




What's on Your Plate?: Mental Health and Food

By: Logan Sherrer, a doctorate of occupational therapy student

Objectives

1. Participants able to demonstrate creating healthy meal planning routines to benefit mental health and climbing
2. Participants are able to explain the benefits of healthy eating and meal preparation for climbing and mental health ✦
3. Participants possess a greater value for mindful eating ✦



**How do different
types of food
make you feel?**

The Positive Effects of Food on Mental Health

- 95% of your body's serotonin is derived from our gastrointestinal tract
 - There are neuron tracts that link directly from our gut to our brain, so the food we eat is important for our mental health
- A mediterranean diet or traditional japanese diet is associated with a 25-35% reduction in depression symptoms when compared to a typical western diet
- Studies show that a healthier diet is positively associated with more self-confidence, higher motivation, and less incidences of anxiety and depression




Negative Effects of Food on Mental Health

- A traditional “western diet” is strongly correlated to decreased serotonin release in the brain
 - A decrease in serotonin leads to higher incidences of depression, anxiety, and other mental health diagnoses
 - The western diet is associated with higher amounts of processed foods, more sugar, more meat, and more food high in trans fats
- Diets high in sugar and meat consumption lead to decreased energy and focus
 - Having decreased energy leads to less engagement in occupations that bring us joy
 - Lower levels of energy impact our ability to exercise and feel confident doing things like climbing
- Diets high in acidic foods, trans fats, and sugar disrupt our sleep
 - Sleep is vital for our brains recovery each day
 - Poor sleep is correlated with higher incidences of depression and anxiety

Disclaimers on Food

- You should always eat what makes you feel happy
 - Sometimes if it makes you feel good to pursue less traditionally “healthy” food that is OKAY and should never be something to feel bad about
- In times where our mental health is impacted sometimes eating foods we are not used to may not feel the best
 - Foods that we associate with comfort also can be beneficial to mental health even if it not considered a “healthy” food
- Never let anyone tell you what you have to eat
 - Everyone’s body is different
 - Eat what make YOUR body feel good
- Being forced or told to eat a certain way can lead to negative food relationships and even eating disorders

The background is a light teal color with several darker teal, wavy, organic shapes that resemble liquid or smoke. A thin white line winds through these shapes, creating a sense of movement and depth.

**How do your
meals impact
your climbing?**

Fueling your climbing

- Finding foods that make you feel good can improve your ability to climb
 - Better sleep
 - Muscle recovery
 - Higher levels of energy
 - Increased focus
- Timing your meals around your climbing can impact your performance
 - Give yourself time to digest
 - At least an hour
 - Fuel your body
 - Climbing or exercising on an empty stomach can reduce energy levels
 - Eat a meal consisting of protein, vegetables, and carbs after to promote recovery
- Climbing and eating healthy foods both promote positive mental health



The background is a light teal color with several darker teal, wavy, organic shapes that resemble leaves or water ripples. A thin white line winds through the composition, starting from the left and curving around the text.

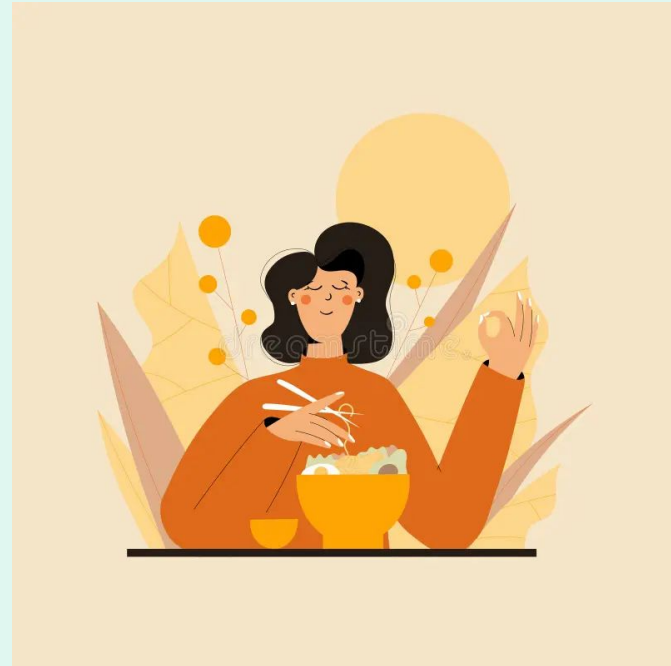
**What does your
weekly meal
preparation look
like?**

