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# As COVID-19 restrictions relax, *eat well for mental health*

The crisis stage of the COVID-19 pandemic is ending, at least for now, but its effects could have a long-term impact on your mental health. For some, the feelings of anxiety that emerged during the pandemic will resolve as more routines return. Others may continue to experience mental health issues post-pandemic, or they may flare up down the road. It may not be until you have a chance to process what you've been through, that you experience the effects.



One of the most important things you can do for your mental health is to look after your physical health by eating a healthy diet, and it can help you think clearly and feel more alert. It can also improve concentration and attention span.

Two popular diet trends—intermittent fasting and a ketogenic diet—may be just what the doctor orders to improve your mental health during these challenging times.

## **1** **INTERMITTENT FASTING** *can boost your mental health*

Intermittent fasting is a specific eating schedule that is proven to have significant effects on the way your body metabolizes food. One of the most common methods of intermittent fasting is to do a nightly fast for 12–16 hours. For example, if you eat dinner at 6 p.m., don't eat again until 6–10 a.m. the next day.

### **HERE ARE SOME OF THE BENEFITS OF FASTING::**

**Mental function.** When you fast, your body has fewer toxic materials flowing through the blood and lymphatic system, making it easier for you to think.

**Brightens mood.** Research in the Journal of Nutrition Health & Aging found that after 3 months of intermittent fasting, study participants reported improved moods and decreased tension, anger, and confusion.

**Reduces inflammation.** Chronic inflammation has been linked to many brain disorders,

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## **2** **A KETOGENIC DIET** *also can support mental health*

Even if you fast, you still need to make healthy food and life choices. When you eat is important, but what you eat matters more.

Sugar and processed foods can lead to inflammation throughout the body and brain, which may contribute to mood disorders, including anxiety and depression. When you're feeling stressed or depressed, it's easy to reach for processed foods for a quick pick-me-up. However, many processed foods are highly addictive, so you've got to stop eating them to end the cravings. Following a low-carbohydrate diet like a ketogenic diet can support brain health. A ketogenic diet consists of large amounts of fats, moderate amounts of proteins, and minimal amounts of carbohydrates.

### **8 REASONS TO TRY A LOW-CARB OR KETOGENIC DIET FOR MENTAL HEALTH:**

#### **1. Improves blood glucose control.**

The higher your blood sugar, the higher your brain sugar...so every time your blood sugar spikes, you're flooding your brain tissue with excess glucose.

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## INTERMITTENT FASTING CONTINUED

including depression, bipolar disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), schizophrenia, Alzheimer's disease, and more. According to a study in Nutrition Research, intermittent fasting decreases inflammation, which improves brain health and mental well-being.

**Fights high blood sugar.** Research in the British Journal of Nutrition shows that intermittent fasting produces greater improvements in insulin sensitivity, which helps you prevent high blood-sugar levels and type 2 diabetes.

**Lowers blood pressure at night.** Intermittent fasting helps reduce blood pressure while you sleep, which is beneficial for heart health, and anything that's good for your heart is also good for your brain. Hypertension lowers blood flow to the brain.

**Burns excess fat.** Intermittent fasting helps to burn more fat, which is also good for brain health. Studies show obesity is associated with a greater risk of depression, bipolar disorder, panic disorder, agoraphobia (fear of going out), and addictions.



### IF YOU ARE CONSIDERING EITHER OF THESE DIETS, TALK TO YOUR DOCTOR FIRST.

Also remember that while fasting and reducing carbs can be powerful tools for improving your mental health, they do not substitute for mental health treatment. Talk to a licensed mental health professional if you're feeling anxious or down for long periods of time.

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## KETOGENIC DIET CONTINUED

**2. Lowers blood insulin levels.** High insulin levels can cause the blood-brain barrier to become insulin-resistant. Low brain insulin is dangerous, because brain cells require insulin to process glucose and turn it into energy. It is a major risk factor for disorders like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease.

**3. Reduces inflammation.** High-sugar diets promote excessive inflammation inside the brain, a root cause of many psychiatric and neurological diseases.

**4. Boosts antioxidant defenses.** Low-carbohydrate diets naturally help improve your internal antioxidant capacity.

**5. Energizes mitochondria.** Mitochondria provide high-quality energy to cells. Low-carbohydrate diets have been shown to improve the health and vitality of mitochondria.

**6. Stabilizes stress hormones and appetite.** Low-carbohydrate diets help smooth out the highs and lows in blood sugar that lead to hormonal instability which causes anxiety, irritability, difficulty concentrating, and carbohydrate cravings.

**7. Rebalances neurotransmitters.** High-sugar diets can negatively impact neurotransmitters which are common in symptoms of psychiatric disorders. Ketogenic diets have been shown to regulate neurotransmitter levels.

**8. Raises BDNF levels.** High-sugar diets can reduce levels of an important molecule called Brain-Derived Neurotrophic Factor which helps the brain cope with, respond to, and recover from stress. Healthy BDNF levels contribute to resilience—something we all need.

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