

Compliments of Kowalski's

May – June 2025
THE JOY OF GOOD FOOD

KOWALSKI'S AT HOME

GOOD *mood* FOOD



Strawberry Sour
Cream Tart
(page 9)

COOKING
WITH LAMB

**seasonal
strawberry recipes**

AGAVE
SPIRITS

Thoughts from the KOWALSKIS

Comfort food typically makes us think about fall, winter and warm, hearty meals and dishes, but what about spring and summer? What foods put us in a good mood when the weather's warm? This season, we are exploring summery foods that make us feel like kids. Foods so beautiful they take our breath away. Healthful foods that strengthen our bodies and make us feel better about eating them. Foods we can eat outdoors, and foods that naturally refresh and energize us.

Another timely gem to perk us up is the double dose of Kowalski's Nutritionist Sue Moores, M.S., R.D., in this issue! Starting on page 14, she's sharing the science behind mood and food with information about the ingredients most likely to impact how we feel. You won't want to miss the companion recipe to her column on page 13, a collab with Kowalski's Culinary & Branding Director Rachael Perron that combines some "mind-altering" ingredients into a delicious and positively gorgeous seasonal salad featuring spinach, avocados, walnuts and strawberries.

Strawberries might arguably be the happiest of berries. In a two-page feature on everyone's favorite fruit, we have both new and updated recipes for classic strawberry desserts and a triple strawberry shortcake that couldn't be more loaded with strawberry flavor. It's made with fresh berries, strawberry yogurt and freeze-dried berries blended into a pretty pink whipped cream. It's the berry best!

Perhaps no food fills us with more joy and childlike wonder than an ice cream sandwich. Turn to pages 10-11 for ideas, along with a slightly more adult frozen treat made with mood-boosting espresso!

Cheerful choices can be had around the store, too. We're sharing some of the best selections for prompting joy from the Grocery and Frozen Foods Departments. Turn to page 5 for a quick look at these good mood foods.



See you in the stores!
Kris Kowalski Christiansen
and Mary Anne Kowalski



looking GOOD

is feeling good

Given that recipes and cooking are at the crux of what I do for a living, I'd say food has a more-than-typical effect on my mood. People often ask me if I hate making dinner at home because I cook so much at work. Actually, quite the opposite is true. I've been known to go home after a long day and make jam or cookies to de-stress. Sometimes, the subject of any given day's culinary project will inspire supper that night. Food, especially *making* food, definitely makes me happy. But nothing in my experience as a chef brings me more pleasure than truly beautiful food.

Yes, I love to make food look pretty. (I certainly loved working on this shot of *Spring Kiwi Cups*.) But food doesn't have to be perfectly styled to lift my spirits – I'll snap a pic of a peeled tangerine sitting on my desk because it just looks *that* good. I tend to find simple, colorful, natural foods the most inspiring and mood-lifting. Maybe that's *why* I don't hate making meals when I get home after a long day. Every day, bliss is mine because I'm surrounded by the best-in-class steaks, juiciest fruits, freshest breads and generally top-of-the-line everything else. If that isn't *the joy of good food*, I don't know what is.

Warmly,

Rachael



Rachael Perron,
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FIND RACHAEL'S
RECIPE FOR *SPRING
KIWI CUPS* HERE!

COOKING AT HOME

SIGNATURE PRODUCT FOCUS

BALSAMIC vinegar

Our Signature **Balsamic Vinegar** and **Fig Balsamic Vinegar** are our favorite sweet-tart condiments! They are imported from the Modena region of Italy, where the best balsamic vinegar in the world is made, and are both major kitchen multitaskers. Drizzle these thick, richly sweet vinegars on salads, blend them into sauces or use them for glazing everything from meats and veggies to sandwiches and appetizers.