Mindful Meal Preparation

- It can sometimes be intimidating to prepare healthy meals in our busy day to day lives
- Modifications to make to weekly meal preparations
 - Less meat
 - Less process food and grains
 - More veggies
 - More fermented food
- Experiment with the food you make each week and try to turn the act of cooking into something enjoyable
 - Find unique recipes online, try new grocery stores, and collaborate with friends or a partner
- Prepare foods at the beginning of the week
 - Vegetables and protein can be prepared ahead of time and stored for the week
 - Prepared foods can be reheated and thrown together for things like rice bowls, salads, tacos, etc.
 - Changing the delivery of the food can keep you from feeling burnt out
- Reflect on the cooking process
 - What feels easy for my schedule
 - Did this food fill me up
 - Was the cost of my food sustainable

Mindful Eating

- Start paying attention to how eating healthier foods make you feel
 - How did your meals affect you physically?
 - How did your meals affect you mentally?
- Start slow don't put too much pressure on yourself
 - Small changes add up
 - Maintaining your same meal routine but adding or subtracting something new can be a great way to start improving your mental health
- What times of the day feel best for you to eat?
 - Eating close to bedtime can disrupt sleep
 - What times of the day should I eat to support my engagement in work or hobbies?
- Think about where your food comes from and take the time to reflect on it



Survey



Group Sign-Ups

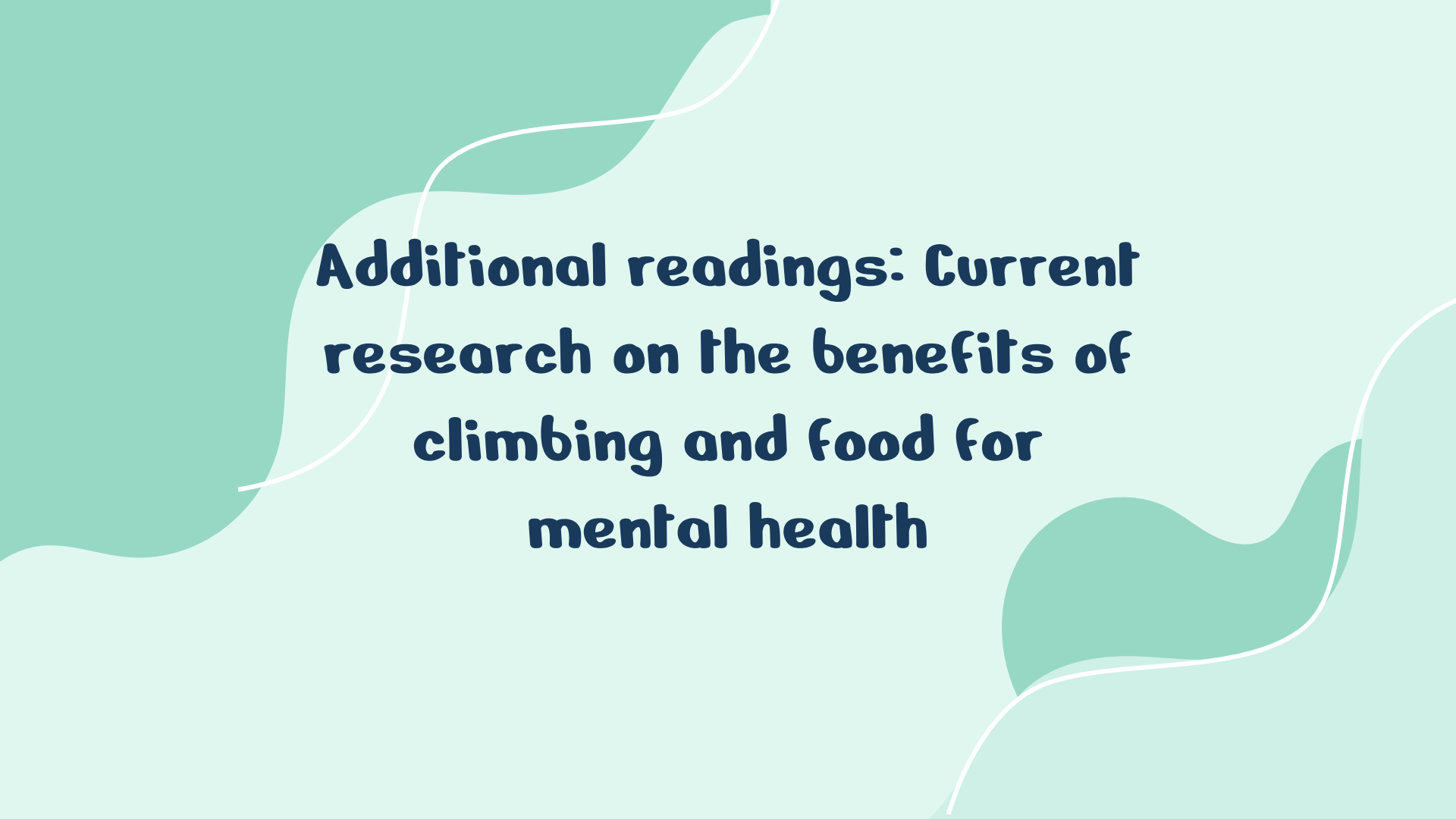
Thank you for your interest in The Spot's mindfulness series! If you want to learn more consider using the links below to sign up for one or more mental health groups led by Logan Sherrer, a Doctorate of Occupational therapy student.

