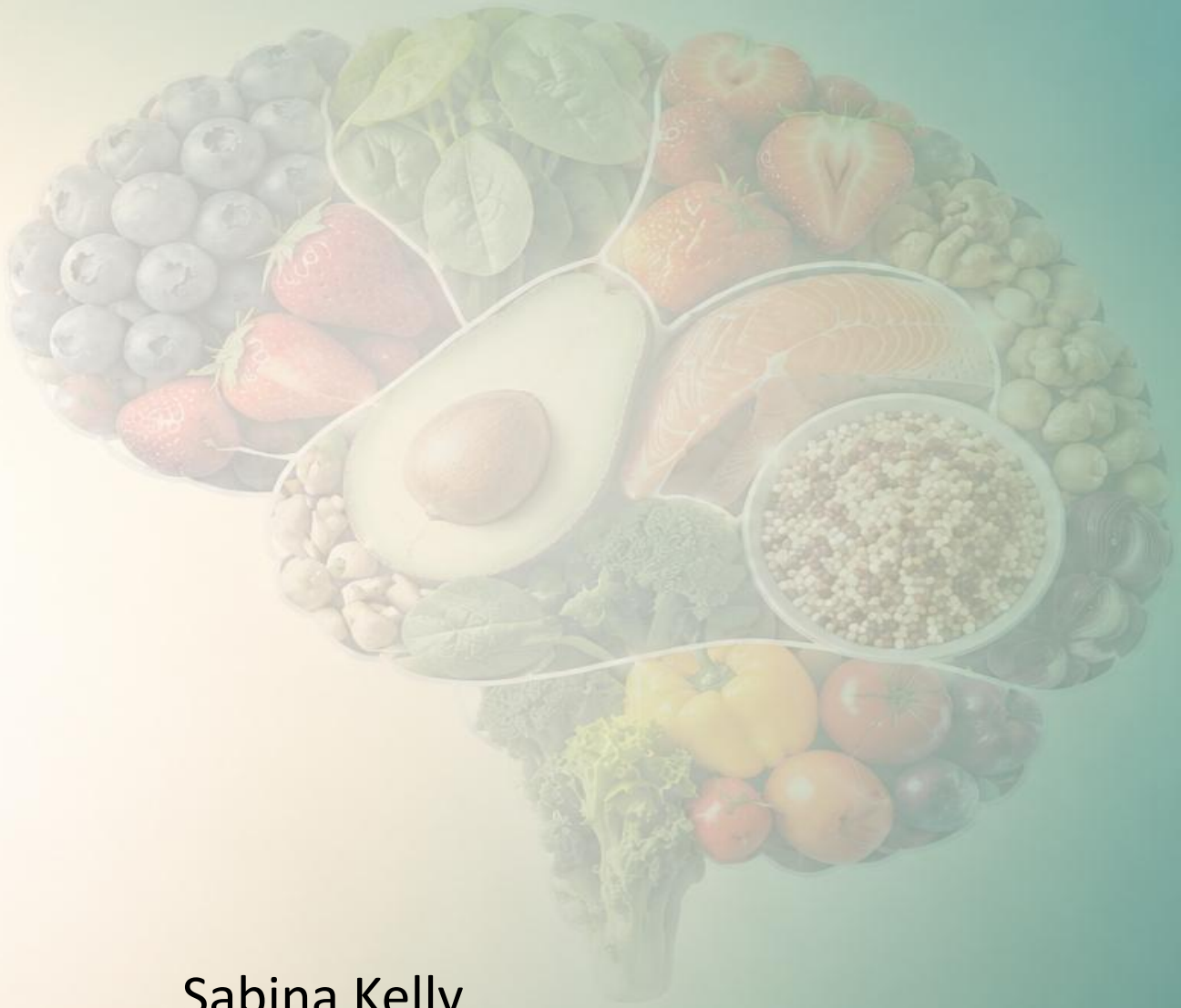
FOOD AS MEDICINE *(and Mood)*



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Future You Nutrition

Can Food Really Change How We Feel?



