy fats.

How to use:

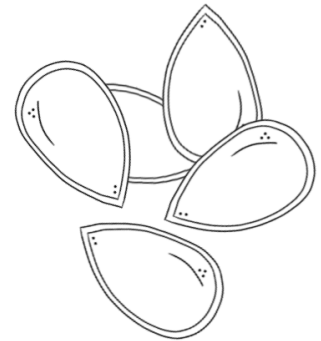
Flax and chia can be added to smoothies if you have a powerful blender. Here's a [muffin recipe packed with flax](#) and some [easy "no-cook" chia seed pudding](#) to try for snacks!

Easy button:

Just sprinkle ground flax in oatmeal and add a tablespoon of chia seeds here and there to your baked goods.



Pumpkin Seeds



Why it helps:

Sometimes a zinc deficiency can cause anxiety/depression symptoms because it [supports neurotransmitter function](#), and pumpkin seeds are about the highest in zinc you can find – unless you like oysters! Pumpkin seeds are also a good source of magnesium.

How to use:

If you are making jack-o-lanterns, roast them and eat for a snack! [Instructions on how to make them crispy here.](#)

Easy button:

Buy “pepitas” which are little green pumpkin seeds and add to cereal, [granola](#), oatmeal, trail mix, muffins and more. If your kids really don’t like to crunch on them, you can buy ground pumpkin seed powder and mix it into smoothies and baked goods.



Leafy Greens

(kale, spinach, Swiss chard, lettuce, mustard greens, beet greens)

Why it helps:

High in magnesium and MANY other nutrients, leafy greens win the prize for the food most often recommended by pediatricians and nutritionists that I interview. It really is important to make greens a priority, since they won't sneak into your day if you're not intentional about them! They also help detoxify the system, which is important to support brain health and fight anxiety.

How to use:

You can mix greens into just about any veggie sauté, [scrambled eggs](#), pasta or soup. Just add some whenever you are cooking anything! They even hide in meatloaf or these [main dish muffins](#). Try this [cheesy spinach casserole](#) to really get a lot on the table, and of course salads are a superb habit to build in kids. Start with crunchy Romaine hearts and work up to darker lettuces, spinach, and even kale – but massage it with olive oil and lemon juice for 5 minutes to reduce bitterness. My kids loooooove kale chips!

Easy button:

Kids can't pick greens out of a green smoothie – [here's how to make those](#) so the greens hide well. You can also buy [green powder](#) or [dehydrate greens](#), which hides them better too.

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Sweet Potatoes

Why it helps:

Sweet potatoes show up on the lists of almost every depression-fighting nutrient out there! They are high in vitamins B6, B3, and B12, magnesium and Vitamin C.

How to use:

If your kids like baked sweet potatoes with plenty of butter, wonderful! Healthy fats like butter, ghee or coconut oil will help the body assimilate fat-soluble vitamins like Vitamin A, so it's important to serve veggies with a fat – and skip the brown sugar and marshmallows, please. If the family doesn't like mushy orange veggies, try peeled, cubed and roasted at 450°F for 20-40 minutes until browning on the edges, which is a totally different taste sensation! A lot of people find they love sweet potato hash with greens and an egg on top for breakfast, an important meal to work veggies into.

Easy button:

Did you know you can use pureed sweet potato in any recipe calling for pumpkin? Put some in smoothies, [muffins](#), or [pancakes](#) – my husband didn't like sweet potatoes for years but always ate pancakes with gusto.



Avocado

Why it helps:

Double bonus! Avocados are high in magnesium and healthy fats!

How to use:

Avocado goes on top of so many things well: salads, eggs, fish, and soups commonly find a boost of avocado in our house, and avocado toast is very popular out there on the web. It doesn't have to be just for taco night! This [magic green sauce](#) goes on anything and [this aioli](#) is one of our favs too.

Easy button:

Serve [guacamole](#) with tortilla chips and get people used to it, then try it as a dip for veggies. You can even [freeze guac](#) when avocados are on sale! My kids have been in charge of making the guacamole for our household for years.



Walnuts and Almonds

Why it helps:

Nuts are a great way to satiate your hunger at snack time because they are a great mix of healthy fats, protein, and fiber. Walnuts are high in omega 3s and B vitamins and almonds boast magnesium. Cashews, pecans, peanuts and sesame seeds (think tahini, in hummus) are also great sources of zinc.

How to use:

Include nuts in salads, look for sauces that include almond butter, and roast nuts next to vegetables for a satisfying crunch (add a few to the oven for the last 3 minutes of a veggie roast).

Easy button:

Just eat a handful! Health benefits are preserved and crunchiness increased if you make time to soak and dehydrate them [like this](#).



Cocoa or Cacao

Why it helps:

Cocoa and cacao are good sources of magnesium and iron.

How to use:

Add cacao powder (less processed than cocoa, higher in minerals) to your smoothies, make [mudballs](#), make homemade dark hot chocolate with less sweetener and whole milk or coconut milk. Put dark chocolate chips in [muffins](#) and [homemade granola bars](#). *I buy cacao at [Thrive Market](#).*

Easy button:

Just eat a square of dark chocolate every day. The less sugar, the better, so look for a higher percentage cocoa. ALDI has an 85% dark chocolate that is absolutely dreamy.



