

# High-Potassium Diets Support Better Mood and Mental Health

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## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Low potassium intake is strongly linked to higher rates of depression and anxiety, making this mineral a key factor in protecting your mental health
- › Large-scale studies from Korea, the U.S., and China all show that people who consume more potassium experience greater emotional stability and fewer mood disorders
- › Most Americans eat nearly twice as much sodium as potassium, reversing the ratio your body needs and driving risks like memory decline, osteoporosis, and mood struggles
- › Whole foods such as spinach, broccoli, beet greens, tomatoes, cantaloupe, and grass fed yogurt are some of the most effective ways to naturally boost your potassium levels
- › Choosing natural salts over processed table salt and gradually replacing packaged foods with fresh produce helps restore balance, supporting steadier energy and improved resilience to stress

Depression is not just a passing sadness – it's a condition that reshapes daily life, sapping energy, clouding concentration, and pulling people away from the things that matter most. It strikes across ages and cultures, leaving many caught in a cycle of exhaustion, poor sleep, and emotional heaviness that makes even simple routines feel overwhelming.

When ignored, it typically doesn't fade; it deepens, often opening the door to chronic illness, reduced quality of life, and even shortened lifespan. What often gets overlooked is how deeply nutrition affects this struggle. Minerals you might think of as basic building blocks for bone strength or blood pressure control are also central to brain health.

The balance of minerals in your diet influences how your nerve cells communicate, how stable your emotions feel, and how resilient you are to stress. Among them, potassium stands out as a nutrient most people don't get enough of. Found naturally in fruits, vegetables, dairy, and beans, it supports smooth electrical signaling in your brain, steady muscle contraction, and fluid balance.

When your intake falls short, the effects ripple into how your brain regulates mood. This connection between diet and mental well-being is gaining attention worldwide, and researchers have begun examining large-scale data to reveal just how strongly minerals, especially potassium, shape emotional health.

## **Mineral Intake Shapes Mood Health in Surprising Ways**

In a study published in *Nutrients*, scientists analyzed large-scale health and nutrition surveys from South Korea and the U.S. to see if mineral intake was tied to depression risk.<sup>1</sup>

They focused on seven minerals – sodium, potassium, phosphorus, magnesium, iron, zinc, and calcium – and used data from more than 22,000 Korean adults and nearly 10,000 American adults. By comparing these massive datasets, the researchers looked for patterns showing whether people with higher or lower mineral intake were more likely to experience depression.

- **Adults with depression tended to have lower mineral intake overall** – The data showed that people with depression ate fewer minerals compared to those without depression. In Korea, 4.1% of participants were depressed, while in the U.S., 6.2% fell into that category.

Beyond just depression rates, those affected also had lower income, education, and more **chronic conditions**. The striking finding was that in both countries, potassium stood out as a consistent mineral linked to lower depression risk.

- **Potassium intake was the only mineral tied to better mood in both nations** – In Korea, sodium, **potassium**, and phosphorus were linked to less depression, while in the U.S., potassium, zinc, and iron showed protective associations. This overlap highlights potassium as the mineral that truly connects diet to mental health on a global scale. This means a simple change like eating more potassium-rich foods could directly affect your resilience against low mood.
- **Sodium showed unique results in Korea because of diet patterns** – While Americans often get **sodium from processed foods**, Koreans consume large amounts of sodium from fermented vegetables, soups, and stews. These foods deliver sodium in a whole-food context.

This difference likely explains why sodium was protective in Korea but not in the U.S. The lesson for you is that source matters. Getting minerals from real food is not the same as eating them from processed meals.

- **Why potassium protects mood** – Potassium balances electrical signaling in brain cells and stabilizes neurotransmitter activity. Low potassium disrupts nerve excitability, making it harder for your brain to regulate emotions. Potassium channels, which act like gates in brain cells, are also directly involved in mood regulation. When those gates malfunction from low potassium intake, depression risk rises.
- **Food choices drive emotional well-being** – This research makes it clear: minerals aren't just for bone or heart health – they directly shape your mood. Paying attention to what's on your plate isn't just about blood pressure or digestion. It's about safeguarding your mental health. By choosing potassium-rich foods and balancing sodium intake with whole food sources, you give your brain the raw materials it needs to maintain emotional stability.

## Low Potassium Levels Linked to Mood Struggles

A study published in *Brain and Behavior* investigated whether low potassium intake, measured through 24-hour urine samples, was tied to depression and anxiety in adults.<sup>2</sup> Urine testing was used because 77% of the potassium you eat gets excreted, making it a reliable way to gauge daily intake. The study included 546 adults from Xinjiang, China, who provided urine samples and completed standardized depression and anxiety questionnaires.

- **People with lower potassium intake had worse mental health scores** – Participants were divided into three groups based on how much potassium was found in their urine. Those in the lowest group were nearly three times more likely to report depression compared to the highest group, and their depression scores were significantly higher.

Anxiety followed a similar pattern, with those in the middle group facing double the odds of anxiety symptoms compared to the high-potassium group. This means that not getting enough potassium in your diet increases your odds of living with both low mood and anxiety.

- **The overlap between depression and anxiety was especially striking** – People who had both conditions together were much more common in the low and middle potassium groups. About 10% to 11% of participants with low or mid-level potassium showed both depression and anxiety, compared with less than 3% in the high-potassium group.

