



**THE NUTRICONNECT**  
Unlocking The Power Of Nutrition Together

# NEWSLETTER

## NUTRITION & MENTAL HEALTH



## WORD FROM CHIEF EDITOR



**NDEGEMO DAPHINE**

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**Makerere University**

**Here we are again our esteemed readers!**

I am so excited to be in this position as the editor of our next issue “**Nutrition and Mental Health**” and I highly value you all that take time to participate in the release and reading of our newsletter.

This theme caught our attention as it is really a factor that affects every individual of any age, ethnicity, race, education background, name it all driving our activity and effectiveness in whatever we do.

In our content we cover and really want to equip you our readers with knowledge and affirmation from students and professionals around the country that nutrition actually affects mental health. Isn't it intriguing and debatable?

We therefore make you comfortable and really want you to know that our work is dependable and can actually be relied on to help out someone out there that may need to use it.

We also welcome any insights from you our readers if any arise for purposes of improving on the services rendered to you in our proceeding issues.

Otherwise, I hope you will enjoy reading our articles and interviews of Issue 4, volume 2. I remain Ndegemo Daphine, your editor.

Thank you.

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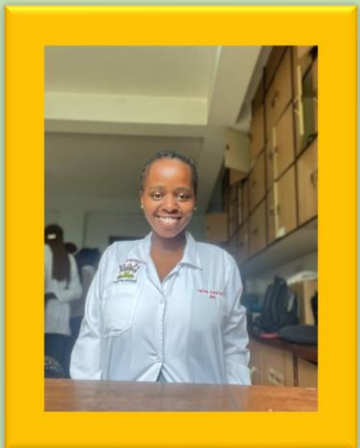
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## ARTICLES FROM OUR WRITERS



AGABA RONALD KAMUGISHA

BSc. Human Nutrition, year3  
Makerere University**Eating disorders and mental health**

Eating disorders (ED), including anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge eating disorders, are associated with increased physical and psychological morbidity, disability, and mortality. The peak age of onset is 15-25 years, which is a developmentally sensitive time. The average illness lasts roughly 6 years. Eating disorders are becoming more common, with lifetime prevalence rates ranging from 3.3 to 18.6% for women and 0.8 to 6.5% for men.

In a study of a nationally representative sample of 36,309 persons, all three ED were linked to more than one comorbid somatic disease, which might include lifelong mood disorders, anxiety disorders, major depressive disorder, and alcohol and drug use disorders. It is commonly acknowledged that people with ED have a greater prevalence of suicidality, which includes complete suicide, suicidal attempts, and suicidal ideation. Individuals with anorexia nervosa or bulimia nervosa often have social anxiety issues, low self-esteem, and are more concerned about their appearance in public areas. The substantial burden of mental health problems needs a more comprehensive understanding of the link between mental health and eating disorders.

Recent research reveals that the burden of mental health disorders has increased, with suicide being the second highest cause of mortality among 15-29 years, and the yearly global cost of depression and anxiety was estimated to be USD 1 trillion. While previous studies and reviews

relationship between ED and specific mental health problems like anxiety, depression, and substance use disorder, there is currently no review that provides a high-level summary of these associations using a broader definition of mental health. As a result, there is a scarcity of comparative evaluations of diverse mental health issues and their relationships with ED.

Therefore, addressing this gap in current research can assist researchers and clinicians to develop a suite of interventions that has the most impact on reducing the ED mental health co-morbidity. Early intervention is key in achieving full recovery, yet many eating disorder cases remain undetected and untreated. Talking therapies, including nutritional management, are the treatment of choice.

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**Food and Mood.**

Food is anything that man eats or drinks. Food affects our mood in different ways. Mood simply refers to the emotional well-being of the mind. Mood includes a person being sad, depressed, detached, peaceful, calm, happy, stressed, mood swings and joyous. The relationship between food and mood is interesting since both food and mood affect each other.

**Food choices affect mood.**

Different food nutrients affect mood in a different way as they affect the formation neurotransmitters such as serotonin, dopamine and norepinephrine. Deficiency in neurotransmitters leads to depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), difficulty sleeping, fatigue, irritability and apathy. For instance, foods rich in sugars, sodium and saturated fat but low in vitamins and minerals inhibit neurotransmitters. The table below shows nutrients and how they affect mood.

**Mood affects food choices.**

Your mood can affect your appetite for food and food cravings negatively which may cause you to overeat or make poor food choices. For instance, people who are depressed or sad may end up eating less or refusing to eat at all as their appetite and love

**Advice on how to feed in order to control your mood.**

- ✓ Eating small food portions regularly; low blood sugars lead to depression and fatigue, so regular eating counteracts it.
- ✓ Proper hydration; improves concentration and proper thinking.
- ✓ Looking after your yoghurt; stress and depression slow down your gut activity.
- ✓ Eating enough proteins; amino acids are the building blocks of the neurotransmitters that control mood.
- ✓ Eating the food rich in omega fats as they promote calmness and well-being of the brain.
- ✓ Managing caffeine; foods rich in caffeine affect dopamine which affects your sleeping patterns.