[Denver](#)

[Golden](#)

[Louisville](#)

[Thornton](#)

The background is a light teal color with several white, wavy, organic shapes that resemble stylized leaves or flowing lines. These shapes are layered, with some appearing in front of others, creating a sense of depth and movement. The overall aesthetic is clean, modern, and nature-inspired.

**Additional readings: Current
research on the benefits of
climbing and food for
mental health**

Evidence to Support Mental Health

Benefits of Mindful Eating

- Results show that college students who consumed a diet consisting of more fruits, vegetables, and healthy fats had decreased symptoms of depression and anxiety.
- Consuming more sugar and processed food was linked to increased feelings of depression, anxiety, and self-doubt.
- The population tested in the study consisted of college students who consistently dealt with symptoms of anxiety and depression before undergoing the study.

Information from:

El Ansari, W., Adetunji, H., & Oskrochi, R. (2014). FOOD AND MENTAL HEALTH: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FOOD AND PERCEIVED STRESS AND DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM. *Central European Journal of Public Health*, 22(2), 90-7.
<https://go.openathens.net/redirector/wingate.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/food-mental-health-relationship-between-perceived/docview/1549243599/se-2>

Evidence to support therapeutic benefits of rock climbing

- Exercise alone has long time been a proven way to reduce anxiety (Karg et al., 2020)
 - Exercise causes our body to increase heart rate and respiration to trick the mind into responding to a fear response even if something is not actually there
- Climbing as a form of exercise or recreation is found to be even more effective than traditional exercise alone (Karg et al., 2020)
 - Outlet for adrenaline
 - Clears the mind
 - Community engagement and support

Information from:

Karg, N., Dorscht, L., Kornhuber, J., & Luttenberger, K. (2020). Bouldering psychotherapy is more effective in the treatment of depression than physical exercise alone: Results of a multicentre randomised controlled intervention study. *BMC Psychiatry*, 20(116), 1–13.

<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-020-02518-y>

Cultural Considerations

- Evidence suggests that community-based exercise is an effective means to provide mental health support to marginalized and lower-socioeconomic communities (Lamb et al., 2015)
 - These individuals may not have as easy or comfortable access to traditional mental health services
- Community engagement and exercise reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression
 - Community engagement should continue to provide a welcoming and culturally sensitive community (Lamb et al., 2015)
 - Supportive communities help to reduce external stressors

Information from:

Lamb, Dowrick, C., Burroughs, H., Beatty, S., Edwards, S., Bristow, K., Clarke, P., Hammond, J., Waheed, W., Gabbay, M., & Gask, L. (2015). Community Engagement in a complex intervention to improve access to primary mental health care for hard-to-reach groups. *Health Expectations : an International Journal of Public Participation in Health Care and Health Policy*, 18(6), 2865–2879. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hex.12272>

References

- El Ansari, W., Adetunji, H., & Oskrochi, R. (2014). FOOD AND MENTAL HEALTH: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FOOD AND PERCEIVED STRESS AND DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM. *Central European Journal of Public Health*, 22(2), 90-7.
<https://go.openathens.net/redirector/wingate.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/food-mental-health-relationship-between-perceived/docview/1549243599/se-2>
- Karg, N., Dorscht, L., Kornhuber, J., & Luttenberger, K. (2020). Bouldering psychotherapy is more effective in the treatment of depression than physical exercise alone: Results of a multicentre randomised controlled intervention study. *BMC Psychiatry*, 20(116), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-020-02518-y>
- Lamb, D., Dowrick, C., Burroughs, H., Beatty, S., Edwards, S., Bristow, K., Clarke, P., Hammond, J., Waheed, W., Gabbay, M., & Gask, L. (2015). Community Engagement in a complex intervention to improve access to primary mental health care for hard-to-reach groups. *Health Expectations : an International Journal of Public Participation in Health Care and Health Policy*, 18(6), 2865–2879. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hex.12272>
- Selhub, E. (2022). Nutritional psychiatry: Your brain on food. *Harvard Health*.
<https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/nutritional-psychiatry-your-brain-on-food-201511168626>