Turkey

Why it helps:

Turkey is high in tryptophan, which is what serotonin, that feel-good chemical, is made from.

How to use:

You know how to eat turkey, right? With mustard! It's the only way.

😊 Don't forget to try ground turkey in some of your fav ground beef recipes (but don't completely skip the beef; it's high in iron and B vitamins!).

Easy button:

Avoid funky ingredients in lunch meat and save money by buying a turkey breast, roasting it, and slicing for easy lunches.



Turmeric with Vegetables

Why it helps:

If our brains are inflamed, they're not functioning well, and [turmeric can affect](#) a lot of brain function related to depression. And I'm totally cheating here by putting "vegetables" as food #10, but listen – none of these foods are magic bullets. You can't eat a few healthy foods and expect your body to suddenly be healthy if 75% of the rest of what you put into your mouth is inflaming or aggravating your system.

Like the old Cheerio's commercials used to say, "helps support heart health as part of a balanced diet!" We DO need to have a balanced diet, and if you're used to eating a white flour roll with every meal or filling snack time with munchy crunchy carbs or relying on sugary foods for breakfasts and cravings...you need to insert nutrient-dense foods to edge those out of your life. Meet vegetables, the most under-appreciated food group!

How to use:

You can sprinkle turmeric on any veggie and mix it into anything that would be good with mustard, like BBQ chicken or slow cooker beef roasts. We love it in [this soup](#), which pairs it with black pepper, cauliflower and coconut to increase the health benefits, and kids really love [this yellow rice](#). Turmeric is a major component of curry, so if you love Indian food, you're off to a great start!

Lots of veggies show up on lists of magnesium, zinc, and vitamin-containing foods. They're not abnormal – just eat more broccoli, peas, peppers, cauliflower, tomatoes and winter squash, and experiment with trying recipes for the lesser known vegetables like red cabbage, Brussels sprouts, leeks, kohlrabi, bok choy, and even legumes like chickpeas and lentils. Try them raw, steamed, sautéed, or roasted (brings out the sweetness and most kids will eat roasted veggies even when they don't love them other ways!). [You can find some ideas for veggies galore here.](#)

Easy button:

While turmeric has lots of health benefits, to really help soothe active depression, you'll need 500mg of curcumin (the active part of turmeric) twice a day, so you may want to look into supplements because that would be a lot of turmeric ([a half cup](#))!



How Will My Kids

Eat All This?

The best way to encourage kids to eat new foods (especially healthy ones) is to **get them involved**. Talk about how eating healthy food can make them feel more balanced – **no one likes feeling out of control**, especially if your child is already feeling anxiety day to day.

I also find that when kids are part of the process, from shopping to meal prep, they are so **much more likely to feel positive about trying new things** (and actually put something in their mouth!).

Members of our [Kids Cook Real Food eCourse](#) echo the same, and fully 25% report that **their kids actually HAVE started eating more healthy foods** as a direct result of the class!

Get kids in the kitchen and healthy food on the table to build the best brains they can have!

I'll be honored if you'll join me over at [Kitchen Stewardship](#) and [Kids Cook Real Food](#) to learn more about healthy eating and fighting depression with food!

Katie Kimball






Huge thanks to all the health professionals who contributed to this resource:

- ❖ [Jess Sherman](#), CAHN-pro, MEd, RHN, author of [Raising Resilience](#)
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- ❖ Heidi Hanna, Ph.D., executive director of the [American Institute of Stress](#)
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- ❖ [Sara Vance](#), nutritionist and author of [The Perfect Metabolism Plan](#)
- ❖ [Aimie Apigian](#), M.D., attachment and trauma expert

Print the next page to hang on your fridge as a reminder to include these healthy foods often!



What to Eat

to Fight Depression and Anxiety

Salmon

Pan fry thin pieces with seasoning and dip it in mustard, or try salmon patties with canned salmon.

Flax and Chia Seeds

Sprinkle ground flax in oatmeal and add a tablespoon of chia seeds here and there to your baked goods.

Avocado

Make avocado toast, or guacamole and dip veggies or use on taco night.

Leafy Greens

Mix greens into just about any veggie sauté, scrambled eggs, pasta or soup, and add a generous handful to smoothies.

Turkey

Try ground turkey in some of your fav ground beef recipes, or oven roast a turkey breast and slice for easy lunches.

Pumpkin Seeds

Add pepitas (the little green pumpkin seeds) to cereal, granola, oatmeal, trail mix, muffins and more.

Cocoa or Cacao

Just eat a square of *dark* chocolate every day. Look for a bar with a high percentage cocoa.

Walnuts and Almonds

Just eat a handful or include nuts in salads and baked goods.

Sweet Potatoes

Use pureed sweet potato in any recipe calling for pumpkin, or peel, cube and roast in the oven until they brown on the edges.

Turmeric with Vegetables

Sprinkle turmeric on any veggie and mix it into anything that would be good with mustard. Eat curry! It contains lots of turmeric and usually a good variety of veggies.