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| Food nutrient      | Impact on mood                                    | Sources                 |
|--------------------|---|-------------------------|
| Carbohydrates      | Produce a sense of calm.                          | Cereals, Grains         |
| Proteins           | Boosts alertness and motivation.                  | Fish, Meat              |
| Omega-3-fatty acid | Reduces cravings and enhances calmness.           | Fish                    |
| Vitamin A          | Boosts learning and memory.                       | Sweet potatoes, Carrots |
| Vitamin B6         | Improves concentration and memory                 | Potatoes                |
| Magnesium          | Inhibits depression                               | Brown rice, Oats        |
| Calcium            | Reduces anxiety, irritability and improves sleep. | Milk                    |
| Folate             | Reduces depression                                | Spinach                 |
| Vitamin B12        | Controls emotions and improves stress             | Lean meat               |
| Vitamin D          | Reduces depression                                | Sunlight                |
| Potassium          | Prevents depression                               | Potatoes, Bananas       |
| Iron               | Reduces irritability, fatigue and mood swings.    | Eggs, beans             |



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## THE EMOTIONAL BRAIN

According to the World Health Organization, health is defined as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity; hence mental health is pivotal to overall health status. Mental health is defined as a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community.

Mental health is the pivot of human life. However, despite its vital importance, it is often the least prioritized amongst health conditions especially in low- and medium-income countries like Uganda where disease, ignorance, and poverty are common. The demand for a steadfast mental healthcare can seem a luxury in such countries. Many mental health conditions can be effectively treated at relatively low cost, yet health systems remain significantly under-resourced and treatment gaps are wide all over the world. Mental health care is often poor in quality when delivered. People with mental health conditions often also experience stigma, discrimination and human rights violations. Uganda is ranked among the top six countries in Africa in rates of depressive disorders (4.6%), while 2.9% live with anxiety disorders (WHO, 2017). About 5.1% of females and 3.6% of males are affected.

The consumption of more processed, high-energy, and nutrient-poor foods is on a rise today and hence problems of overweight and obesity with concomitant nutrient deficiencies. Although the level of calories consumed is increasing, recommended intake values of micro- and macro-elements that play a significant role in the proper functioning of our nervous system – b vitamins, zinc, and magnesium are low. Superimposing smoking, limited physical activity, and harmful alcohol consumption to the above dietary patterns, adversely affects health and development of mental disorders, including depression.

As the saying goes that “the gut is the emotional brain”, the gut brain connection plays a significant role in nutrition and mental health.

The gut-brain axis (GBA) consists of bidirectional communication between the central and the enteric nervous system, linking emotional and cognitive centers of the brain with peripheral intestinal functions. This interaction between microbiota and GBA appears to be bidirectional, namely through signaling from gut-microbiota to brain and from brain to gut-microbiota by means of neural, endocrine, immune, and humoral links. About 95% of the serotonin in the body is produced in the gastrointestinal tract. Serotonin is essential for mood, cognition, digestion to mention but a few. Therefore, the balance of bacteria in your gut influences serotonin production in the body whose disruption would affect one’s mental or physical health.

The brain- gut connection impacts hunger and satiety, cravings, food sensitivities and intolerances, digestion, mood and behavior, stress and cognitive function.

According to a study by (Saulnier et al., 2013), the impact of microbiota on GBA has been further supported by the manipulation of gut microbiota through the use of probiotics and/or antibiotics. These studies also confirm that microbiota affects anxiety by influencing brain neurochemistry. The probiotics, in parallel, reduced stress-induced release of cortisol, anxiety- and depression-related behavior. Similarly, transient alteration of microbiota composition, obtained by administration of oral antimicrobials in specific-pathogen-free mice, increased exploratory behavior.

Nutrition strategies including inclusion of probiotics in diet through fermented dishes and yoghurt, and increasing fruit and vegetable intake which supply both soluble and insoluble fibers some of which are prebiotics can maintain / restore healthy gut microbiome to positively impact mental health.

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**DICKSON MUKISA**BSc. Human Nutrition, (*finalist*)*Makerere University*

### **The Plate & the Psych: The Bridge Back & Forth Across**

As of the World Health Organization, mental health refers to the state of mental well-being that facilitates coping with life stresses, the realization of abilities, learning and working well and productivity in communities. Conditions of concern in mental health span from mental disorders to psychosocial disabilities beyond these abnormalities.

Mental health is a key determinant in individuals' nutrition status and vice versa. All mental health is a subject with reference to psychological state of an individual which is attributed to the nervous system, the brain being its center. It is only prudent that vitality of mental health is taken into consideration before an individual is viable, in their fetal stage of growth. This is the only provision that mental health of individuals will be capacitated. In such a case the role is played by a mother who caters for the fetal wellbeing through nourishment and habitation.

To that end, mindful eating is an important consideration among health-conscious individuals. This is across an individual's lifespan from the fetus to the elder. Mindful eating constitutes elements of understanding the reason, time, how, kind and amount of food eaten. Such a background of an individual's nourishment is a great assurance of its vitality to them, culminating into good health and wellbeing.

