Food for Mood: FOOD FOR THE BRAIN

Family orientated tips for Children's Mental Health Week

It is easy to forget that our mental health and well-being are as important as our physical health – particularly during these challenging times – and what we eat and drink can influence our mental function. As part of Children's Mental Health Week, we are producing a series of handouts to provide simple family-orientated tips to support and encourage better mental health. **This one focusses on the best foods to eat to support mental health.**

Eat a wide range of wholefoods: Whole, unprocessed foods contain a range of different vitamins and minerals, some of which play vital roles in brain health. Vitamins C, B_6 and B_{12}, as well as folate and iron are all essential for brain function. It is easy to get stuck in a food 'rut', so trying to regularly introduce new foods and making each plate as colourful as possible with natural ingredients, could be a positive step for you. Aim to eat a wide range of colourful vegetables and fruit each day – at least five portions.

Eat healthy fats: Did you know that 60% of our brains are made from fat? Healthy fats, such as omega-3 fats, are important for brain development and function. These fats can only be obtained from foods such as oily fish (salmon, trout, fresh tuna, mackerel, sardines) seafood (lobster, crab, oysters, shrimp, clams), walnuts, pumpkin seeds and flaxseeds.

Eat protein with every meal and snack

Sugar provides our brain with fuel, however, it is needed in the right amounts and at the right time! Too much sugar from sweets and refined carbohydrates can cause a blood sugar 'rollercoaster' resulting in low energy and mood. A slower release of glucose into the blood provided by combining a complex carbohydrate (wholemeal bread) with a good quality protein and healthy fat (such as eggs) at all meals and snacks can support better blood glucose balance, energy and mood.