

HERKIMER COUNTY OFFICE FOR THE AGING

NUTRITION NEWS

WRITTEN BY: SHANNON DAVIS, RD, CDN

LAYOUT BY: REGINA PIZZO

DECEMBER 2025

Happy Holidays!

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 who 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. Eating at one of our congregate sites provides you with not only a nutritious meal, but also the opportunity to visit and interact with your peers. Volunteering at a congregate site is also an option that can promote a feeling of wellbeing and usefulness. Opportunities are all around you!

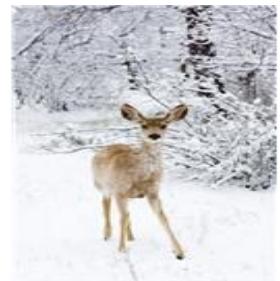


INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

MOOD
BOOSTING
FOODS 2

DEPRESSION IN
CAREGIVERS 3

EGGNOG PIE



Depression can have a large impact on your appetite, intake, and diet. However, these effects can vary from person to person. While some individuals who are depressed tend to overeat, others stop eating and begin 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 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) experiences more depression, anxiety, and anger than those who ate a diet moderate in carbohydrates. Researchers speculate that carbs promote the production of serotonin (a “feel-good” hormone).
- ◆ 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 felling 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 possible 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.

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!

Caregivers are also at increased risk of developing their own chronic health conditions. The physical, emotional, and mental stresses of taking care of a loved one puts extra strain on the body. Studies show that caregivers have an increased risk for developing the following health problems:

- Alcohol, tobacco, and drug abuse
 - Anxiety disorders
 - Cancer
 - Diabetes
- Heart disease, including high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and heart attack
 - Heartburn
 - Infection
 - Obesity

- Pain, such as muscle or joint pain or headaches
- Stress and depression

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.

Regardless of the reasons for depression, there are ways to combat these feelings through behavior changes. Here are a few tips:

1. Get in a routine: establishing a generally daily routine can help you get more structure in your life.
2. Set goals: setting small goals and then achieving them, can help alleviate the feelings of helplessness that often accompanies depression.
3. Exercise: it temporarily boosts endorphins and may also have long term benefits.
4. Eat health: 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.

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**.

HERKIMER COUNTY OFFICE FOR THE AGING

109 Mary St., Herkimer, NY 13350

Phone: 315-867-1121

Fax: 315-867-1448

Email: hcofa@herkimercounty.org

Web: www.herkimercounty.org; then ‘departments’ then ‘Office for the Aging’

Funding for this newsletter is from the NYS Office for the Aging & Herkimer County

Lastly, here’s a holiday recipe to boost your mood!

Eggnog Pie

1 (0.25 ounce) package unflavored gelatin, 1/4 c cold water, 1 cup milk, 1/2 c white sugar, 2 eggs lightly beaten, 1/4 c rum, 1 cup whipping cream, 1/4 pinch sugar, 1 baked pie shell, 1/2 tsp ground nutmeg

In a small bowl, combine gelatin and cold water; set aside to soften. Combine milk and 1/2 cup sugar in glass bowl. Microwave for 3 minutes or until milk begins to boil.

In a steady stream, pour hot milk into beaten eggs, whisking constantly. Cook custard in the microwave whisking after each minute, until it thickens. Stir in the gelatin mix until melted. Stir in rum.

Let filling cool to room temperature. In a medium bowl, whip cream until soft peaks form; beat in 1/4 cup sugar.

Set aside 1/2 cup of whipped cream for garnish; keep refrigerated. Fold remaining whipped cream into egg mixture. Pour filling into pie crust and refrigerate 4 hours or overnight.

Garnish with reserved whipped cream and a dusting of nutmeg.

