

## Mood-Boosting Foods

These superfoods can cure what ails you—including those winter blues.

By Yishane Lee  
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If you're feeling down, take heart; help is at hand—and it's as close as your pantry. A number of "superfoods"—so called because they're loaded with nutrients and disease-fighting antioxidants—will not only keep you healthy, they'll boost your mood, too. The bonus? They're all tasty options that are perfect for lifting your spirits on a gloomy winter's day.



### 1. Chicken Noodle Soup

All proteins, including meat and dairy, contain tryptophan, an amino acid that the body converts into the happiness hormone serotonin.

"The catch is that other amino acids are better at passing from the bloodstream into the brain," says Elaine Magee, MPH, RD, the California-based author of several cookbooks, including *Food Synergy*, and the founder of [RecipeDoctor.com](http://RecipeDoctor.com) [1].

To help clear a path for tryptophan, Magee suggests eating carbohydrates (like whole-grain pasta) with your chicken soup to help your brain produce that happy-making serotonin.



### 2. Dried Beans

This staple of Latino cuisine packs a real nutritional punch. Beans are a great source of folic acid, which can help prevent heart disease. They're also high in iron, to give you the energy you need when you're in the doldrums, and fiber, to help you feel satiated, says Marcela Xavier, a New York-based certified integrative nutrition coach and

cofounder of [NourishingMoms.com](http://NourishingMoms.com) [2].



### 3. Dark Chocolate

Along with heart-healthy flavonoid antioxidants, chocolate contains serotonin and phenylethylamine, both of which have been proven to fight depression.

"When you eat chocolate, the chemicals create the same reaction in

your body as when you're happy or in love," Xavier says. Choose dark chocolate or unsweetened cacao beans or nibs for maximum benefit.



#### 4. Butternut Squash

Winter squash has loads of beta-carotene (thus the signature orange flesh) to fight off pesky viral infections and keep you healthy all winter. Plus it contains potassium, which gets depleted under stress. And, says Xavier, "squash is also naturally sweet and can help balance out cravings for sweets." This includes sugary baked goods, which—

though they may provide a temporary boost—can actually contribute to mood swings.



#### 5. Canned Tuna

The humble tuna scores a nutritional triple threat: B vitamins, omega-3 fatty acids and vitamin D. "The B-complex vitamins are essential to mental and emotional well-being," says [Sharon Richter](#) <sup>[3]</sup>, RD, a New York-based dietitian and consultant for school-lunch programs and gyms. "They cannot be stored in our bodies, so we depend entirely on our diet to supplement them."

What's more, B vitamins are destroyed by alcohol, refined sugars, nicotine and caffeine—all of which you may have overindulged in during the holidays. If you make a tuna sandwich with Greek yogurt instead of mayonnaise you'll also get B-12, which helps regulate the brain and nervous system. Tuna's omega-3 fatty acids (which are often referred to as "good fats") reduce the inflammation that can lead to depression and other chronic diseases, Magee says.

Another nutritional element of tuna, vitamin D, increases levels of serotonin in the brain, says Magee, citing a University of Toronto study that showed that people's moods improved when they had higher levels of the vitamin in their bodies. There are only a few food sources of vitamin D, but fish such as tuna is one of them. To minimize your mercury intake, choose canned light tuna over albacore steaks.



#### 6. Oatmeal

Oats stabilize your blood sugar, which in turn regulates mood. (No one is in a good mood after a sugar crash.) "Its fiber content gives you longer-lasting energy, so you feel sustained and not hungry for a longer period of time," Xavier says.