

Diet and nutrition essential for mental health

28 January 2015, by Anne Rahilly



Evidence is rapidly growing showing vital relationships between both diet quality and potential nutritional deficiencies and mental health, a new international collaboration led by the University of Melbourne and Deakin University has revealed.

Published in *The Lancet Psychiatry* today, leading academics state that as with a range of medical conditions, psychiatry and public health should now recognise and embrace diet and nutrition as key determinants of mental health.

Lead author, Dr Jerome Sarris from the University of Melbourne and a member of the International Society for Nutritional Psychiatry Research (ISNPR), said psychiatry is at a critical stage, with the current medically-focused model having achieved only modest benefits in addressing the global burden of [poor mental health](#).

"While the determinants of mental health are complex, the emerging and compelling evidence for nutrition as a key factor in the high prevalence and incidence of mental disorders suggests that nutrition is as important to psychiatry as it is to cardiology, endocrinology and gastroenterology," Dr Sarris said.

"In the last few years, significant links have been established between nutritional quality and mental health. Scientifically rigorous studies have made important contributions to our understanding of the role of nutrition in mental health," he said.

Findings of the review revealed that in addition to dietary improvement, evidence now supports the contention that nutrient-based prescription has the potential to assist in the management of mental disorders at the individual and population level.

Studies show that many of these nutrients have a clear link to brain health, including omega-3s, B vitamins (particularly folate and B12), choline, iron, zinc, magnesium, S-adenosyl methionine (SAME), vitamin D, and amino acids.

"While we advocate for these to be consumed in the diet where possible, additional select prescription of these as nutraceuticals (nutrient supplements) may also be justified," Dr Sarris said.

Associate Professor Felice Jacka, a Principal Research Fellow from Deakin University and president of the ISNPR noted that many studies have shown associations between healthy dietary patterns and a reduced prevalence of and risk for depression and suicide across cultures and age groups.

"Maternal and early-life nutrition is also emerging as a factor in mental health outcomes in children, while severe deficiencies in some essential nutrients during critical developmental periods have long been implicated in the development of both depressive and psychotic disorders," she said.

A systematic review published in late 2014 has also confirmed a relationship between 'unhealthy' dietary patterns and poorer [mental health](#) in children and adolescents. Given the early age of onset for depression and anxiety, these data point to dietary improvement as a way of preventing the initial incidence of common [mental disorders](#).

Dr Sarris, an executive member of the ISNPR, believes that it is time to advocate for a more integrative approach to psychiatry, with diet and nutrition as key elements.

"It is time for clinicians to consider diet and additional nutrients as part of the treating package to manage the enormous burden of [mental ill health](#)," he said.

Provided by University of Melbourne

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