In Uganda today, pregnant mothers are encouraged to attend antenatal visits. In such, they are provided with supplements in form of tablets containing nutrients that are very instrumental in fetal brain development.

Folate and iron provided in composites of ferrous folate and ferrous sulfate have been one of the interventions in the healthcare system that have been put into place to curb their deficiencies. Alleviating the deficiencies of folate and iron is principle in ensuring optimal brain development, the center of discussion of the subject of mental health.

In the antenatal visits, they are also called upon to consume diversely well-nourishing foods. Foods that are rich in iron are distinguished into the plant (non-heme) and animal (heme) sources.

The non-heme sources of iron include amaranth, broccoli, asparagus and spinach. The heme sources include poultry, beef, mutton, pork and liver. The distinction between these two sources of iron is that iron from animal foods is more bioavailable than from plant foods.

Pregnant women are also encouraged to consume foods rich in folic acid. Foods rich in folic acid include green leafy vegetables (sukuma wiki, spinach, lettuce, amaranthus and cabbage), cereals (maize, millet, sorghum, maize) and fruits (oranges, lime, lemon and tangerine).

Folate is an important nutrient in development of the nervous system. The nervous system is a determinant of an individual's mental capacity. The provision of adequate nutrients required for its development is vital in ensuring an optimal mental state of the new-born.

Inadequacies in consumption of folate rich sources increases the risk of spina bifida, anencephaly and encephalocele. In spina bifida, the spinal cord fails to close, a deformity in brain development is observed in anencephaly and the brain protrudes the skull in encephalocele. Many victims of such conditions fail to survive. Survivors have their mental abilities compromised with regard to their genetic potential.

Brain development occurs up to the ages of 20 to 25 years. This is by the aid of a balance of both macronutrients (carbohydrates, proteins and lipids) and the micronutrients (minerals and vitamins) for optimal development. The role of oils can never be under-estimated in brain development and maintenance of the infants, school-going children and adolescents. Omega-3 fatty acids are very important in this role. These are mainly obtained from fishes such as tilapia, Nile perch and catfish predominant in Uganda today. Ensuring optimal consumption of these nutrients is important in development of a high-grade cognition.

Despite the advocacy to for adequate dietary consumption, this never exists in a wide range of the homesteads of country men and women. Wherever nutritionists and nutrition-enthusiasts seek their niche, they should look forward to sensitization of the masses on the mindful consumption of foods for their wellbeing.

Many studies allude to the fact that consumption of food in amounts and quality that meets the body's nutritional needs is enough to maintain a stable mental status.

Characteristic of the many adolescents is their need for independence in their lives, with their nourishment being part. This calls them to consumption of foods in large portions without their conscious consideration of the nutrient composition. In the long-run is the growth out of

all proportion, a condition referred to as obesity. The state of being obese increases the risk of chronic diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, cancer and diabetes. Victims of such conditions following self-induction into them does not leave their mental state as formally was. The individual faces a life-time trauma as a result of erratic consumption of food.

The case is identical to victims of anorexia nervosa that induce thinning by reducing on their dietary consumption. This is majorly to meet occupational demands of athletes, fashionistas and media personalities. The effects of much of this are more long-term than immediate, ranging from deterioration of immune capacity and more. These, too, like the victims of bulimia nervosa suffer from a condemning self-judgement, an important aspect with regard to mental health.

One of the mindful behaviors, I call upon all the citizenry to consider important is food label reading. Comprehensive interpretation of the information written on food packages about food products entails food label reading. This goes beyond the articulating the price tags of foods as many people, today, do. A keen understanding of nutrient and non-nutrient composition from the nutrition panel, shelf-life through the use-by and expiry dates, ingredients, instructions of use, net contents, food brand, country of origin, health and nutrition claims is key in mindful eating. Consumers are able regulate their consumption of ultra-processed foods reported to be of very high food portions, having high amounts of added sugars, sodium, saturated and trans-fat and carcinogens. These are associated with obesity and overweight, cardiovascular diseases and cancers. Such, are avoidable conditions upon adoption of food label reading.

Optimal mental health is not an ideal reality realized across humanity because many factors are associated with this subject. Among the multitude is nutrition, whose consideration is based on the day-to-day choices made by individuals. This calls us to re-master the choices made that have a significant effect on the mental health of us all, directly and indirectly, short and long-term.

Many solutions have been put forward in the quest to elevate the mental health of people in this society. Many will go meditating upon mountains, seek counseling from counselors and do more. To these, too, is one of the daily decisions that we undertake. A keen consideration should be taken to feeding for the price victims pay is not worth bearing while there was an option, prior. It only takes a sacrifice to affect the therapy for better mental health. Even when the financial resource is abounding, the expense on

time and health in the therapy is not bearable, except with the hope to rejuvenate one's living.



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## Food and Mood

*Have you ever left Hangry (hungry + angry)?*

*Food and mood affect one another, the food and mood have a huge impact on our mood (leathwood & pollet 1983) if you understand how they interact you can make a good diet choice and avoid emotional or impulse eating. Certain nutrient and bioactive factors which can have important influence on cognitive functioning and mood (prashad 1998).*

**FOOD** is any substance raw, processed or formulated that consumed to provide nutritional support, energy and nourish the body.