This suggests that adequate potassium intake doesn't just affect single conditions – it helps buffer you against the burden of multiple mental health challenges occurring at the same time.

- **The study confirmed the findings even after accounting for other factors** – To make sure results weren't skewed, the researchers adjusted for variables like [blood pressure](#), diabetes, body mass index, smoking, alcohol use, and sleep quality. Even

with those factors accounted for, the association between low potassium and mood disorders held strong. This strengthens the case that potassium itself plays a direct role in how stable and balanced you feel mentally.

## How to Restore Potassium and Protect Your Mood

If your potassium intake is too low, your brain and body pay the price. The studies you've just learned about show that when potassium levels drop, depression and anxiety rise.

That means one powerful step you can take for your emotional health is to bring this mineral back into balance through your everyday choices. You don't need expensive treatments or complicated plans – just steady, consistent changes that give your brain and nerves what they need to work smoothly. Here are five steps to start with:

- 1. Load your plate with potassium-rich foods every day** – Think in terms of whole, colorful foods. Bananas, sweet potatoes, grass fed yogurt, and leafy greens are some of the richest sources of potassium. If you usually eat a lot of processed foods or takeout meals, swapping them with potassium-rich whole foods in your daily routine will shift your potassium balance in the right direction.
- 2. Fix your sodium-to-potassium ratio** – Your body works best when you eat about five times **more potassium than sodium**, yet the average American gets nearly double the sodium instead. If most of your meals come from boxes, bags, or restaurants, your ratio is upside down.

This imbalance drives far more than high blood pressure – it's linked to memory decline, kidney stones, osteoporosis, and rheumatoid arthritis.<sup>3</sup> Shifting your balance means choosing fresh, potassium-rich foods more often while cutting back on refined, salty processed products.

- 3. Choose real food sources of potassium** – The simplest way to improve your mineral balance is to add foods that naturally pack in potassium. As long as you tolerate them, spinach, beet greens, broccoli, Swiss chard, winter squash, tomatoes,

oranges, cantaloupe, coconut water, carrots, kefir, and grass fed yogurt are all excellent options.

I recommend you treat these like daily "mood protectors" on your plate. Every serving helps your nerves fire more smoothly, your brain stay more focused, and your mood stay more even.

- 4. Switch from processed salt to natural salt** — Refined white table salt is stripped of supportive minerals. It contains only trace amounts of potassium, about 151 milligrams (mg) per kilogram (kg). Natural unprocessed salts contain over 2,000 mg of potassium per kg.<sup>4</sup> This difference matters. You still get flavor, but you also give your body minerals that support better nerve and brain function rather than draining them away.
- 5. Make gradual changes that stick** — You don't need to overhaul your diet overnight to feel the benefits of better sodium-to-potassium balance. Start by swapping one processed meal or snack each day for a whole-food option, like replacing chips with carrot sticks or cantaloupe.

These small, steady shifts lower processed salt while boosting potassium naturally. If you keep building on these changes week after week, your body adapts, your taste for salty packaged food fades, and your mood and energy become more stable without you feeling deprived.

## **FAQs About Potassium and Mental Health**

**Q: How is potassium linked to depression and anxiety?**

**A:** Research shows that people who eat less potassium are significantly more likely to experience depression and anxiety. Large studies in Korea, the U.S., and China found that low potassium intake consistently increased the risk of mood disorders, while higher intake supported emotional stability.<sup>5,6</sup>

**Q: Why is my sodium-to-potassium ratio important for mental health?**

**A:** Your body functions best when you get about five times more potassium than sodium. Most Americans do the opposite, consuming nearly double the sodium instead. This imbalance raises the risk not only for high blood pressure but also for depression, memory problems, osteoporosis, and other chronic health conditions.

**Q: What foods are the best sources of potassium?**

**A:** Whole foods are the most effective way to raise potassium levels. Some of the richest sources include spinach, beet greens, broccoli, Swiss chard, winter squash, tomatoes, oranges, cantaloupe, bananas, coconut water, carrots, kefir, and grass fed yogurt.

**Q: How does processed salt differ from natural salt?**

**A:** Refined white table salt is stripped of supportive minerals and contains almost no potassium – about 151 mg per kg. In contrast, natural unprocessed salts contain more than 2,000 mg of potassium per kilogram, along with other trace minerals that support brain and nerve health.<sup>7</sup>

**Q: What are simple steps I can take to improve my sodium-to-potassium balance?**

**A:** Start small. Replace processed foods with potassium-rich fruits and vegetables, switch from table salt to natural salt, and aim to add at least one extra serving of fresh produce daily. Even gradual changes shift your balance, reduce excess processed salt, and give your brain the minerals it needs for better mood and energy.

## Sources and References

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- <sup>1, 5</sup> [Nutrients August 9, 2025, 17\(16\) 2593](#)
- <sup>2, 6</sup> [Brain and Behavior March 15, 2023, 13\(4\):e2842](#)
- <sup>3</sup> [Arthritis Research & Therapy March 27, 2021](#)
- <sup>4, 7</sup> [Foods. 2020 Oct; 9\(10\): 1490, Table 2](#)