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Science backs two week diet of more fruit & vege to improve well-being

5+ A Day

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Media release from 5+ A Day

Our spirits often lift when spring arrives each year but eating more fruit and vegetables is another proven way to boost your psychological well-being.

5+ A Day General Manager Paula Dudley says it's been shown that eating more fresh fruit and vegetables each day can lift people's spirits within about a fortnight.

"They are much more beneficial for your overall well-being than many people realise, as well as providing nutritional advantages such as reducing cholesterol, lowering blood pressure and improving immunity," she says.

Auckland-based clinical psychologist, Dr Natalie Flynn, says there's a multitude of research linking fruit and vegetable consumption to increased well-being and less depression and anxiety.

A recent study by Otago University's Department of Psychology found young adults who ate two extra daily servings of fresh fruit and vegetables reported significant improvements in their feelings of vitality, flourishing and motivation in just two weeks.

"Vitality is when we feel full of life and 'flourishing' is when we feel a sense of purpose and experience social and emotional well-being," Dr Flynn explains.

"There is clear evidence that increasing our daily intake of fruit and vegetables has a range of psychological benefits. Interestingly, the Otago study showed that actually giving people fresh produce to eat was far more beneficial than just reminding them to buy and eat more.

"That ties in with what we know about human behaviour – we find it hard to plan ahead and are more likely to eat what's in front of us. So it's a great idea to consciously stock up on fruit and vegetables this spring as a way to boost your emotional well-being."

Dr Flynn says another study carried out by an Australian university earlier this year showed people who suffered from depression could reduce the severity of their symptoms by eating a diet high in fruit, vegetables, wholegrains, legumes, fish, lean red meats, olive oil and nuts.

"So these studies taken together answer the question: can well-being and mental health improve with diet. Yes!"

Now that spring has officially arrived, Dudley says new season potatoes and avocados will be in plentiful supply. Asparagus, fresh herbs like mint or basil, and tropical fruit like mangoes and bananas are also great at this time of year.

"Fresh is best because the antioxidants, vitamins and minerals are all still intact. The heat from cooking can deplete some of the goodness so eat them raw or lightly steamed if possible."

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