HERB BALSAMIC LAMB CHOPS GF DF

SERVES 4

½ cup Kowalski's Extra Virgin Olive Oil	2 tsp. gluten-free Dijon mustard
¼ cup Kowalski's Balsamic Vinegar	¼ tsp. freshly ground Kowalski's Sea Salt
1 tbsp. Kowalski's Pure Honey	¼ tsp. freshly ground Kowalski's Black Peppercorns
1 tbsp. chopped fresh oregano (or 1 tsp. dried)	8 (1 ¼-1 ½" thick) lamb rib chops (about 3 ½ lbs. total)
2 cloves garlic, minced	

DIRECTIONS:

1. In a small mixing bowl, whisk together all ingredients except chops.
2. Place chops in a baking dish; pour marinade over chops, turning chops to thoroughly coat. Cover and refrigerate for 1 hr., turning chops occasionally.
3. Preheat a grill to medium-high heat; clean grill grates.
4. Remove chops from marinade; discard marinade.
5. Arrange chops on preheated grill; cook until slightly pink in the center and meat reaches an internal temperature of 140° (10-14 min.), turning once when dark grill marks form and meat releases easily from grill grates.
6. Remove chops from grill; tent loosely with foil and let rest for 5 min. before serving.



FIND YOUR happy

This season, the center of the store is helping you find a little lift with products that spark joy. From bright and colorful packaging and flavors that appeal to your inner child to healthful, colorful foods that bring balance to your body, there's something special in every aisle.



NEW!

KOOSHY CROUTONS

Bring your feel-good salads to life with Kooshy CROUTONS! Made with Non-GMO Project verified sourdough bread and no artificial flavors, dyes or preservatives, these crunchy croutons will spice up your salads with unique flavors like *Mambo Italiano* and *Poco Picante* (Chili + Lime). Also look for Kooshy Sourdough Breadcrumbs in the Grocery Department.

LOCAL



FINLEY'S DOG TREATS

Perhaps nothing boosts our mood as much as our pets do! With Finley's, you can feel good about treating them to good mood food, too. Founded in Minneapolis, Finley's treats are made with all natural, delicious whole foods your dog will love. Started by two special education teachers, Finley's is committed to reducing employment barriers for people with disabilities. They partner with Special Olympics, Best Buddies and other local nonprofits that are similarly dedicated to inclusion.

FIND OUR BEST WEEKLY FEATURES HERE:



TRENDING

MELA WATERMELON WATER

Refreshing, hydrating Mela Watermelon Water is big on flavor and made with clean, simple ingredients. Small-batch, non-GMO and gluten-free Mela uses real, responsibly grown watermelons as a naturally occurring source of fluid-regulating electrolytes and antioxidants. Find Mela in the Single Beverage Case.



HIDDEN GEM

JENI'S ICE CREAM

Jeni's unique flavors are sure to put you in a good mood! These scratch-made ice creams have a smooth texture and lush, buttercream-esque body. Their bright flavors and clean finishes are available in a wide range of flavors inspired by art, pop culture, history and more! Pineapple Upside Down Cake and Goopy Butter Cake are fan favorites!



DAVE'S KILLER BREAD SNACK BITES

NEW!

These organic, tiny-but-mighty snack bites are baked with organic nuts, seeds and grains for a craveable taste and texture. For nearly 20 years, Dave's Killer Bread has actively hired people with criminal backgrounds, giving them a second chance to turn their lives around while helping make a positive difference in hundreds of lives, families and careers. Now that's something to feel good about! Look for all six varieties in the Grocery Department.



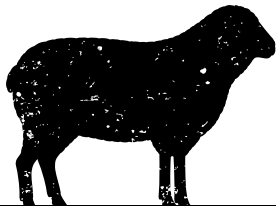


COOKING

WITH

lamb

Lamb may be a springtime favorite, but it is wonderful year-round. Domestic lamb is a uniquely flavorful and surprisingly mild culinary experience. Kowalski's Naturally Raised 100% Grass-Fed Certified Humane Lamb comes from a co-op of fourth- and fifth-generation shepherds from Oregon that aim to produce the highest-quality lamb possible. Like all Kowalski's Service Counter choices, the animals are never given added hormones or antibiotics – ever!



