

# HERKIMER COUNTY OFFICE FOR THE AGING

## NUTRITION NEWS

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### Merry Christmas!



With Christmas right around the corner, it is one of the best times of the year. But it can also be a difficult time, especially for those who are alone or have recently lost a loved one. Depression is common around the holidays, and feelings of loneliness, sadness, and a sense of being overwhelmed can be difficult to deal with.

Depression affects about 6 million Americans over the age of 65. A more sobering statistic is that only about 10% of this population receives treatment for depression. Depression, while often co-existing with other medical conditions in the elderly, can exacerbate certain illnesses. For example, depression in the elderly increases the risk of cardiac disease. It also affects an individual's ability to successfully rehabilitate from an illness or recent surgery.

Once depression is diagnosed, there are treatment options that are available. A combination of medication, counseling, and social involvements can be part of an effective treatment plan. It may be helpful to be aware that antidepressant medications generally take longer

to work in the elderly population than they do in individuals under the age of 65.

While medical treatment is an important component, complementary therapies can ease the symptoms of depression as well. Getting involved within the community is a way to feel purposeful and surround yourself with other people who may be in a similar situation. While the Covid pandemic has made volunteering more difficult, there are still opportunities around! And because of the pandemic, it is important to stay on top of your mental health and make positive changes where possible.

Depression can have a large impact on your appetite, diet, and intake. However, these effects can vary from person to person. While some individuals who are depressed tend to overeat, others stop eating and see a gradual decline in weight and well being. But there may be some foods that can actually improve your mood. The following foods have been singled out through research. Increasing

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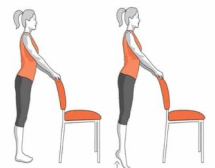
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### Monthly Exercise: Toe Lifts

This strength training exercise for seniors also improves balance.

You'll need a chair or a counter.



Stand straight and put your arms in front of you. Raise yourself up on your toes as high as you can go, then gently lower yourself. Don't lean too far forward on the chair or counter. Lift and lower yourself 20 times.

your intake of these foods may give your mood a boost through the long, cold winter.

- \* **Chocolate:** eating dark chocolate every day (1.4 ounces) for two weeks reduced stress hormones including cortisol in people who were highly stressed. Researchers believe this is due to the antioxidants that are found in dark chocolate.
- \* **Carbs:** even though carbohydrates are sometimes blamed for packing on the pounds, people who followed a very low carb diet (only 20-40 grams daily) experienced more depression, anxiety, and anger than those who ate a diet moderate in carbohydrates. Researchers speculate that carbs promote the production of serotonin.
- \* **Fruits and Vegetables:** individuals who ate a diet rich in fruits and vegetables report fewer feelings of depression than those whose diet was made up of a large amount of desserts, fried foods, processed foods, refined grains, and high fat dairy products. The antioxidants present in fruits and vegetables, along with folate, can also reduce your feelings of depression.
- \* **Fish:** eating oily, fatty fish, which are high in omega-3's can positively affect your mood. Omega-3's alter the production of brain chemicals associated with mood, such as dopamine and serotonin.
- \* **Saffron:** saffron is a spice that is also sold in caplet form. It is unclear why saffron boosts your mood, but a recent study showed that individuals who had a saffron capsule daily (as opposed to those who had a placebo) reported fewer feelings of depression and discontent.
- \* **Coconut:** if you're under stress, the scent of coconut may blunt your natural "fight

or flight" response. This may not be unique to coconut however. Researchers propose that inhaling any pleasant scent enhances your alertness and soothes your response to stress.

- \* **Tea:** drinking tea daily may promote a feeling of alertness and overall well being. Researchers believe that theanine (an amino acid found in tea) in combination with caffeine may improve focus and attention. This may, in turn, promote a satisfied feeling, which leads to an overall feeling of well being.

Don't forget to enrich your diet with foods high in Vitamin B12, folic acid, selenium, and Vitamin D. All of these nutrients are thought to play a role in keeping you mentally healthy.

While these foods may boost your mood, don't underestimate the effect that other foods can have on adversely impacting your mood. Reduce your intake of saturated fats, alcohol, highly processed foods, and high fat foods to keep your mood stable.