- Have you ever eaten something and thought, “That made me feel great!” or “Why do I feel like I need a nap after that meal?”
- Food provides more than calories.
- Food affects our bodies and our brains.
- The connection between nutrition, physical health, and emotional well-being.
- Food can be part of our medicine cabinet—but it can also be part of our joy.

Food and chronic disease prevention



- There’s a relationship between what we eat and
  - Blood pressure and cardiovascular health
  - Blood sugar and metabolic health
  - Brain health
  - Bone and muscle health
  - Gut health
  - Inflammation

- Key message: No single “superfood” fixes everything. Patterns of eating matter more than individual foods.

3. Your Brain Is Hungry



- The brain runs on primarily on glucose since that easily crosses the blood/brain barrier
  - but in some cases can run on ketones or lactate or fatty acids
- An average adult brain uses roughly 100–120 grams of glucose per day when someone is eating a typical mixed diet.
- Glucose NOT SUGAR (Sucrose)!
- Your body can make glucose from:
  - Carbohydrates you eat
  - Glycerol from fat
  - Amino acids from protein
- **“Feed your brain like you expect it to do important work.”**
- “Is your brain running on fuel or fumes?”

Your Brain Is Hungry



- Your brain is only about 2% of your body weight, yet it uses roughly 20% of your resting energy expenditure. It is an energy-hungry organ that depends on a steady supply of nutrients to maintain attention, memory, mood, and normal neurological function.

- “What if what you eat for lunch affects more than your waistline—it affects how you think at 3 PM?”

Your Brain Has Expensive Taste



- High energy demand: The brain requires a continuous supply of energy.
- Consistency matters: Large swings in blood glucose can contribute to changes in energy and how we feel, particularly in susceptible people.
- Hydration matters: Even relatively small fluid losses can affect cognitive performance and feelings of fatigue.
- The brain needs building materials: Fatty acids, amino acids, vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients support normal brain structure and function.
- “Your brain doesn't just need calories. It needs ingredients.”

Feed Your Brain



Nutrient	Why the brain cares	Food sources
Omega-3 fats	Important components of brain cell membranes	Salmon, sardines, trout, walnuts, chia
Protein & amino acids	Provide building blocks for neurotransmitters and tissues	Eggs, fish, poultry, beans, lentils, dairy, soy
Complex carbohydrates	Provide glucose and fiber	Oats, whole grains, beans, fruit, vegetables
B vitamins	Important for energy metabolism and nervous-system function	Whole grains, legumes, leafy greens, eggs, meat
Iron	Essential for oxygen transport and neurological function	Meat, seafood, beans, lentils, spinach
Magnesium	Involved in hundreds of biochemical reactions, including nervous-system function	Nuts, seeds, beans, whole grains, leafy greens
Antioxidant-rich plant compounds	Help protect cells from oxidative stress	Berries, vegetables, herbs, spices, tea

Important nuance: This isn't about individual foods acting like drugs. It's about **dietary patterns supplying the nutrients your brain needs over time.**

The Brain-Friendly Plate



- Build a meal around:
- ½ plate:
  - Vegetables + fruit (e.g. asparagus, beans, peaches, raspberries)
- ¼ plate:
  - Protein (plant or animal based)
- ¼ plate:
  - Fiber-rich carbohydrates (e.g. quinoa, barley, sweet potatoes)
- Add:
  - Healthy fats (e.g. Avocado or Olive Oil)
- Drink:
  - Water
- Protein + Plants + Fiber + Healthy Fat = A More Satisfying Brain-Fueling Meal