**MOOD** is a temporary emotional state of mind or feeling. It is usually a more general representation of how one is feeling after a reflection on multiple aspects of one's mental state

Ways in which food and mood are related.

### Serotonin

Serotonin is a neurotransmitter that regulates mood and feelings of well-being. The production of serotonin is influenced by the amino acid tryptophan, which is found in foods such as meat, chicken, eggs, cheese, beans. Consuming these foods can help to increase serotonin levels and improve mood.

### Omega-3 Fatty Acids

Omega-3 fatty acids are essential fats that are important for brain health and function. They are found in foods such as fatty fish, walnuts and flaxseeds. Studies have shown that omega-3 fatty acids can help to reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety and hence keep us with good mood.

### Caffeine

Caffeine is a stimulant that is found in coffee, tea and many soft drinks. It is often called a drug: it acts as a stimulant and can increase feelings of alertness, and counter the effects of fatigue energy and mood, consuming too much can lead to feelings of anxiety and jitteriness.

### Vitamins and minerals



## Vitamins and minerals

When you don't eat enough nutrient-rich foods, your body may lack vital vitamins and minerals, which may affect your energy, mood and brain function, not getting enough of some vitamins/minerals can affect your mood, and what you can eat to replenish your body. You should aim to get your vitamins and minerals from eating a healthy, balanced diet with plenty of fruit and vegetables.

### Carbohydrate → Glucose → Brain Power → Mood

To be able to concentrate, focus and mood, the brain needs enough energy, which comes from blood glucose. Glucose is also vital to fuel muscles and maintain body temperature. The glucose in our blood comes from Healthier sources of carbohydrates include wholegrains, vegetables, fruits, legumes and lower fat dairy foods. These are important sources of other nutrients as well, such as calcium and B vitamins. Not having enough glucose in your blood (hypoglycaemia) can make you feel weak, tired and 'fuzzy minded'.

### How you eat is important too

It's not only what you eat, but also how you eat that makes a difference to your wellbeing.

Food helps us connect with others, our community, our culture and our land. Celebrating where your food comes from, how you prepare it and who you share it with are wonderful ways to enjoy food, eat healthier and boost your wellbeing:

Is well known that unhealthy eating patterns can cause mood swings. Blood sugar fluctuations and nutritional imbalances are often to blame. Without a steady source of fuel from the foods we eat, our mind and bodies don't function well. Here's how some unhealthy eating habits can alter your mood and emotional well-being:

- Skipping meals. Missing a meal, especially breakfast, can lead to low blood sugar. This will likely leave you feeling weak and tired.
- Cutting out entire food groups. If you reduce the variety of foods in your diet, it can be more difficult to get all the essential nutrients you need. Low levels of zinc, iron, B vitamins, magnesium, vitamin D, and omega-3 fatty acids are associated with worsening mood and decreased energy.
- Eating too many refined carbohydrates. High intakes of unhealthy, processed carbohydrates,

## SUMMARY.

Beyond mood and general well-being, the role of diet and nutrition on mental health is very complex and has yet to be fully understood. However, research linking the two is growing at a rapid rate. In recent years, evidence shows that food can contribute to the development, prevention, and management of mental health conditions, including mood, depression and anxiety disorders.

Researchers are also taking a closer look at why diet may influence mental health. Studies are exploring diet's effects on gut microbiota (organisms in the intestinal tract), neuroplasticity (brain's ability to modify structure, wiring and function), oxidative stress (cellular damage) and chronic inflammation.

While we still have much to learn about the effects of dietary patterns on mental health issues, evidence suggests that eating a healthy diet can have a protective effect. In fact, many believe that good nutrition is as important to mental health as it is to physical health.

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## **THE GUT-BRAIN CONNECTION:**

### **Understanding the structure and function of the Gut-Brain Axis.**

Have you ever wondered why one feels bowel discomfort when anxious or experiences mood changes when coping with diarrhea or bloating? This is because of a complex bidirectional communication network between the gastrointestinal tract (GIT) and central nervous system (CNS) called the gut-brain axis (GBA) (Appleton, 2018).

The GBA consists of: the autonomic nervous system (ANS), enteric nervous system (ENS), hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, endocrine and immune systems (70% are gut-associated lymphoid tissue), and gut microbiota (Appleton, 2018; Melina Farshbafnadi, 2021). Gut microbiota are micro-organisms like bacteria, fungi, and viruses that exist in the GIT (Appleton, 2018).

The ENS, alias the second brain, innervates the GIT. It is capable of functioning independently due to local reflex circuits or in communication with the brain and spinal cord via the vagus (parasympathetic) nerve and sympathetic ganglia respectively (Li 2020). Gut microbiota synthesize and release neurochemicals and metabolites capable of influencing the nervous system through the GBA. These include catecholamines (dopamine and norepinephrine), histamine, tryptophan, serotonin, 4-ethyl sulfate and short chain fatty acids (SCFAs) (Melina Farshbafnadi, 2021).

Dopamine is a neurotransmitter responsible for the feelings of pleasure, motivation and satisfaction.

