

Healthy food is key to a healthy mind

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The risk of developing depression is directly linked to diet, lifestyle and exercise, a ground-breaking index developed by Swinburne researchers has found.

The Risk Index for Depression (RID) developed by Swinburne lecturer

Dr Joanna Dipnall, reveals that an individual is more likely to become depressed if their diet is poor, their [lifestyle](#) is erratic and they do not [exercise](#).

Dr Dipnall, who lectures in the Department of Statistics Data Science and Epidemiology, says she developed the RID to help identify the most common risk factors for depression and to give [health](#) professionals an early intervention tool.

"The RID is about prevention," she says.

"It aims to identify individuals with a predisposition to depression as well as which is the key determinant that would reduce this risk."

Dr Dipnall says the RID is the first [risk index](#) of its kind and will help clinicians and sufferers to identify the early signs of depression.

The research found that the risk of depression is most closely linked to our diet, followed by physiological factors and then lifestyle patterns such as sleep and exercise.

Dr Dipnall says that a fibre rich diet is the key to a healthy mind.

"A diet comprised of fibre-rich foods such as leafy green salads, vegetables and whole grains has been consistently associated with a reduced risk for depression," she explains.

"At the same time, an unhealthy diet high in processed foods and high fat dairy has previously been found to be associated with increased odds for depression."

And she says the same is true for the opposite.

"Lifestyle factors such as problems sleeping, snacking behaviour and exercise activity have all been found to be associated with individuals' mental health," she says

While diet has long been associated with mental health, Dr Dipnall believes more research is being conducted on the role that the gut plays in [mental health](#).

"Dietary fibre appears central to gut health, which has recently been a key focus of depression research," she says.

"Our findings provide further support for [diet](#) as a key modifiable factor in gut health, and in depression [risk](#)."

Dr Dipnall says future research is being planned to build on the current RID model. Dr Dipnall's PhD was awarded by Deakin University with a supervision collaboration between Swinburne and Deakin universities.

If you are experiencing [depression](#) or anxiety, support is available by calling [beyondblue](#) on 1300 22 4636.

Provided by Swinburne University of Technology

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