LEG OF LAMB is as easy to cook as a beef or pork roast and sure to impress at any spring or summer entertaining occasion.

LAMB CHOPS are easy to prepare. Just cook them as you would pork chops! Like beef and poultry, cuts with bone impart flavor. (Find a recipe for Herb Balsamic Lamb Chops on page 4.)

GROUND LAMB is another easy entrée into the world of lamb. Swap it into seasonal recipes for burgers.



GREEK LAMB BURGERS

FIND OUR FULL
COMPLEMENT
OF LAMB
RECIPES HERE:



TASTY TIP

You can substitute an equal amount of beef top round roast or beef chuck roast for the lamb top round roast called for in this recipe.



TOP ROUND OF LAMB is meltingly tender when braised all day in a slow cooker. Serve chunks on pita bread with fresh gyro-style fixin's.

SUMMER SLOW COOKER LAMB GYROS

SERVES 6

- 3 tbsp. Kowalski's Freshly Squeezed Lemon Juice (from the Produce Department)
- 2 tbsp. Kowalski's Extra Virgin Olive Oil
- 3 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1 tbsp. finely chopped fresh mint (or 1-2 tsp. dried mint)
- 1 ¾ tsp. dried oregano
- 1 tsp. freshly ground Kowalski's Black Peppercorns
- ¾ tsp. kosher salt
- 2 lb. lamb top round roast
- 6 slices pita or flatbread, warmed
- garnishes, as desired: sliced or diced cucumber, sliced tomato, sliced red onion, torn Bibb lettuce, shredded radicchio, tzatziki sauce, fresh mint and lemon wedges

DIRECTIONS:

1. In a medium mixing bowl, whisk together first 7 ingredients (through salt).
2. Place roast in a slow cooker; add marinade and turn to coat all sides.
3. Cook lamb on high for 5-6 hrs. or on low for 7-8 hrs.
4. Remove lamb from slow cooker; discard fat and bones, if any.
5. Serve chunks of warm lamb on warm pita or flatbread with desired fresh toppings.

LAMB BURGERS WITH FRESH HERB SAUCE

MAKES 2

- 12 oz. Kowalski's Naturally Raised 100% Grass-Fed Ground Lamb
- kosher salt and freshly ground Kowalski's Black Peppercorns, to taste
- 2 whole-wheat burger buns, split and toasted
- toppings, to taste: leaf lettuce, sliced tomato, thinly sliced red onion, very thinly sliced cucumber, fresh herbs and *Fresh Herb Sauce*

DIRECTIONS:

1. Preheat grill to medium-high heat; clean grill grates.
2. Using clean hands, form lamb into 2 patties; season with salt and pepper.
3. Grill burgers over direct heat, lid down, until done (4-5 min. per side), turning once.
4. Remove from heat; tent loosely with foil and let stand for 3-5 min.
5. Serve burgers on toasted buns with toppings to taste.

FRESH HERB SAUCE GF V

MAKES ABOUT ½ CUP

- ½ cup Kowalski's Signature Herb Spread
- 2 tsp. finely chopped fresh Italian parsley (from the Deli Grab & Go Case)
- ½ cup low-fat buttermilk
- 1 tsp. kosher salt and freshly ground Kowalski's Black Peppercorns, to taste
- 1 tbsp. finely chopped fresh dill
- 1 tbsp. sliced green onion

DIRECTIONS:

1. In a small mixing bowl, whisk together herb spread and buttermilk.
2. Stir in dill and parsley; season to taste with salt and pepper.
3. Garnish with sliced green onion; serve immediately or store in the refrigerator, covered, for up to 5 days.



Selection and availability of products and ingredients vary by market.