Norepinephrine is released in the ‘flight or fight’ response and plays an important role in regulation of stress reactions, arousal, cognitive function and attention (Hussain et al., 2023). These substances are relayed to the brain via the ENS to regulate emotions and mental wellbeing.

The HPA axis, part of the limbic system (amygdala, hippocampus, and hypothalamus), is a major neuroendocrine system responsible for the body’s stress response (Linda S. Costanzo, 2018). The HPA is controlled by hormonal feedback loops.

Adrenocorticotrophic hormone (ACTH) release by the pituitary gland is stimulated by Corticotrophin releasing hormone (CRH), a hypothalamic hormone, in response to stress, hypoglycaemia, surgery, psychiatric disorders,  $\alpha$ -adrenergic agonists,  $\beta$ adrenergic antagonists and serotonin (Li, 2020; Linda S. Costanzo, 2018).

Under such conditions, high cortisol levels are secreted by the adrenal cortex in response to stimulatory effects of ACTH, hence bowel disruptions and a weakened immune system.

SCFAs induce the synthesis of the tryptophan hydroxylase 1 enzyme involved in serotonin secretion by enterochromaffin cells in the gut (Arun Kumar, 2023). Furthermore, increased serotonin levels stimulate the SNS, modulate learning ability and memory, influencing cerebral vascular tone, central respiratory drive and emotions of anger, fear, sexual pleasure and pain. Serotonin is also a precursor to melatonin, a sleep hormone, in the pineal gland (Linda S. Costanzo, 2018; Vissavajjhala, 2017).

In conclusion, the connection between the gut and brain via the GBA is important in clinical practice and treatment of some previously bizarre mental health challenges including neurodevelopmental disorders such as depression and autism respectively.

For instance, gut dysbiosis, an imbalance of the gut microbiota caused by alcoholism, extreme stress and unhealthy eating habits, is associated with both gut and mental health disorders. Therefore, modifying gut microbiota with diet and pro- or pre-biotics may be used in such conditions (Laura R. Dowling BBioMedSci Hons, 2022).

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## EXERCISE AND STRESS MANAGEMENT

Exercise and stress management are closely related, as physical activity reduces stress and improves overall mental health.

When we exercise, our bodies release endorphins, which are natural mood elevators that can help to reduce feelings of anxiety and depression.

Additionally, exercise can help to improve sleep quality, boost self-esteem, and increase overall feelings of well-being.

There are many different types of exercise that can be beneficial for stress management, including cardiovascular activities such as running, swimming, or cycling, as well as strength training exercises like weightlifting or resistance training. Yoga and tai chi are also excellent options, as they combine physical movement with mindfulness and relaxation techniques.

One of the main benefits of exercise for stress management is that it provides a healthy distraction from daily worries. When we engage in physical activity, we are able to focus our attention on the present moment and what our bodies are doing, rather than dwelling on past or future events. This mindfulness can help to reduce feelings of stress and anxiety, and promote a greater sense of calm and relaxation.

Exercise is also a great way to improve our physical health, which can in turn help to reduce stress. Regular physical activity can help to lower blood pressure, reduce the risk of heart disease, and improve overall cardiovascular health. Additionally, exercise can help to reduce muscle tension, improve sleep quality, and boost our immune systems, all of which can contribute to reduced stress levels.

Another benefit of exercise for stress management is that it provides an opportunity for social interaction. Joining a fitness class or sports team, or simply exercising with a friend, can help to build a sense of community and connection, which can be a powerful stress-reducer. Social support from friends, family, or a community of like-minded individuals can be incredibly helpful in managing stress and promoting overall mental health.

In conclusion, exercise is a powerful tool for stress management, offering numerous physical, mental, and emotional benefits. By incorporating regular physical activity into our lives, we can improve our overall health and well-being, reduce feelings of stress and anxiety, and promote a greater sense of calm and relaxation. So, whether you're looking to reduce stress, boost your mood, or simply improve your overall quality of life, exercise is definitely worth considering.

# INTERVIEWS



**SSENGOBA YUNUSU**  
Mental health counselor

## **Kindly introduce yourself to our readers.**

My name is Ssenigooba Yunusu, and I am a mental health counselor. I hold a Bachelor's degree in Guidance and Counseling from Kyambogo University and a Certificate in Mental Health Human Rights, recovery and inclusion from the WHO QualityRights. I am the founder and Executive Director of Counseling Hub -Uganda, this is a community based mental health organisation aimed at addressing mental health disorders through providing professional counselling and guidance services to the people. I also work as a mental health counsellor volunteer at Butabika National Referral Mental Hospital. I am passionate about empowering individuals and communities to achieve better mental health and well-being.

## **Why did you decide to take up the career as a mental health counselor and how has the experience been so far for you?**

I always wanted a career that suits my personality traits. I possess a personality trait of agreeableness which implies having

pro-social behaviors. This is because of my background as a student leader at all levels of my education. Therefore, I have always been passionate about helping people overcome their challenges and improve their quality of life. When I secured a national merit scholarship from the government in Bachelors of guidance and counselling at Kyambogo University, I felt this is the right profession for me to always be a people centered person. I wanted to contribute to this field by providing support, guidance, and care to those in need. My experience has been incredibly rewarding; I have had the opportunity to work with diverse populations and see firsthand the positive impact that counseling can have on individuals' lives.

