



DART Prevention Coalition

Taking Aim at Substance Use in Ocean County

March Into Wellness



Good nutrition plays an important role in our physical and mental well-being. Our brains require a steady supply of nutrients to regulate our mood and improve concentration, memory and emotional balance. When our nutrition is poor or lacking, our overall well-being can suffer.

Nutrition and Wellness

Wellness is complex and can look different for each individual, but the goal is overall health. When we nourish our bodies, we strengthen our ability to cope, heal, thrive and be our best selves. Eating a balanced diet can stabilize our mood, improve energy and focus and support brain and body recovery.

An easy rule for balanced meals is steady nutrition = steady emotions. If we are in control of our emotions, we are able to get through our days less stressed, more focused and with our coping skills at the ready. Neurotransmitters like serotonin and dopamine help keep us regulated and motivated. These chemicals are made up of nutrients that can be incorporated into your daily diet:

- **Amino acids** are the building blocks for serotonin and dopamine. Try eggs, lean meats and fish, beans and lentils, nuts and seeds, tofu or Greek yogurt.
- **B-Vitamins** help energy and mood regulation. Look for whole grains, leafy greens, eggs, beans or avocados.
- **Omega 3 Fatty Acids** help brain and emotional health. Try salmon, sardines, mackerel, walnuts, chia seeds and flaxseeds.
- **Iron** helps with energy and concentration. Focus on lean red meat, chicken, lentils, spinach, fortified cereal and pumpkin seeds.
- **Zinc and Magnesium** promote stress support. Try pumpkin seeds, almonds, cashews, dark chocolate (70% cocoa or higher), chickpeas, yogurt and whole grains.

Pro-tip: Find foods that are cross-listed to maximize the impact of your food!

Substances and Health

If you are using substances, you may find that you eat less nutritious foods or feel less than your best. Additionally, if you are missing certain nutrients from your diet, you may crave ingredients often found in substances—such as stimulants (like caffeine), nicotine or tobacco or other mood-altering substances—that synthetically alter your moods, increase your energy or help you concentrate. However, over time, continuous substance use can:

- Disrupt appetite and digestion
- Impact mood and energy levels
- Slow physical healing
- Lower levels of essential vitamins and minerals
- Negatively impact sleep routines and patterns

Tips for Healthy Eating

When developing a nutrient-dense diet that works for you, it is important to remember: small changes can make a big difference! Try these easy tips to get yourself feeling that spring in your step:

- Add fresh fruit and vegetables where you can.
- Stay hydrated. Set a goal of having a glass of water first thing when you wake up.
- Plan out your meals to reduce cravings.
- Spend time outdoors. We've all been missing that Vitamin D boost from the sun!



Consult with your Primary Care Provider before making major changes to your diet. Need a provider?
Visit rwjbh.org/rwjbarnabas-health-medical-group/our-specialties/primary-care/ or scan the QR code.

rwjbh.org/DARTresources

RWJBarnabas
HEALTH

**Institute for
Prevention
and Recovery**