Mix and Match your way to good nutrition





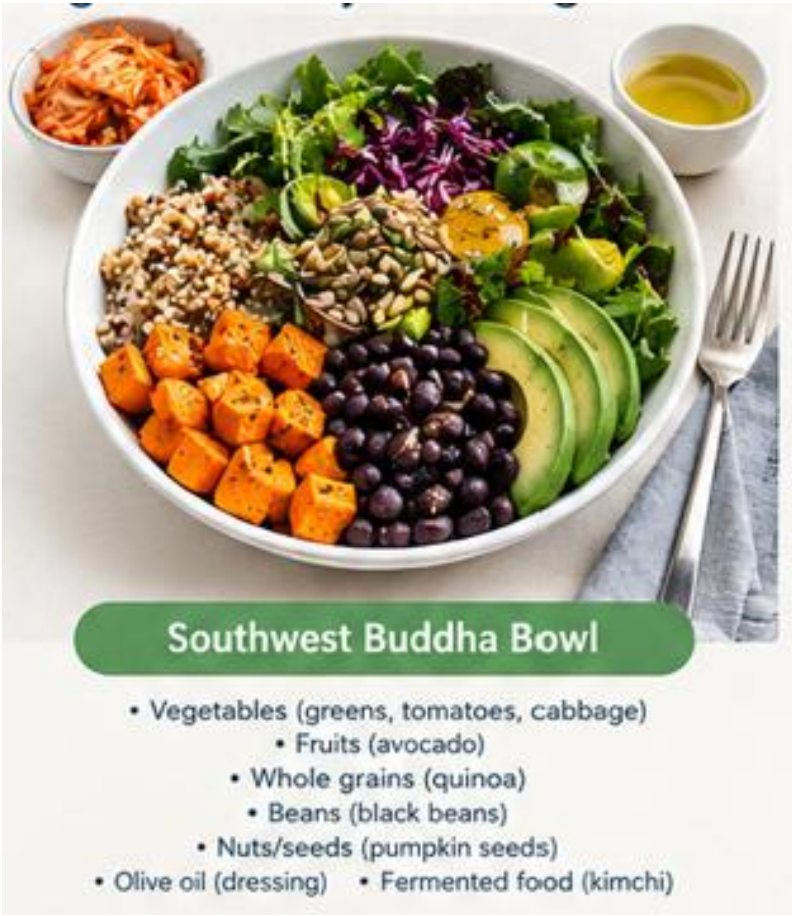
Shrimp & Farro Plate

- Seafood (shrimp) • Whole grains (farro)
- Vegetables (zucchini, peppers, greens)
- Fruits (berries)
- Nuts/seeds (mixed nuts and seeds)
- Olive oil • Fermented food (sauerkraut)



Salmon & Grain Bowl

- Fish (salmon) • Whole grains (farro)
- Vegetables (broccoli, carrots, greens)
- Fruits (citrus, pomegranate)
- Nuts/seeds (sunflower seeds)
- Olive oil • Fermented food (kimchi)