FRESH

celebrating

STRAWBERRIES

Berries are beloved picks in the Produce Department in these warmer months. Great out of hand as a snack or healthful dessert, strawberries, blueberries, raspberries and blackberries also make sweet, beautiful additions to seasonal recipes like tarts, trifles, salads and smoothies. Strawberries are certainly the customer favorite in the berry category, and here we're sharing some of our favorite ways to enjoy them!

TRIPLE STRAWBERRY SHORTCAKES

SERVES 8

3 lbs. (approx.) fresh strawberries, stemmed and hulled, divided
¼ cup superfine sugar
15.3 oz. pkg. Kowalski's Original Scones Baking Mix
½ cup Kowalski's Salted Butter, cold, cut into small cubes
¾ cup full-fat strawberry-flavored Greek yogurt
1 ½ cups heavy cream
0.8 oz. pkg. freeze-dried strawberries (such as Natierra brand)
¼ cup confectioners' sugar

DIRECTIONS:

1. Dice enough strawberries to measure 1 cup; set aside.
2. Slice remaining strawberries and place in a medium mixing bowl; sprinkle with superfine sugar and let stand until strawberries are juicy and soft (about 2 hrs.).
3. Meanwhile, prepare 8 scones using scone mix, butter, yogurt and diced strawberries as directed on the package of scone mix; let cool at room temperature for at least 1 hr. (up to 1 day).
4. Just before serving, combine cream, dried strawberries and confectioners' sugar in a medium mixing bowl. Using an electric mixer, whip mixture until dried strawberries are well incorporated and soft peaks form (there will still be small bits of berry visible in the whipped cream).
5. Serve scones with an equal amount of macerated strawberries and strawberry whipped cream.



BALSAMIC STRAWBERRIES GF V
WITH WHIPPED MASCARPONE

SERVES 6

- ½ cup mascarpone cheese
- ½ cup heavy cream
- ¼ cup superfine sugar
- ½ tsp. Kowalski's Organic Madagascar Vanilla Extract
- 2 lbs. fresh strawberries, hulled and halved (or quartered if very large)
- 6 tbsp. Kowalski's Balsamic Vinegar
- optional garnishes, to taste: freshly grated lemon zest, freshly ground Kowalski's Black Peppercorns and fresh mint leaves

DIRECTIONS:

1. In a large mixing bowl, use an electric mixer with whip attachment to combine mascarpone, cream, sugar and vanilla at medium speed just until soft peaks form; set aside.
2. In a separate large mixing bowl, combine strawberries and vinegar, tossing to coat; cover and refrigerate for 30 min.
3. Spoon strawberries and their juices into a rimmed serving platter or bowl. Dollop mascarpone mixture on the platter next to the berries; sprinkle with lemon zest, black pepper and fresh mint, if desired.



STRAWBERRY SOUR CREAM TART V
(from the cover)

SERVES 8-10

- 1 ¼ cups graham cracker crumbs
- ¼ cup plus ⅔ cup sugar, divided
- 5 tbsp. Kowalski's Unsalted Butter, melted
- 16 oz. (2 containers) Kowalski's Original Whipped Cream Cheese Spread, at room temperature
- 1 cup sour cream
- 4 tsp. Kowalski's Freshly Squeezed Lemon Juice (from the Produce Department)

DIRECTIONS:

1. Preheat oven to 350°.
2. In a medium mixing bowl, combine crumbs, ¼ cup sugar and butter; toss with a fork until well blended.
3. Press crumb mixture firmly into the bottom and up the sides of an 11" tart pan with a removable bottom. Bake in preheated oven until crust is golden-brown and firm to the touch (6-8 min.).
4. Remove crust from oven; set aside to cool completely.
5. In a large mixing bowl, beat cream cheese and ⅔ cup sugar until smooth.