## **Briefly, could you explain what mental health is?**

Mental health refers to our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and behave, and it also influences how we cope with problems, relate to with others, and make choices and contribute to the society. Mental health is therefore an aspect of functionality in the different areas of functioning in life. This implies being able to deal with limitations of life to keep healthy and productive. Any situation that makes an individual not to feel, think or behave rightfully is a potential mental health problem that impairs functioning.

## **From your own practice, what are those mental health disorders that people usually present with?**

In my practice, I commonly encounter mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and substance-related and addictive disorders. Each of these conditions presents unique challenges and requires tailored interventions to help individuals manage their symptoms and improve their well-being.

## **How and when does one realize that their mental health is declining and would require professional help of a mental health counselor such as you?**

Signs of declining mental health can vary, but common indicators include persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness, excessive worry or fear, changes in sleep or appetite, withdrawal from social activities, difficulty concentrating, experiencing severe mood swings, suicidal thoughts, uncoordinated speech, hallucinations these conditions present unique challenges and requires tailored interventions to help individuals manage their symptoms and improve their well-being.

## **How and when does one realize that their mental health is declining and would require professional help of a mental health counselor such as you?**

Signs of declining mental health can vary, but common indicators include persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness, excessive worry or fear, changes in sleep or appetite, withdrawal from social activities, difficulty concentrating, experiencing severe mood swings, suicidal thoughts, uncoordinated speech, hallucinations and delusions. If these symptoms persist for an extended period or interfere with daily functioning, it is important to seek professional help. A mental health counselor can provide the necessary support and interventions to address these issues.

## **How has your experience been like working with specific populations such as children, adolescents, adults, and maybe the elderly?**

Working with different populations has been a rich and enlightening experience. Children and adolescents often face unique challenges related to development, identity, and peer relationships. Adults may struggle with work-related stress, family dynamics, and personal growth, while the elderly deal with issues such as loss, loneliness, social isolation and physical health concerns. Each group requires a different approach and understanding, and I strive to provide compassionate and effective support tailored to their specific needs

## **What are the probable adverse effects of a declining mental health state that is not adequately addressed?**

If mental health issues are not adequately addressed, they can lead to severe impairments in the social, occupation, psychological and academic consequences, like chronic stress, physical health problems, substance abuse, relationship difficulties, decline at work, self-harm or suicide, gender-based violence thus low social economic development in the country

## **One of the adverse effects that are highly pronounced is suicide. How, according to you or from your own experience**

**as a mental health counselor, does one reach a breaking point to the extent of taking their own lives?**

Suicide often occurs when an individual feels overwhelmed by their circumstances and perceives no other way out. Factors contributing to this breaking point can include severe depression, unresolved trauma, prolonged stress, feelings of isolation, lack of support systems and substance abuse

**Would you say that mental health, detrimental as it can be, is getting the attention it deserves in terms of awareness in the population and services available to address the problem?**

While there has been progress in raising awareness about mental health, there are still many gaps to be addressed. For example, there is lack of a national comprehensive mental health policy, lack of integration of counsellors in the public service institutions, stigma and misconceptions about mental health persist, lack of access to mental health particularly in rural areas, violation of mental health human rights, and negative attitudes towards counselling and guidance among people.

**What are those steps?**

To maintain good mental health, it is important to engage in self-care activities such as regular exercise, a balanced diet, adequate sleep, and mindfulness practices like meditation or deep breathing. Building strong social connections, setting realistic goals, joining support groups, seeking guidance and counselling and other related professional help when needed. Additionally, finding healthy ways to cope with stress, such as hobbies, journaling, or talking to a trusted friend, can contribute to overall well-being.

**Let's talk counseling as a practice. Do you mind sharing techniques on how you ensure adherence of the client and prevent resistance to therapy in order to achieve the desired outcomes?**

Motivational interviewing is a language of change that helps to address resistance of clients. It involves providing psycho education about the counselling process and addressing any concerns or misconceptions thus reducing resistance and fostering adherence to mental health treatment. Also building a strong therapeutic alliance based on trust and respect. Techniques such as active listening, empathy, availability and validation help clients feel understood and supported. Helping clients to set clear goals, involving them in their treatment plans

**Any concluding remarks?**

I encourage everyone to take proactive steps towards maintaining their mental health. Mental health is a vital aspect of our overall well-being. Everyone should take responsibility of their mental health well-being.

Mental health illnesses are natural, can affect anyone, can be prevented and treated. Let's embrace counselling and guidance in our lives. It is important to prioritize our mental health and support one another in this journey.



**PRISCA ALEO EYABU**  
*NUTRITIONIST*

**1. Kindly introduce yourself to our readers.**

I'm Prisca Aleo Eyabu, it is my pleasure to introduce myself as a dedicated and compassionate nutritionist, specializing in the areas of functional nutrition, mental health nutrition, dietetics and holistic wellness. With a passion for empowering individuals to achieve optimal health and vitality, I utilize my expertise to craft personalized approaches that harmonize nutrition, wellbeing, and mental resilience. My commitment is to provide evidence-based guidance, support and inspiration, fostering a transformative journey towards wholeness and wellness for everyone.