Southwest Buddha Bowl

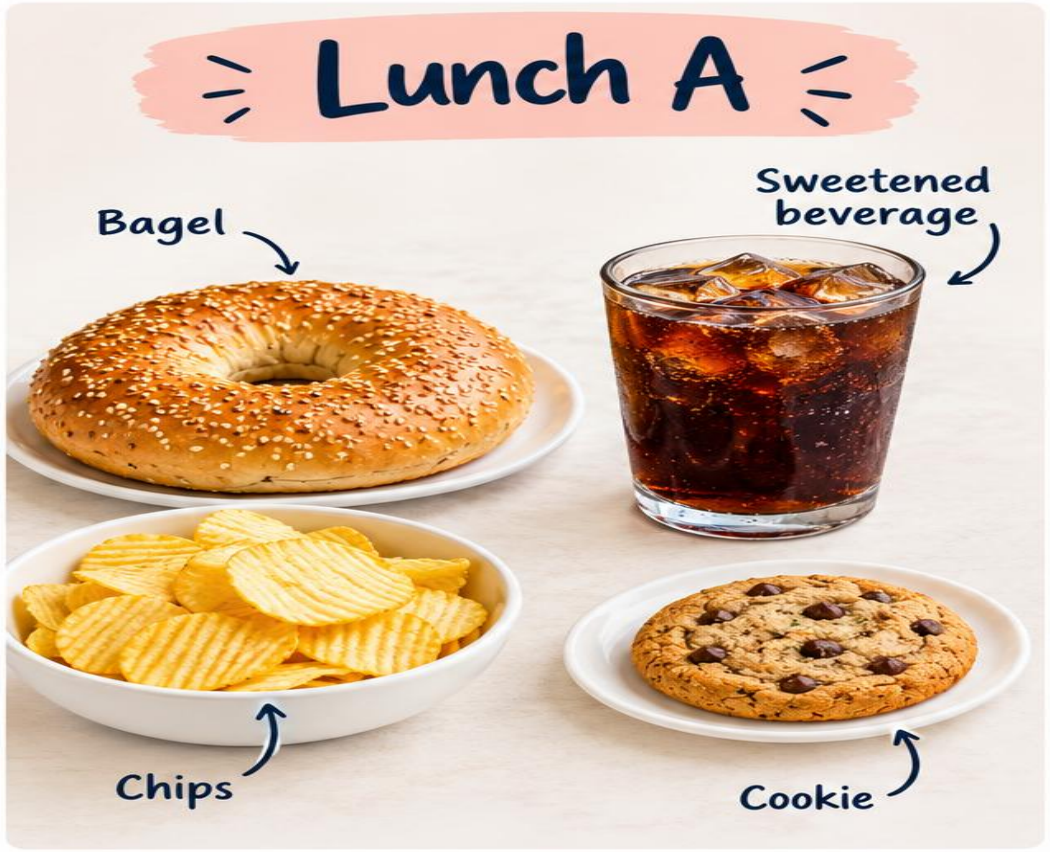
- Vegetables (greens, tomatoes, cabbage)
- Fruits (avocado)
- Whole grains (quinoa)
- Beans (black beans)
- Nuts/seeds (pumpkin seeds)
- Olive oil (dressing) • Fermented food (kimchi)

What Happens When We Don't Fuel Well?



- You might notice:
  - “I'm starving by 3 PM.” – the slump!
  - Difficulty concentrating
  - Fatigue
  - Irritability
  - Strong cravings
  - Reaching for quick-energy foods
  - Feeling like you need caffeine to get through the afternoon
- Food is one piece of the puzzle—but it's a pretty important piece.
- Sleep, stress, medications, medical conditions, hydration, activity, and many other factors affect energy and mood too.

The 3 PM Brain Test





Which lunch is more likely to leave you satisfied, energized, and ready to think at 3 PM?

Food & Mood: The Gut–Brain Connection



- Your gut and brain are in constant conversation - your gut is home to trillions of microbes that interact with the food you eat—and some of the compounds they produce can influence the body and brain.
  - Gut bacteria use components of our food—especially fiber and other plant compounds—to produce metabolites such as short-chain fatty acids.
- These compounds can influence:
  - Inflammation and immune function
  - The gut lining
  - Metabolism
  - Signals that communicate with the brain
- So…how does the gut talk to the brain?
  - The vagus nerve — a major communication highway between gut and brain
  - Immune and inflammatory signals
  - Hormones and other chemical messengers
  - Microbial metabolites
- **what happens in the gut doesn’t necessarily stay in the gut.**

Food & Mood: The Gut–Brain Connection



- **Fiber = food for your gut microbes**
- Many beneficial gut microbes thrive on the **fiber found in plant foods**.
- Think:
  - Vegetables
  - Fruits & berries
  - Whole grains
  - Beans & lentils
  - Nuts & seeds
- **Diversity matters**
  - Different microbes like different foods.
- **More plant variety → more types of fibers & compounds → more opportunities to support a diverse gut ecosystem.**
- **Fermented foods bring another interesting player**
  - **Kimchi** **sauerkraut**
  - **Kefir** **and other fermented foods**
- **Why might this matter for your brain?**
  - A healthy, well-supported gut may help support systems involved in **inflammation, metabolism, immune function, and brain signaling**.
- **Feed your gut microbes—and they may help feed your brain.**

The Blood Sugar Roller Coaster



- What happens after a carbohydrate-rich meal
- Energy highs and crashes
- Hunger and cravings
- Pairing carbohydrates with protein, fat, and fiber can help
- Meal composition—not carbohydrate elimination

Food, Stress & Cortisol



- Stress can increase cravings for highly palatable foods
- Regular meals, protein, fiber, and nutrient density can support overall resilience
- Food shouldn't become another source of stress
- Sometimes the most nourishing choice isn't the “perfect” choice—it's the realistic choice you can actually make when life is chaotic.

