



# MARCH

## The Importance of Nutrition & Mental Health

### Prioritize Your Mental Health & Well-Being in 2021

Nutrition plays a key role in an individual's physical health and directly affects emotional well-being. In light of the pandemic, access to certain nutritional foods and the ability to maintain a healthy routine has become more difficult, causing a decline in mental health and spike in food insecurity across the country. Bringing awareness to these complex issues and understanding how our bodies and minds function in response to them cannot be understated.

#### HOW NUTRITION & MENTAL HEALTH ARE CONNECTED

Nutrition is inextricably linked to health and overall well-being. The connection between nutrition and mental health, stems from the close relationship between your brain, how it functions and what you put into your body.

Having access to nutritional food and developing a healthy lifestyle goes beyond skin health, gut health, and weight management. It is also critical for cellular health and reducing the risk of noncommunicable diseases according to Maya Feller, Registered Dietician and MBG Functional Nutrition Coach.

#### HOW FOOD AFFECTS HOW YOU FEEL

Serotonin is a neurotransmitter that helps regulate sleep and appetite, mediate moods, and inhibit pain. Approximately 95% of your serotonin is produced in your digestive system, which is lined with a hundred million nerve cells. This means the digestive system not only helps digest what you eat, but also guides your emotions and plays an essential role when it comes to your health.

*\*Researchers have been studying the connection between nutrition and our mental health for years, and the common theme found is this — good bacteria not only influences what your body digests and absorbs, it also affects the degree of inflammation throughout your body, as well as your mood and energy level.*

#### ELIMINATING FOOD & NUTRITION DISPARITIES

This year, an estimated 54 million Americans, including 18 million American children, are now food insecure. Meaning, the limited availability of nutritional, safe foods has doubled and child food insecurity has tripled during the current pandemic. The USDA found that adults with disabilities, especially mental health issues, have especially high rates of hunger. Low food security disrupts individual eating patterns and can reduce food intake, ultimately increasing the risk of developing chronic health conditions.

Being mindful of the foods entering your body and aware of your body's response to them can help in developing a healthy routine. Understanding this connection of nutrition and mental health, can enable you and those across the country affected by mental health disorders and food insecurity, to maximize nutritional health and overall well-being.