**2. What inspired your interest in incorporating mental health in your nutrition practice and how has the experience been for you so far?**

My interest in incorporating mental health into my nutrition practice was inspired by the realization that physical and mental well-being are deeply interconnected. I noticed many of the clients struggling with physical health issues were also grappling with mental and emotional challenges. I wanted/always want to address the whole person, not just their physical health alone. My experience so far has been incredibly rewarding. I have seen clients break free from limiting beliefs and negative patterns, and witnessed profound transformations in their overall wellbeing. It's amazing to see how nutritional healing and mental health can complement each other, leading to a more holistic approach to health. Combining my passions for nutrition and mental health has allowed me to support individuals in a more comprehensive way, empowering them to achieve optimal wellness and live authentically. It's a privilege to be part of this journey with my clients and I'm grateful for the opportunity to make a positive impact on their lives.

**3. How do you define mental health?**

Scientifically, it's a state of well-being in which the

individuals realize their own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to their community. It's important to note that mental health not only encompasses the scientific definition but also the broader aspects of inner experiences, interactions, and environmental influences. It includes the thoughts we think, the imagination we foster, the experiences we have, the narratives we create and the physical and virtual environment we inhabit. It is also shaped by the media and entertainment we consume, which ultimately impact how we perceive our abilities, cope with stress, work and relate with others. This perspective recognizes mental health as a dynamic interplay between individual and environmental factors.

#### **4. Could you cite out any mental health disorders that are as a result of poor nutrition or which could be corrected with improved nutrition?**

Depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, eating disorders, mental fatigue, inability and mood swings. It's also important to note that while nutrition can play a significant role in mental health, these disorders are complex and often require comprehensive treatment plans, including Eyabu Nutrition Hub (ENH) Promoting Healthy and Sustainable Lifestyles Eyabu Nutrition Hub (ENH) | ENH Wellness UG | ENH NutriTech UG Telephone: +256770675821, +256701928614, +256770675820 | Email: inquiries@enhug.org services@enhug.org Address: P.O BOX 164499 | Plot 83, Luthuli Avenue, Bugolobi | Plot 37, Mbiro Road, Mbale | Website: enhug.org therapy, medication, care, and not just nutrition alone. Nutrition is just one of the core pillars in the holistic management of these disorders, which is why it is very important to acknowledge the contribution other mental health professionals when managing/treating these disorders.

#### **5. How important is nutrition in mental health management?**

Nutrition plays a crucial role in mental health management. A healthy diet provides the necessary building blocks for optimal brain function, mood regulation, and emotional wellbeing and influences the gut-brain axis. However, while nutrition is essential for mental health management, it's important to note that it should be considered in conjunction with other treatments such as therapy and medication as part of a comprehensive approach.

#### **6. Would you say that this has been effectively and vastly embraced or made use of during mental health management today?**

Unfortunately, no. Despite the strong evidence linking nutrition to mental health, the importance of nutrition is not yet widely embraced or effectively utilized in mental health

management today. While there's a growing interest in the field of nutritional psychiatry, many mental health professionals still rely primarily on medication and therapy, without fully considering the potential benefits of nutritional interventions. Probably because of limited education and training in nutrition among mental health professionals, lack of standardized nutritional guidelines for mental health conditions, limited access to registered dietitians or nutritionists specializing in mental health and stigmas surrounding the importance of nutrition in mental health.

#### **7. Now on to eating disorders, do these signify that one a mental health problem, if so, why?**

Eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and binge eating disorders are complex conditions that often indicate underlying mental health struggles such as difficulty managing emotions, struggles with self-acceptance & self-worth, trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, mood disorders and personality disorders or traits like perfectionism. So yes, they signify that one has a mental health problem.

#### **8. What is your say on eating while being distracted like watching TV, or on phone, is it even of concern?**

Eating while being distracted by phone or TV is a concern for several reasons such as mindless eating, poor digestion, lack of satisfaction, nurturing unhealthy eating habits, and a negative impact on mental health (excessive screen time during meals has been linked to increased stress, anxiety and depression).

#### **9. Any tips on how people out there can maintain or improve their mental health using nutrition such as in management of stress, depression or anxiety?**

To maintain or improve mental health through nutrition, focus on consuming a balanced diet rich in omega-3-fatty acids, complex carbohydrates, green leafy vegetables, B-vitamins, magnesium and probiotics, while limiting processed foods and practicing mindful eating. In addition to that, it's important to seek professional guidance from Nutritionists or dietitians for personalized support

#### **10. Any concluding remarks?**

Concluding remarks, it's clear that nutrition plays a vital role in mental wellbeing. Let's continue to prioritize our health and spread awareness about the importance of nutrition in mental health management. Remember, 'A Healthy Plate Can Also Lead to a Healthy Mind.'

