



## JUST DO IT

## 3 Basic Supplements for Better Moods

A low mood is more common in the winter months. But it may also signal a gap in your nutrition.

**LOW ENERGY, LACK OF MOTIVATION**, a general ennui.

During the winter these symptoms of mild or moderate depression can be exacerbated due to the shorter days, more time spent indoors, and less physical activity. They may also signal a nutritional imbalance. Researchers are more convinced than ever about the role nutrition plays in mental health.

A balanced diet *should* provide the nutrients we need for optimal physical and mental functioning, but factors including soil nutrient depletion and food processing can have an impact on how much we get of the vitamins and minerals we need. Meanwhile, aging, illness, certain medications, alcohol use, and stress can affect how much of them the body absorbs. For example, recent research shows that significant changes in the gut microbiome as we age can dramatically reduce our ability to absorb nutrients. In other words, the same diet over time may provide fewer nutrients where we need them most, in the brain.

Fortunately, readily available nutritional supplements can bridge these gaps—and may bolster mood at the same time. If you are not already taking supplements, here are three with the strongest research behind them to get you started toward better health.

### Magnesium

This essential nutrient is involved with more than 300 biochemical processes, notably nerve and muscle function, regulating heartbeat, and building bone. It's also necessary for optimal communication along the limbic-hypothalamus-pituitary-adrenocortical (HPA) axis, our



» no wallflower  
Claudi Kessels

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stress response system. While severe magnesium deficiency is rare, many people don't get adequate amounts. And stress, alcohol abuse, some medications, and diabetes, as well as diseases of the digestive tract, can affect its absorption. Found naturally in almonds, pumpkin seeds, black beans, and dark chocolate, magnesium is also easily supplemented. A 2017 study at the University of Vermont found "significant decrease in depression and anxiety symptoms" across all populations from supplementation of 248 mg of elemental magnesium (from four daily doses of 500 mg of magnesium chloride) after just two weeks into a six-week study.

### Omega-3s

The brain uses omega-3 polyunsaturated acids to build nerve cell membrane and for nerve cell signaling. Research has linked both low dietary intake and low blood and brain levels of omega-3 with depression and anxiety, according to an August 2018 review published in *Frontiers in Physiology*. Omega-3s include two important elements, EPA and DHA, which are found naturally in fish and krill and in some algae. Plants, including most nuts and seeds as well as dark greens, also contain omega-3, but mostly just in the form of ALA, alpha-linolenic acid, which then must be

converted into EPA or DHA to be used by the body. Supplements with the highest level of EPA seem to provide the strongest benefit for moderate to major depression.

### Vitamin B<sub>12</sub>

This cornerstone nutrient is involved with the creation of red blood cells and in supporting the nervous system, among other vital functions. It has also been linked to mood—from mild symptoms like feeling tired, low, and foggy to severe depression. Yet many of us don't get enough B<sub>12</sub>, which must be consumed through animal products or fortified foods. It's estimated that up to 20 percent of American adults over 50 may be deficient. If you eat a plant-based diet, or suffer from anemia or conditions affecting the gastrointestinal system, or have an autoimmune disease, you likely need to take B<sub>12</sub> supplements. Its absorption is also influenced by lifestyle factors, including heavy drinking and long-term use of antacids, as well as by aging.

—KELLE WALSH

**Kelle Walsh** is a journalist who specializes in health reporting and editing, and strives to apply what she learns in her work toward the ongoing goal of creating a balanced, vibrant, health-promoting life—allowing for good wine and organic potato chips, of course.

## Clinical Solutions for Mood Support



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