

Abstract

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Nutrition and depression: implications for improving mental health among childbearing-aged women.

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BACKGROUND: Adequate nutrition is needed for countless aspects of brain functioning. Poor diet quality, ubiquitous in the United States, may be a modifiable risk factor for depression.

OBJECTIVE: The objective was to review and synthesize the current knowledge of the role of nutrition in depression, and address implications for childbearing-aged women.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: Poor omega-3 fatty acid status increases the risk of depression. Fish oil and folic acid supplements each have been used to treat depression successfully. Folate deficiency reduces the response to antidepressants. Deficiencies of folate, vitamin B12, iron, zinc, and selenium tend to be more common among depressed than nondepressed persons. Dietary antioxidants have not been studied rigorously in relation to depression. Childbearing-aged women are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of poor nutrition on mood because pregnancy and lactation are major nutritional stressors to the body. The depletion of nutrient reserves throughout pregnancy and a lack of recovery postpartum may increase a woman's risk of depression.

CONCLUSION: Prospective research studies are needed to clarify the role of nutrition in the pathophysiology of depression among childbearing-aged women. Greater attention to nutritional factors in mental health is warranted given that nutrition interventions can be inexpensive, safe, easy to administer, and generally acceptable to patients.

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