# LATEST ACTIVITIES



Nina Amutuheire, our winner of the previous issue received her award from Dr. Robert Mugabi at the School of Food Technology Nutrition and Bioengineering.



The 3<sup>rd</sup> National Nutrition Forum at Mestil Hotel, Kampala witnessed a pivotal moment – the launch of SUN-ARINU, a network dedicated to scaling up nutrition in academic and research institutions in Uganda. Our team also conducted nutrition assessments and showcased innovative products.




Leadership baton passes to the next generation! The MUHUNSA Cabinet handover ceremony took place at SFTNB Conference Hall, with MATSIKO ALEX as the Chairperson for 2024/25 new MUHUNSA leadership.




# MAKERERE UNIVERSITY HUMAN NUTRITION STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION (MUHUNSA)

## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 2024/25




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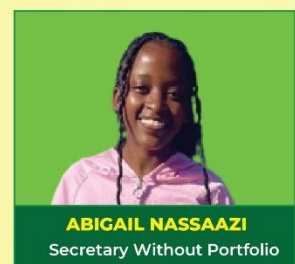
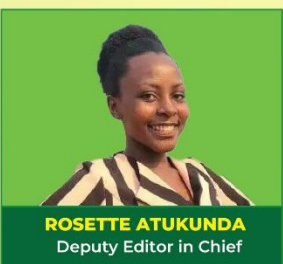
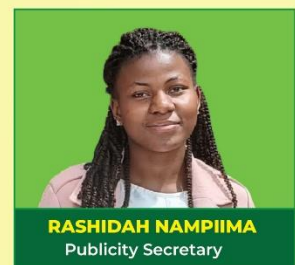
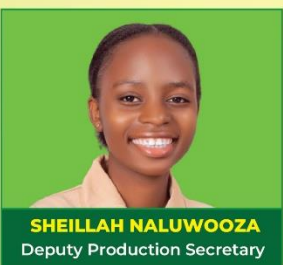
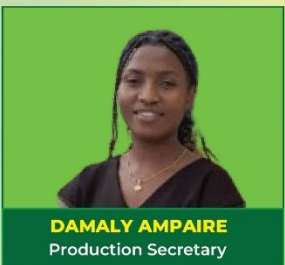
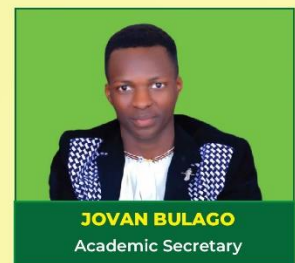
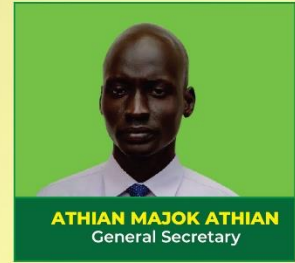




# MAKERERE UNIVERSITY FOOD SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION

## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

2024/2025





**Students and the patron, Dr. Kigozi Julia, cut the cake together at the handover ceremony of the fellowship leadership.**



**After a mentorship talk with two of the staff members from the University of Leeds (London), Dr. Carolyn Auma and Dr. Jonas Cromwell to the students of Human Nutrition and Food Science and Technology**



**Launch of the E-Resource website at the college of Natural Sciences (CONAS) in partnership with the Nutrition Society of Uganda.**



**Some students and staff of the School of Food Technology, Nutrition, and Bioengineering (SFTNB) visited Nabisunsa Girls Secondary School, sharing valuable career guidance, mentorship, and showcasing innovative products that promote healthy eating! The team also assessed the nutrition status of students and provided personalized guidance, empowering them to make informed choices. Nutrition education sessions sparked lively discussions and new insights.**

## LET'S HAVE SOME FUN TOGETHER



**Why did the scarecrow eat a salad?** Because he wanted to boost his "grain" power!

**Why did the apple go to therapy?** It couldn't find its core purpose!

**Why don't eggs tell jokes?** Because they might crack up!

**Why did the banana go to the doctor?** It wasn't peeling well, and needed some potassium for a mental boost!

**Why did the mushroom get invited to all the parties?** Because he's a fungus who knows how to keep everyone's mood up!

**What did the nut say when it was chasing the other nut?** I'm going to cashew!

**Why did the tomato turn red?** Because it saw the salad dressing and got a little emotional!

**Why do grapes never get depressed?** Because they always turn into wine when they're feeling down!

**Why did the coffee file a police report?** It got mugged and lost its perk!

**Why did the lettuce break up with the celery?** It found out the celery was stalking it and it needed to leaf for its own peace of mind!

## NUTRITION FACTS

1. Omega-3 fatty acids found in fish, and walnuts are essential for brain health and have been linked to improved mood and reduced risk of depression.
2. B vitamins are important in neurotransmitter function and energy production in the brain.
3. Low levels of vitamin D have been linked to depression and mental health conditions.
4. Found in leafy greens, nuts, and seeds, magnesium reduces stress and anxiety by regulating the stress-response system.
5. Tryptophan: This amino acid, found in turkey, milk, and nuts, boosts serotonin production, improving mood and sleep.

**Follow** Makerere University Human Nutrition Students Association (**MUHUNSA**) on her social media platforms.