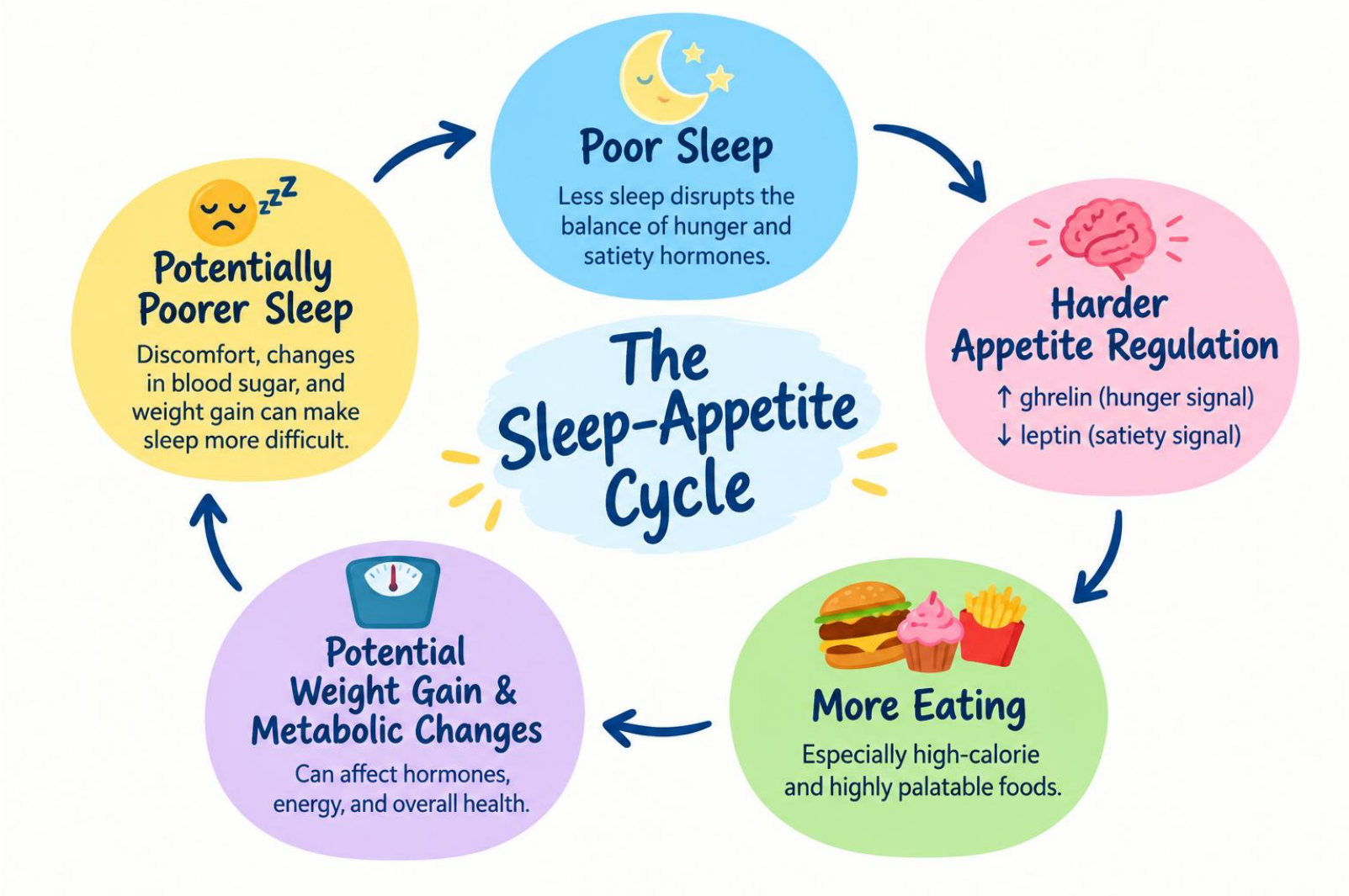
Food & Sleep



- Ghrelin (hunger hormone) and leptin (satiety hormone)
  - Less sleep → ↑ hunger/appetite signals + ↓ satiety signals → greater drive to eat
  - Sleep deprivation doesn't just make you hungrier—it can make high-calorie foods more tempting.
- Caffeine
- Alcohol
- Large/heavy meals
- Timing of meals

