

Supporting Healthy Mood in Kids



Fluctuations in mood are a normal part of being human. How we feel changes day to day, however, extreme shifts in mood or constantly feeling on edge, sad, cranky and having meltdowns or explosive behaviour as well as not being able to regulate emotions warrants a closer look at what is going on internally.

Our brain and nervous system function well with all the right ingredients - sleep, good food, a healthy gut and a good amount of exercise and nature time. Being out of balance in any of these areas can impact mood and behaviour.

Factors that could be impacting your child's mood and behaviour:

- Lack of restful sleep;
- Poor gut health;
- Poor diet;
- Not enough physical movement and time outside;
- Life stress from school, activities, and relationships (including home and family life);
- Underlying health conditions, for example, allergies, intolerances as well as genetic factors;
- Neurodivergence including autism and ADHD;
- Pyrroluria and mutations in the MTHFR gene can also impact mood and behaviour.

Foods that support a healthy brain and mood often have an anti-inflammatory effect. **Neuroinflammation** is becoming more prevalent and is now known as a contributing factor in mood.

Foods that support mood and reduce neuroinflammation:

- Increase omega 3 fatty acids rich foods including fish, nuts (walnuts), seeds (flax, hemp & chia);
- Antioxidant-rich foods including a broad range of colourful fruits and vegetables;
- Herbal medicines and nutrients that reduce inflammation: saffron, turmeric, zinc;
- Supplements we recommend: I'm Nutrients Calm Mind (contains saffron & zinc); Metagenics Omega Brain Care for Kids; Metagenics Algal Oil (both are high in DHA)

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Gut-brain axis:

The gut-brain axis is a 2-way 'highway' where the brain communicates with the gut and the gut communicates with the brain. A disturbance in gut flora (dysbiosis) can contribute/cause mood disorders.

Foods that support the microbiome:

- Prebiotic foods - see our [Prebiotic Fibre cheat sheet](#) for more information;
- A diverse wholefood diet rich in fibre and colour;
- Probiotic-rich foods like ferments including kefir, yoghurt, kombucha, sauerkraut;
- Supplements we recommend: Biomedica Mood Fx (this contains saffron and 2 strains of probiotics shown to improve mood); Prebiotics - Metagenics Gi Regulate.

Sleep:

Sleep is essential for supporting the brain and nervous system to repair and rejuvenate.

Factors to consider with sleep:

- Address underlying factors such as allergies, mouth breathing;
- Practice good sleep hygiene, including minimizing screen time in the afternoon and before bed;
- Daily exposure to sunlight;
- Daily movement;
- Support gut health - serotonin (a precursor to melatonin) is produced in the gut.

Foods to support sleep:

- Protein is important as it provides the building blocks for many of the neurotransmitters that help calm the nervous system and support restful sleep;
- Supplements we recommend: Give Back Health L-glycine (helps to support falling and staying asleep); Metagenics Calm X (contains magnesium, taurine and B vitamins for nervous system support).

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Teens:

Hormonal changes and fluctuations in adolescence can create and contribute to mood swings, changes in sleep habits, motivation, depression and anxiety. You can refer to our Supporting Teenagers cheat sheet for more information [Supporting Teens cheat sheet](#).

Key nutrients to support teen health: zinc, magnesium, B vitamins and omega-3 fatty acids.

Connection:

Connecting with your child is so important for their growth and development as well as their feeling of safety and security. How we connect with our kids changes over time, with age and as their interests change. We also change and develop new interests, and become busier with life and work.

Here are some easy ways to connect with your kids:

- Share one meal a day together;
- Enjoy a cup of tea outside;
- Talk about their day with them;
- Pick a moment you enjoyed about your day and share that with them;
- Plan an outing or a movie night;
- Place your own screens away;
- Play some music.

Your child will change as they grow and develop. Here are some red flags to look out for if you think their changes are out of alignment with 'normal' growth and development. If you're unsure, reach out to a health professional or use the services listed below.

- Trouble sleeping or constantly overtired;
- Consistent low mood (longer than 2 weeks);
- Sudden mood or behavioural changes;
- Irritability;

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- Sudden weight gain or loss;
- Loss of appetite or change in dietary intake;
- Loss of interest or a drop in academic performance;
- Withdrawal from regular social events, family and friends;
- Behaving in a way they have outgrown (bedwetting, thumb sucking);
- Self-harm or suicidal thoughts.

For more information on supporting your child's mental health, go [here](#)

If your child is seeking help for their mental health, refer them to some of these relevant and useful support services:

- [Kids Helpline](#) (1800 55 1800) to talk to a childhood counsellor;
- [Youth Beyond Blue](#) (1300 224 636);
- [Sydney Children's Hospital Network Mental Health and Intellectual Disability Hub](#) specifically to support the mental health of children under the age of 18 in NSW with intellectual or developmental disabilities.

If you as a parent are thinking you may need some support yourself, please reach out to any of the following services:

- [Head to Health](#) (1800 595 212) a free confidential service to help connect you with the right services and keep you mentally healthy;
- [Beyond Blue launch](#) (1300 224 636) to chat with a counsellor or connect with a peer support community;
- [Lifeline](#) (13 11 14) for inclusive, non-judgemental and confidential support
- Mental Health Line (1800 011 511) is a NSW state-wide phone service linking people to the right mental health support services;
- [13 YARN](#) (13 92 76) is a First Nations crisis support service for the mob who are feeling overwhelmed or having difficulties coping.

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