- 1 tsp. Kowalski's Organic Madagascar Vanilla Extract
- ½ cup strawberry jam or preserves
- 1 tbsp. water
- 1 ½ lbs. fresh strawberries, hulled and halved (or quartered if very large)
- for garnish, to taste: confectioners' sugar and fresh mint leaves

6. Beat in sour cream, lemon juice and vanilla until completely combined.
7. Spread filling inside cooled crust; cover and chill in the refrigerator until filling is set (at least 4 hrs.).
8. In a small mixing bowl, whisk jam with water. Heat jam mixture in the microwave for 15 sec.
9. Toss berries with warm jam mixture.
10. Arrange berries over filling; turn the top layer of berries cut-side down for the prettiest look.
11. Dust with confectioners' sugar and garnish with mint; serve immediately.



SUMMER BERRY SAUCE RECIPE:



frozen FUN

REFRESH YOURSELF AND FEEL LIKE A KID AGAIN WITH THESE SEMI-HOMEMADE FROZEN TREATS.

MOCHA BROWNIE ICE CREAM SANDWICHES

You can fill layers of brownies with any flavor of ice cream, but we love the combination of rich chocolate and Kowalski's Signature Java Chocolate Chunk Ice Cream. It replicates the reviving energy of an iced mocha latte. Bake brownies at home or treat yourself with Kowalski's Signature Brownies from the Bakery Department.

EASY ICE CREAM SANDWICHES

Make any flavor of cookies you prefer using our Bake at Home Cookie Dough or pick up freshly baked Kowalski's Signature Family Favorite Cookies in the Bakery Department – even mini cookies! Mix and match flavors with your choice of Kowalski's Signature Ice Cream to craft your custom confection. Use a cookie cutter to make perfectly round slices of ice cream for filling your sandwiches.



EASY ICE CREAM SANDWICHES V

MAKES 2

- 4 ct. pkg. Kowalski's Signature Family Favorite Cookies (your choice of flavor), divided
- 1 pt. Kowalski's Signature Ice Cream (your choice of flavor), divided
- sprinkles, crushed candy, etc., for rolling (optional)

DIRECTIONS:

1. Put cookies in the freezer for 3-4 hrs. to harden.
2. Allow ice cream to soften at room temperature for 3-5 min.
3. Place 1 cookie on a clean work surface, bottom side up; top cookie with ½ pt. ice cream.
4. Place another cookie on top, bottom side against the ice cream; press cookies together to evenly distribute ice cream. Smooth edge with the back of a spoon.
5. Repeat with remaining cookies and ice cream.
6. Roll edges of ice cream sandwiches in sprinkles or candy to coat exposed ice cream, if desired.
7. Wrap sandwiches in waxed paper; freeze for 4 hrs. or until solid.
8. Let sandwiches stand at room temperature for 5-10 min. before serving.



MOCHA BROWNIE ICE CREAM SANDWICHES V

MAKES 8

- 1 pkg. boxed brownie mix, plus ingredients needed to prepare as directed on the pkg.
- 1 pt. Kowalski's Signature Java Chocolate Chunk Ice Cream
- 1 pt. Kowalski's Signature Chocolate Malt Ice Cream

DIRECTIONS:

1. Preheat the oven as directed on the package of brownies.
2. Lightly spray two 8" metal baking pans with cooking spray; line bottoms with parchment paper, leaving at least a 1" overhang on two opposing sides of each pan.
3. Prepare brownie batter as directed on the package, splitting the batter between pans; smooth batter evenly to the edges of the pan with an offset spatula.
4. Bake brownies in preheated oven until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out with just a few moist crumbs attached (start checking after 9 min.; the brownies will bake much faster than if all the batter was in a single pan, usually no more than 15 min.).
5. Remove from oven; let brownies cool in pans to room temperature.
6. Loosen brownies from the edges of each pan; remove each slab from the pan in a single piece, using the overhanging parchment as a sling.
7. Reline the bottom of one pan with clean parchment paper, leaving at least a 1" overhang on two opposing sides. Return one of the brownie slabs to the lined pan, top side up.
8. Let ice cream soften until it's easy to work with (up to 30 min.).
9. Scoop softened ice cream evenly over brownies in pan; spread ice cream evenly to the edges of the pan with an offset spatula. Cover ice cream layer with the second brownie slab, top side down, pressing down evenly but firmly. Freeze until solid (at least 3 hrs.).
10. Cut slab into 8 evenly sized sandwiches; wrap each in parchment or waxed paper. Store wrapped sandwiches in a sealed freezer bag or storage container until ready to serve.
11. Remove sandwiches from freezer about 10 min. before serving.



