

# 8 SUPERFOODS

## FOR SUPER-GOOD MOODS

**Lucia Giovannini shows YOGA Magazine readers how to eat your way to happiness, good health and vitality**



We all know food is necessary to maintain our physical health. Food is, after all, the fuel our body needs to grow, develop and heal. But did you know that food is also a powerful tool of transformation that can help you improve mood, energy and vitality?

Our gut is actually governed by its own nervous system called the enteric nervous system (ENS) that consists of more than 100 million nerve cells. While its main role is to control digestion, the ENS can also send signals to our central nervous system (CNS) to trigger mood changes!

Additionally, our gut also manufactures neurotransmitters like serotonin that affects our mood, digestion, sleep and memory. According to a 2012 article published by the American Psychological Association, our gut produces 90% of our body's supply of serotonin.

Thus, it is quite evident that taking care of our gut health can help boost your mood. Personally, I feel the best kinds of food to care for your gut are natural, plant-based foods. Not only are they rich in nutrients to care of your physical and mental health, but they will also support your emotional and spiritual health because they stem from non-violent sources that keep you connected, centred, and balanced with our world at large.

In this article, I will share some powerful plant-based foods that I incorporate into my diet to support overall wellbeing - physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually.

## BRAZIL NUTS

Brazil nuts are largely a monounsaturated fat, which is the good fat. They are also a vegan source of protein and other important nutrients, including magnesium, zinc, calcium, vitamin E and some B vitamins. Most notably for mental health, Brazil nuts are very rich in selenium.

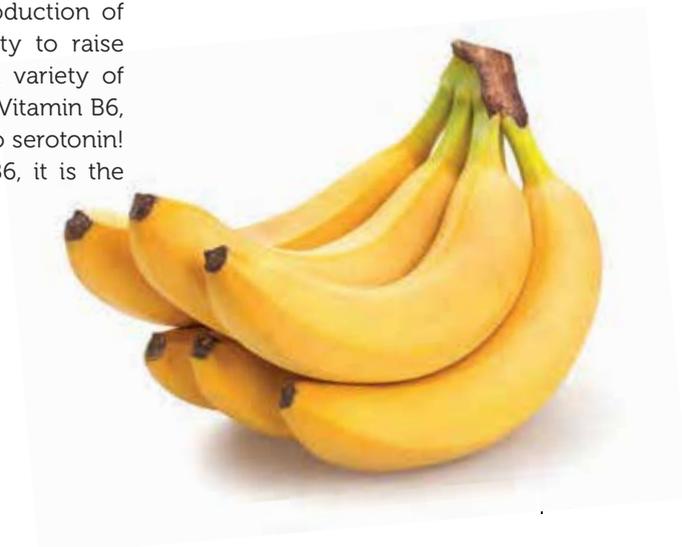
Studies have shown that people who are low on selenium have increased rates of depression, irritability, anxiety, and tiredness. Simply adding three Brazil nuts a day to your diet is enough to meet your body's daily requirement of selenium. You can simply incorporate Brazil nuts into your daily diet as a snack, or sprinkle crushed Brazil nuts onto your salads or desserts!



## BANANAS

You probably already know that bananas are rich in potassium and a good source of energy. But did you know bananas also have the perfect recipe to boost your mood? Bananas actually contain both tryptophan and Vitamin B6. So why is this such a powerful mood booster?

Well, tryptophan is an amino acid essential in the production of serotonin, the mood-lifting hormone. Due to its ability to raise serotonin levels, tryptophan has been used to treat a variety of conditions, including insomnia, depression and anxiety. Vitamin B6, on the other hand, is required to convert tryptophan into serotonin! Since bananas contain both tryptophan and vitamin B6, it is the perfect recipe for boosting mood.



## LENTILS

Just like a banana, lentils are a complex carbohydrate that assist the brain's production of serotonin to support a calmer, less anxious and happier state of mind. Lentils also help to stabilise our blood sugar level to keep our mood even. Additionally, lentils are high in folate. Deficiencies in folate have been linked to depression and mania.

Since lentils are made up of over 25% protein yet are low in calories, they are also a good source of plant-based protein that also aid in weight loss. Additionally, studies have shown that lentils are also good for heart health and can help to reduce blood pressure. The best part? This superfood is also quick to prepare, requiring only 15-20 minutes of cooking time.



## OATS

This common breakfast is a very good mood booster. With a low glycemic index, oats slowly release energy to the bloodstream which stabilises blood sugar levels, and in turn stabilises our mood. They also contain selenium which is very good for our energy and our mood.

Fret not, for oats do not have to be a boring meal. There are many creative ways you can incorporate oats into your diet. From overnight oats to smoothies and breakfast bars, to being an alternative to meat in patties, and even incorporating oats into pizza crust or risotto!



## RAW CHOCOLATE / COCOA

Before you reach out for your favourite chocolate bar, it's important to take note that I'm talking about raw chocolate. Processing cocoa destroys a lot of its natural antioxidants, and so that's why it's important to consume raw cocoa or chocolate.

Raw cocoa is a great source of bliss chemicals like serotonin and tryptophan, as well as causes the brain to release mood-enhancing endorphins. It's also packed with 40 times the antioxidants of blueberries and is full of magnesium to support a healthy heart and healthy brain.



## MACA ROOT

This nutrient-rich root is a very powerful superfood that can help reduce anxiety and stress while supporting healthy brain function. It also helps to balance hormone levels, which is especially helpful to relieve the symptoms of menopause such as hot flashes. Other powerful benefits of maca root include increasing energy levels, vitality, endurance, and libido and sexual function.

The most convenient way to consume maca root is through powder form. You can add it into your smoothies, mix it into a hot cocoa or coffee drink, or add some maca powder into the batter for your pancakes, waffles or breakfast bars.



## CHIA SEEDS

Don't underestimate this small and unassuming seed - the chia seed packs in quite a punch! Chia seeds deliver a massive amount of nutrients, antioxidants, quality protein and fibre, yet contain very few calories. This makes it a great source of fibre and protein content while helping you lose weight! Chia seeds also contain omega 3 fatty acids, so it's also a wonderful vegan alternative to omega 3 extracted from fish oil.

It's really easy to incorporate chia seeds into your daily diet. They can be sprinkled on top of almost anything - juice, cereal, toast, smoothies, cookies, yogurt, salads, puddings and more!



## WATER

Water is very important for our bodies to function properly. Even the smallest degree of water loss can impair our physical and mental wellbeing. Dehydration can really affect our ability to concentrate.

Yet most of the time, we are not even aware that our bodies are dehydrated. This is why above all else, it's important to pay attention to how much water our body is getting.

Ideally, you should be drinking 1.5-2 litres of water a day. It's important to drink this amount throughout the day, and preferably not while you eat! To help you do this, try carrying a water bottle around with you as a reminder to keep drinking throughout the day. Another powerful tip is making it habit to drink a glass of water every time you wash your hands. This way, you're not just triggered to drink water during meal times.

It's also good to begin your day with a glass of warm water and lemon juice, as it helps to alkalise your body which boosts your immune system.



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