You may also have success in combating your depressive feelings through behavioral changes. Here are a few tips:

1. **Get in a routine:** establishing a general daily routine can help you get more structure into your life.



2. Set goals: setting small goals, and then achieving them, can help alleviate the feeling of helplessness that often accompanies depression.
3. Exercise: it temporarily boosts endorphins and may also have long term benefits.
4. Eat healthy: if depression tends to make you overeat, gaining some control over your intake may help you feel better.
5. Get enough sleep: simply put, getting too little sleep can make depression worse. Try not to nap. Try to go to bed and get up at the same time each day.
6. Take on responsibilities: staying involved and having daily responsibilities can be a good natural treatment of depression.
7. Check with your doctor before starting supplements: while fish oil and folic acid may improve depression, more definitive studies must be conducted.
8. Try something new: challenging ourselves can also raise the level of “feel good” blood chemicals.
9. Try to have fun: make sure you have time for things that you enjoy.

Individuals who suffer from chronic health conditions are at high risk for becoming depressed. But those who care for the chronically ill are also at an increased risk for depression. For example, dementia takes a toll on loved ones that are left to do the day to day tasks, in addition to the added jobs involved when caring for someone. These tasks include shopping for food, cooking and preparing meals, cleaning the house, paying the bills, giving medicine, helping the sick individual toilet, bathe, and dress, helping to feed the patient, and providing company as well as emotional support. It is easy to see why caregivers may require some care and assistance of their own,.

There are ways to combat the risk of depression when caring for a sick loved one. Making sure you have time carved out for yourself is important. Have a little bit of time set aside every day, if possible, to do something that you enjoy. Take a relaxing walk, bake a special treat, or just make a phone call to a friend to chat.

Keep in mind that there is assistance out there for caregivers as well. You can start by contacting the Office for the Aging to steer you in the right direction. Respite care, adult day care, home health care, and transportation can all help ease the difficulties of caring for a loved one.

Time is at a premium when caring for someone, but picking up a hobby can also be beneficial. Reading a new book, trying a new recipe out, or taking up a craft are all ideas for a relaxing distraction. If you enjoy cooking and baking, the next page may provide some inspiration!



### **Chocolate Mint Candies Cookies**

3/4 cup butter

1 1/2 cups brown sugar

2 tbs water

2 cups semisweet chocolate chips

2 large eggs

- 2 1/2 cups flour
- 1 1/4 tsp baking soda
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 3 (4.5 ounce) packages chocolate covered thin mints

In a saucepan over medium heat, cook the sugar, butter and water, stirring occasionally until melted. Remove from heat, stir in the chocolate chips until melted and set aside to cool for 10 minutes.

Pour the chocolate mixture into a large bowl, and beat in the eggs, one at a time. Combine the



flour, baking soda and salt, stir into the chocolate mixture. Cover and refrigerate dough for at least 1 hour.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease cookie sheets. Roll cookie dough into walnut sized balls and place 2 inches apart onto the prepared cookie sheets.

Bake for 8 to 10 minutes in the preheated oven, be careful not to overbake. When cookies come out of the oven, press one mint wafer into the top of each cookie and let sit for 1 minute. When the mint is softened, swirl with the back of a spoon or toothpick to make a pattern with the green filling of the mint wafer. For smaller cookies, break mints in half.

**HEAP**

If you received HEAP last year but have not yet received an application for this year, please call our Office at 867-1195.

If you did not receive HEAP last year but want to apply this year, please call our Office at 867-1195.

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**Hot Spiced Holiday Tea**

- 6 cups water, 1 tsp whole cloves, 1 (1 inch) piece cinnamon stick, 6 teabags (plain, such as Lipton), 3/4 cup orange juice, 1/2 cup white sugar, 1/4 cup pineapple juice, 2 tbs. lemon juice

Pour water into a pot; add cloves and cinnamon stick. Bring water to a boil; remove from heat. Add tea bags to water and set aside to steep until the tea is your preferred strength, at least 5 minutes. Remove and discard cloves, cinnamon stick, and tea bags. Stir juices and sugar together in a saucepan and bring to a boil. Cook and stir until sugar dissolves. Pour juice mixture into the spiced tea and serve hot.