ESPRESSO GRANITAS GF V VE DF

SERVES 4

Made with energizing espresso, these icy desserts require little more than some coffee and a fork to make. This fluffy, cold, classic Italian treat can be made with just about any fruit purée, juice or flavorful liquid, including cocktails!

2 cups espresso or strong black coffee, lukewarm

½ cup brown sugar

1 tsp. freshly grated orange zest

- garnishes, to taste: fresh mint sprigs and orange curls or segments (optional)

DIRECTIONS:

1. Combine coffee, sugar and zest in a medium mixing bowl; stir until sugar melts.
2. Pour mixture into a 9x13" baking dish; freeze for 1 hr.
3. Remove dish from freezer; use a fork to scrape up any ice crystals.
4. Return dish to freezer; repeat scraping process every 15 min. for approx. 3 ½ hrs.
5. When mixture is thoroughly frozen, fluff with a fork and freeze for another 30 min.
6. Serve with garnishes, if desired.

GIVE AGAVE A GO

Agave spirits are one of the country's fastest-growing categories of spirits, right up there with whiskey. Tequila is undoubtedly the most popular beverage in the agave category, with mezcal not far behind and gaining fans at a rapid pace.

Though it has a reputation as a rough distilled spirit, tequila can be incredibly smooth and quite clean-tasting depending on how it's produced. Made from blue agave plants, good-quality tequila preserves the plant's sweet, vegetal and faintly floral characteristics.

Mezcal may have a reputation for being of lesser quality, but that's somewhat undeserved. Legally, mezcal must be made from at least 51% agave (sugar cane is used to make up the difference, which can give the spirit a harsher, rougher taste). The more agave used, the smoother and more pleasant mezcal tastes. Mezcal made with a higher proportion of agave typically costs more than that made with less.

GOOD TO KNOW

The agave plant has adapted over thousands of years to withstand scorching heat, intense sun and limited rainfall. Spiky leaves protect its sweet center from unwelcome predators, and its long center stalk (known as a *quiote*) can grow up to 20 feet tall. The *quiote* keeps the agave's delicate seeds protected so it can bloom – something that only happens once in each plant's lifetime.

MEZCAL NEGRONI

MAKES 1

GF V DF

- ice
- 1 oz. mezcal
- 1 oz. Campari
- 1 oz. sweet vermouth
- orange wedges, for garnish

DIRECTIONS:

1. Fill a lowball glass with ice; set aside.
2. In a mixing glass, combine mezcal, Campari and vermouth.
3. Add ice; stir until well chilled.
4. Strain into ice-filled glass; garnish with orange wedge.



FRESH AND EASY MARGARITAS GF V VE DF

MAKES 4

- 4 tbsp. kosher salt, for rimming glasses
- 5 lime wedges, divided
- ice
- 8 oz. Kowalski's Freshly Squeezed Lime Juice (from the Produce Department)
- ½ cup Kowalski's Classic Simple Syrup or Lime Simple Syrup
- 4 oz. tequila



DIRECTIONS:

1. Pour salt onto a flat rimmed dish. Moisten the rims of 4 cocktail glasses with a lime wedge; dip rims in salt.
2. Fill prepared glasses with ice; set aside.
3. In a 4-cup spouted measuring glass, combine lime juice and simple syrup; stir in tequila.
4. Pour into prepared glasses; garnish each glass with a lime wedge.

eating YOUR feelings

Along with a lovely balance of flavors, colors and textures, our choice for the best mood-enhancing recipe features five foods scientifically proven to make you feel better.* Turn the page for more good news from our resident nutritionist, Sue Moores, M.S., R.D.

