

<https://www.nutritionist-resource.org.uk/articles/confidence.html#howcananutritionisthelpwithselfesteemconfidence>

NUTRITION TOPICS

Confidence and self-esteem

Having positive self-esteem and feeling confident isn't always easy - there are lots of things that affect the way we feel about ourselves, from experiences in childhood to societal expectations of success and beauty.

Something people often overlook when it comes to self-confidence is our health. Think about it - when you're feeling physically and mentally well, chances are you feel better about yourself generally. What we eat and our relationship with food plays a big role in this.

Here we'll look at this concept in more detail, exploring how a balanced diet rich in nutritious, mood-boosting foods can contribute to improved self-confidence and help with self-esteem.



What is self-esteem and self-confidence?

Having positive self-esteem means, in essence, that you like and accept yourself. If you have low self-esteem you may think you aren't 'good enough', that people don't like you or that you need to change yourself. Feeling like this can affect the way you live your life and hinder you from reaching your full potential.

Similarly, confidence is all about having belief in your capabilities and not worrying what others think of you. When you don't feel confident, you may shy away from certain situations or people, which again can hold you back.

Body confidence is another aspect to keep in mind - having a poor body image can affect your confidence in other areas. This is an area where diet can play an important role;

eating intuitively and developing a healthy relationship with food can really help improve body confidence.

When we are eating out of synchronization with our bodies, some people find that feelings of guilt and shame follow and this self-judgement cycle can lead to food restriction, overeating or yo-yo dieting which have shown to have a negative impact on well-being and health outcomes.

- Jo Withers, registered dietitian.

How does food affect your confidence?

Researchers have found some fascinating links between what we eat and mental health. When it comes to confidence and self-esteem, considering your diet and making necessary changes can help reduce stress and anxiety, boost your mood and in turn help you feel more confident.

Improving your relationship with food and your relationship with your body can make a big difference too and this is where working with a nutritionist can be beneficial. Let's start by looking at mood-boosting foods.

Mood-boosting foods

Ensuring your diet includes nutritious foods with vitamins, minerals and fats is the best way to help you boost your mood and feel more confident in yourself. In addition to this, there are certain types of foods known for their mood-boosting qualities, including:

Carbohydrates and protein – These are broken down into glucose which is essential to supply the brain and muscles with energy. Too little and irregular intake of carbohydrate foods can leave you feeling tired and lacking concentration. Eating plenty of unrefined carbohydrates, for example, whole grains, vegetables and fruit, can help sustain your energy levels for longer.

Carbohydrate-rich foods may also help the brain receive more serotonin. Serotonin is made using tryptophan, which can be found in protein. Therefore, it's important to enjoy a variety of protein sources, such as meat, fish, eggs, low-fat cheeses and pulses, which also contains other essential nutrients.

Foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids - Studies suggest that omega-3 fatty acids can help to prevent low mood as they affect the neurotransmitter pathways in the brain. Ensure you are eating at least one portion of oily fish a week such as sardines, salmon, mackerel and trout.

Foods rich in vitamin D - This vitamin is thought to increase levels of serotonin in the brain, so aim to include foods in your diet that contain vitamin D such as eggs, oily fish, yoghurt and fortified cereals.

Foods rich in vitamin B - Another key vitamin for energy production, low levels of vitamin B have been noted in those with depression. Foods like spinach, broccoli, meat, dairy and eggs are great sources of B vitamins.

Foods rich in selenium - Studies have shown a link between low selenium levels and poor mood, so try to include foods like lean meat, whole grains, brazil nuts, oats, beans/legumes, seafood, nuts and seeds.



Foods to limit

As well as including all the right mood-boosting foods, you may find reducing your intake of certain foods can help with self-esteem too. Take a look below for some foods to limit:

Sugar - If you're not feeling good about yourself you may instinctively reach for a sugary snack to perk yourself up. This may work in the short-term, however, the spikes and falls in blood sugar levels will disrupt your mood and leave you feeling drawn out and lethargic in the long run. Try to replace sugary snacks for a piece of fruit, nuts or seeds instead.

Caffeine - Drinks like coffee and caffeinated soft drinks can cause mild dehydration if too much is consumed and may lead to withdrawal headaches. Similarly, to sugar, if too much caffeine is consumed it can disrupt your energy levels and cause mood swings, which over time can affect your confidence. Try to reduce the amount of caffeine you consume and up your intake of caffeine-free herbal teas and water.

Alcohol - Drinking alcohol may give your confidence a brief lift but, as too much alcohol can be both a stimulant and depressant, you are likely to feel irritable and anxious the following day. Avoid drinking over the recommended guidelines and have at least two alcohol-free days a week - your body and mind will thank you for it.

Improving your relationship with food and your body

When you have a poor relationship with food and your body, it can have a big impact on daily life. When it consumes your thoughts it can make you feel low and, at its worst, even contribute to depression and eating disorders.

Building a healthy and nurturing relationship with yourself is key. This can take time, work and a whole lot of compassion, but the results are worth it. Learning more about body neutrality may be a helpful first step for you. Many people find it both helpful and necessary to work with professionals.

You may want to look into counselling to see if a therapist can help you understand why your relationship with food and your body is the way it is and how to take those first steps to self-acceptance. To complement this work, a nutritionist can help you honor your hunger, eat more intuitively and reach any health goals you set.

Trying new foods and building confidence in the kitchen can also help to rekindle a love for food. The aim here is for you to see eating as a joyful thing, not something that triggers stress and anxiety. Understanding how different foods affect your body and mind will help hugely with this.

I take joy in food and note how the foods I eat make me feel. If I feel bloated, in pain or lethargic after a meal, I remember to avoid (or reduce my portions) next time. If a particular snack boosts my energy – I'll keep it in mind for the future. This way of eating, with its distinct lack of restrictions, rules or calorie counting, is called intuitive eating.

- Spotlight on intuitive eating.

How can a nutritionist help with self-esteem and confidence?

When you look at improving self-confidence and making lasting changes, it's important to take a holistic approach. This means looking at your lifestyle as a whole to consider what may be affecting your confidence. As we have discussed, a key factor here is diet and your relationship with food. A nutritionist will work with you to analyze your typical day-to-day diet and determine what changes you could make to help with self-esteem and confidence.

This tailored eating plan is an ideal complement to other changes to your lifestyle, supporting you as you build up your confidence.