Brain Food

Using Nutrition in Early Recovery for Healing

Substance Misuse Prevention Newsletter: A Collection of Readings

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Substance Misuse Contributes to Nutrient Deficiencies

Alcohol and marijuana are amongst the most misused substances. Heavy use of each can result in nutrient deficiencies.

Alcohol
Alcohol can wreak havoc on our bodies. Heavy drinking can lead to poor nutrition as individuals may limit food intake due to drinking all their calories (Gans, 2021). In addition, alcohol can cause gastrointestinal inflammation and ulcers which may inhibit digestion and absorption of nutrients (Gans, 2021). On this same note, a B1 deficiency can occur resulting in problems with memory and learning (Gans, 2021).

Marijuana
Marijuana can stimulate our appetite, which can make it hard for those who regularly use marijuana to maintain a healthy diet. This may result in increased consumption of unhealthy foods that do not necessarily meet our array of nutritional needs.

How does this relate to substance use?
Despite research not being able prove a cause and effect between mental illness and diet, we do know that our diet likely supports brain health. In addition, substance misuse can deplete our bodies of vital nutrients that impact how our brain functions.

[How Does Alcohol Affect Your Nutrition?]

[Substance Use Recovery and Diet]

University Health and Counseling Services

A Brief Overview

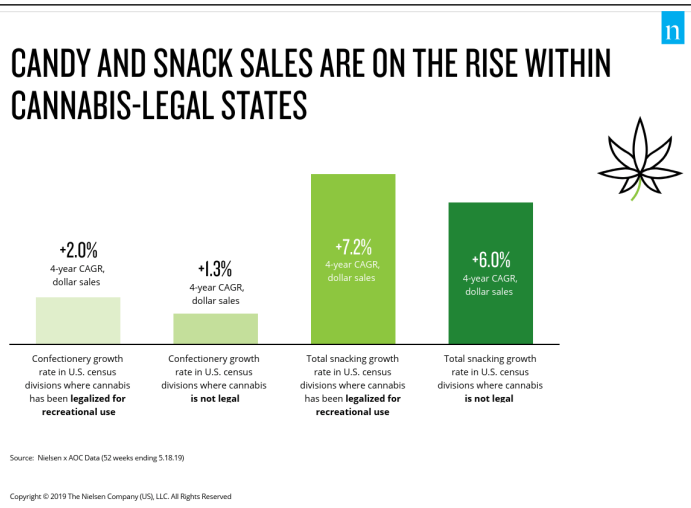
Nutritional psychiatry explores how what we eat can potentially impact our mental health (McGrane, 2021). For example, some studies have found a potential link between a healthy, well-balanced diet and a decreased risk of depression in adolescents (McGrane, 2021). Another small randomized controlled trial called the SMILES trial found that those who received dietary counseling saw an improvement in symptoms of depression (McGrane, 2021). Furthermore, a small study found a possible association between ADHD and consumption of fast food, sugar and soft drinks in children and adolescents (Clay, 2017). However, many studies have limitations and much more research needs to be done to solidify the potential relationship between diet and one's mental health (McGrane, 2021). Nonetheless, there is an overarching belief that some foods can boost mood due to an interaction with neurotransmitters or brain protecting factors (Imhoff, 2019).

[Nutrition and mental health: Is there a link?]

[SMILES Trial]

[How to Boost Your Mood with Food]

[The Link Between Food and Mental Health]



How do I Maintain a Healthy Diet?

- Meal Plan
- Include a variety of fruits and vegetables
- Choose water over sugar filled drinks
- Limit or eliminate alcohol consumption as these are often filled with calories and sugar
- Limit or eliminate marijuana use as this often induces cravings
- Limit processed foods and desserts

Working Towards a Healthier Diet & Mind

There are many types of foods that are thought to benefit brain health, which may subsequently improve mood and limit the use of harmful coping skills such as substance misuse.

Omega 3 Fatty Acids

Some studies have found a possible correlation between lower risk of depressive symptoms and the intake of omega 3 rich foods (Kelly, 2020). Again, while these studies do not provide a definitive link, they do suggest that there may be a benefit behind incorporating Omega 3 fatty acids into our diet. Some examples of omega 3 foods include Salmon, walnuts, Mackerel, and flax seeds (Kelly, 2020).

Gut Brain Axis & Probiotics

The gut-brain axis is signaling that occurs between the central and enteric nervous system (Carabotti et al., 2015). Re-occurring GI symptoms can occur due to mental triggers (e.g. stress, anxiety, depression) (National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, 2017). Due to the connection between gut and brain health it is thought that gut health may play a role in limiting symptoms of depression (Kelly, 2020). Foods that contain probiotics include yogurt, kefir, buttermilk, sauerkraut, kimchi, miso, and pickled vegetables (Kelly, 2020).

Whole Grains

B vitamins support brain health and are found in whole grains (Kelly, 2020). For example, B5 (pantothenic acid) helps synthesize a neurotransmitter called acetylcholine, which assists with memory and learning (Kelly, 2020). Additionally, B6 is crucial in the production of Serotonin (Kelly, 2020). Good sources of whole grains include oatmeal, brown rice, quinoa, bulgur and amaranth (Kelly, 2020).

Green Veggies

Folate is found in many green vegetables and possibly thought to support mood (Kelly, 2020). Examples of folate infused vegetables include spinach, edamame, artichokes, spinach, avocado, and broccoli (Kelly, 2020).

"The secret of **change** is to focus all your energy not on fighting the old but on **building the new."**
-Dan Millman

For comments on this newsletter or suggestions for future articles please contact: Diane Geyer, LCPC, LADC, CCS, NCC~ Clinician and Coordinator of Clinical Substance Use Services at USM or Jillian Littlefield, RN and Graduate Assistant ~ Email: *diane.geyer@maine.edu, jillian.littlefield@maine.edu*