- The circular relationship: poor sleep → food choices → energy/mood → sleep
- “Sometimes we don't need more willpower. We need more sleep.”

The Overlooked Connection



Breakfast





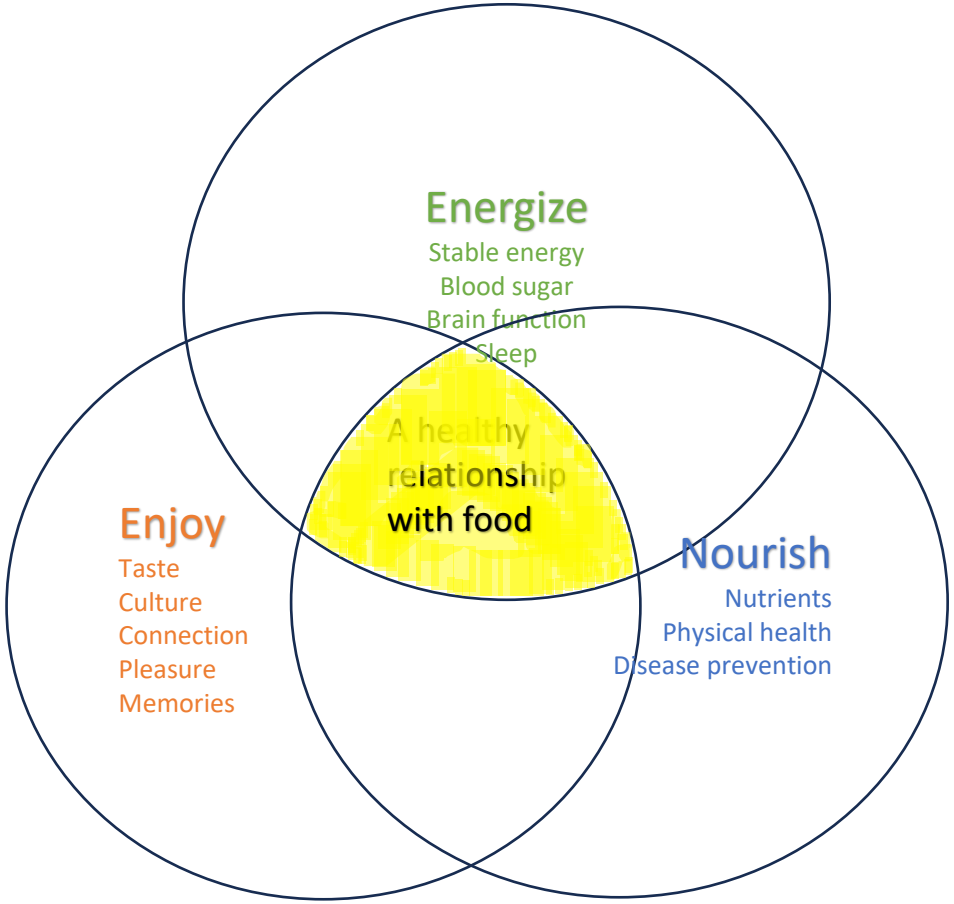
Ultra-Processed Food: It's Not Just About Calories



- Highly processed foods are easy to overconsume
- Energy density (calorie dense)
- Usually lack fiber and protein
- Highly palatability

“The goal isn't to eat perfectly. It's to create a food environment where nourishing choices are easier.”

Food And Mood





food can be nutritious without being joyful—and joyful without being especially nutritious.

