

MENTAL HEALTH



Throughout life, many individuals experience mental health issues that can impact their mood, thoughts, behavior, and quality of life. Supporting good overall health by engaging in regular physical activity, maintaining a well-balanced diet, prioritizing sleep, and managing stress can help to support mental well-being. Certain dietary supplements may also help to support cognitive function, as well as address or prevent mental health conditions.

Top recommended supplements for mental health

St. John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum*)

St. John's wort is one of the most-researched medicinal herbs, commonly used for mood disorders in herbal medicine and Traditional Chinese Medicine. The plant's yellow flowers are used to prepare teas or formulate dietary supplements. Research has demonstrated that supplementation with St. John's wort in individuals with mild-to-moderate depression has comparable efficacy and safety when compared to selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), a class of pharmaceutical antidepressants. Considering several pharmaceuticals interact with St. John's wort, it is recommended to speak with your healthcare practitioner before taking this supplement.

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Bacopa (*Bacopa monnieri*)

Bacopa monnieri is also known as water hyssop or *Brahmi* in Ayurveda, the traditional system of medicine in India. Bacopa is a medicinal herb with a variety of properties, including anti-inflammatory, analgesic, memory enhancing, sedative, and anti-epileptic effects. Clinical research has demonstrated that bacopa may improve cognitive functions such as learning and memory in healthy individuals, as well as improve concentration in individuals with mild cognitive impairment. Further, bacopa may increase serotonin levels, a neurotransmitter that promotes relaxation in the body.

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Phosphatidylserine

Phosphatidylserine (PS) is an essential structural component of the brain that helps to form nerve cell membranes and myelin, a protective sheath that surrounds nerve fibers. Although PS is not easily obtained through the diet, PS dietary supplements commonly derived from soy lecithin or sunflower lecithin are available. Supplementation with PS has been shown to support short- and long-term memory formation, memory retrieval, learning and information recall, as well as reasoning, problem-solving, communication, and language skills.

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Folate

Folate, or vitamin B9, is a water-soluble nutrient required for brain function and development. Folate exists in several forms, including tetrahydrofolate (THF) in food and folic acid or L-5-methyltetrahydrofolate (L-5-MTHF) in dietary supplements. Foods that are high in folate include beef liver, green vegetables (e.g., asparagus, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, mustard greens, spinach), **black-eyed** peas, avocado, and kidney beans. Low levels of folate are associated with age-related cognitive dysfunction. Folate supplementation prior to conception and during the first trimester of pregnancy supports fetal nervous system development and lowers the risk of neural tube defects (NTDs). Certain individuals who have difficulty converting folate to its active form due to a genetic polymorphism may benefit from supplementing with L-5-MTHF specifically, which is considered the “active” form of folate.

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Vitamin D

Sometimes referred to as the sunshine vitamin, vitamin D is synthesized in the skin from sun exposure. Clinical studies suggest that low levels of vitamin D are associated with cognitive impairment, as well as an increased risk of Alzheimer’s disease and seasonal affective disorder, a form of depression that typically occurs during the winter months. Certain individuals, such as older adults, individuals with limited sun exposure, and dark-skinned individuals have a limited ability to synthesize vitamin D and may benefit from supplementation.

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Omega-3 fatty acids

Almost 60 percent of the human brain is comprised of fat. Omega-3 fatty acids, an essential component of cell membrane structure, play a role in brain development and function. The long-chain omega-3 fatty acids eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) may be obtained through diet by eating oily fish (e.g., mackerel, herring, salmon, sardines) or through fish oil or vegetarian algal supplements. Omega-3 supplementation has been shown to improve cognition in individuals with low omega-3 status. Dietary intake of omega-3 fatty acids may also help prevent certain cognitive conditions such as depression and dementia. The antidepressant effects of fish oil supplementation may be attributed to its ability to reduce inflammation and directly act on cell membrane properties.

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