Takeaway: Five Ways to Eat for Your Body AND Your Mood



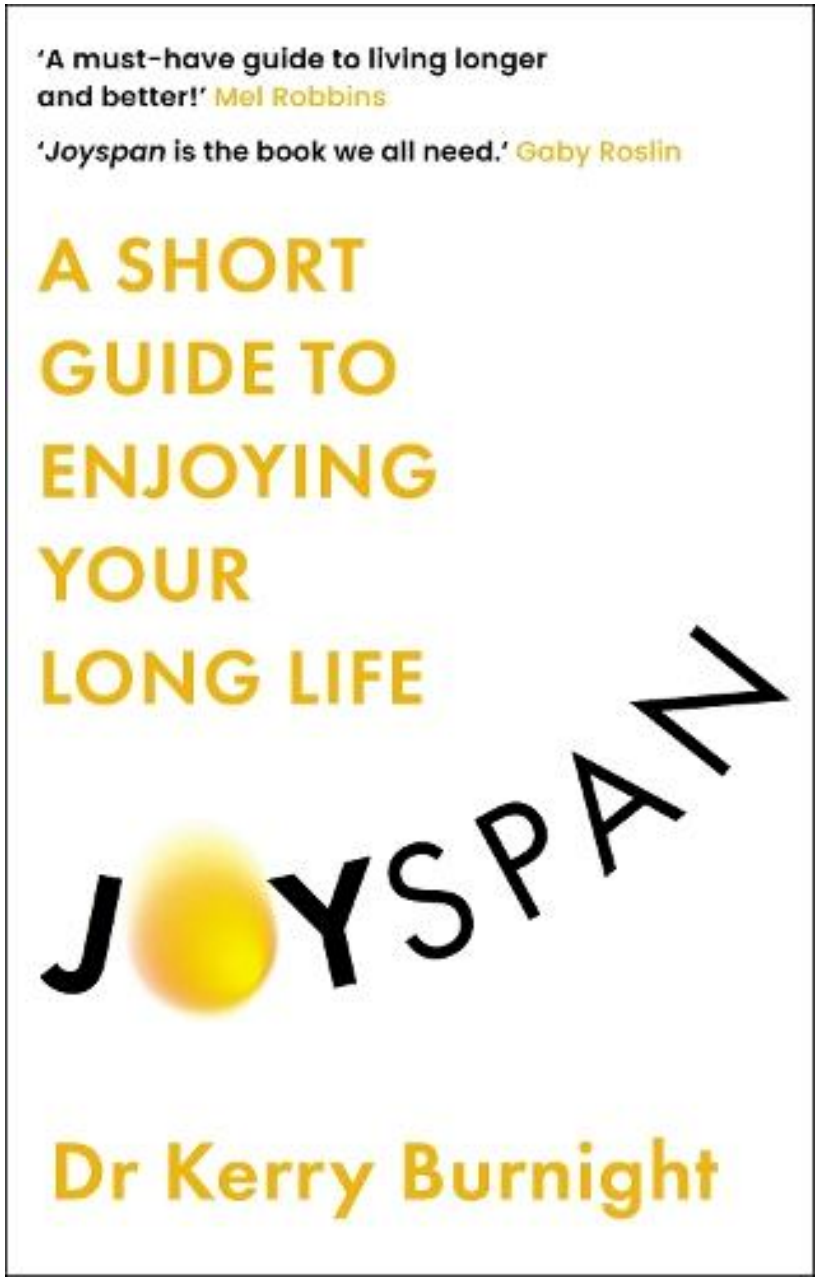
1. Put plants on your plate every day.
2. Include protein regularly.
3. Choose fiber-rich carbohydrates.
4. Include healthy fats—especially omega-3-rich foods.
5. Make room for pleasure.

“Don't ask only, ‘Is this food healthy?’ Ask, ‘Does this way of eating help me feel, function, and live well?’”

Next Month

- Healthy Eating - July 9th - Eating Out with Nutrition in Mind
  - What are some of your favorite local eating establishments?

- Book Club – Sept 14th – Joyspan By Kerry Burnight



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