SPINACH This dark green leafy vegetable is a good source of folate, an essential B vitamin that's needed to regulate the production of three "feel good" brain chemicals: dopamine, norepinephrine and serotonin.

STRAWBERRIES Strawberries are rich in antioxidant vitamin C, which protects cells throughout the body from damage, including those in your brain. If you're not eating enough vitamin C, eating more may help improve your mood and energy level.

WALNUTS Their vitamin E, magnesium and plant-based omega-3 fatty acids are a trifecta of nutrients for fighting inflammation and supporting brain-focused nutrition.

AVOCADOS Known for their high fiber content, avocados help build a community of healthy bacteria in your gut. That robust microbiome directly connects to and favorably influences the health of your brain.

OLIVE OIL The polyphenols in olive oil, particularly extra virgin olive oil, offer anti-inflammatory capabilities. Since the presence of inflammation can limit the body's ability to produce serotonin, the benefit of reducing inflammation means more calming, "feel good" serotonin.

**The nutrients in these foods support positive mental health and well-being. Deficiencies may increase the risk of triggering depression and anxiety or negatively affect your ability to manage stress. Consuming more than what's needed, however, doesn't translate to a better mood or better mental health.*



MOOD BOOST SALAD GF V

SERVES 4

6 oz. baby spinach	3 oz. crumbled fresh goat cheese
- Balsamic Vinaigrette, to taste (find the recipe at kowalskis.com)	- toasted walnuts, to taste
8 oz. fresh strawberries, sliced	- freshly ground Kowalski's Black Peppercorns, to taste
1 avocado, sliced	

DIRECTIONS:

1. Wash spinach in ice-cold water; drain thoroughly in a salad spinner until very dry.
2. In a large salad or mixing bowl, toss spinach with dressing to taste.
3. Top salad with remaining ingredients; season generously with pepper and drizzle with additional dressing to taste.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

eat good, feel good.



Susan Moores, M.S., R.D.
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Research shows that food and its nutrients can significantly influence mood and mental health, making eating an effective and delicious way to support your well-being. The relationship is meaningful enough that it has evolved into a field called *nutritional psychiatry*, which studies these connections and uses the findings to help people improve their mental health.

Though the brain accounts for only 2% of your body weight, at least 20% of the calories you eat each day go toward fueling it. That fuel affects the composition, structure and function of the brain. It feeds the hormones, proteins and chemical messengers that operate inside the brain and the communication and nourishment flowing between your brain and gastrointestinal tract, also known as your *microbiome*.

Chronic inflammation and unmanaged stress negatively influence brain health and mental well-being. These factors disrupt the microbiome and interfere with the production and transport of brain chemicals that shape mood and cognition.

The Mediterranean diet and eating style are winning ways (yes, *again*) for calming inflammation, easing stress' impact, and feeding your brain, mood and mental health. This approach to eating emphasizes whole fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds and other fiber-rich foods like beans and whole grains. Collectively, these foods slow damage to brain cells, support the production of healthy new ones and bolster the mechanisms associated with better brain function. The Mediterranean diet focuses on healthy fats like olive oil and leaner proteins, with a shift toward more fish and less red and highly processed meats. These ingredients create and cultivate a healthy group of bacteria in your gut, directly influencing your brain and mood. Research has shown that in as little as 12 weeks, mental health benefits can be felt from following a Mediterranean way of eating.

notable nutrients that have been studied for their impact on mood

CARBS

When digested, carbs break down into glucose, a sugar that is the main (and preferred) source of energy for your brain. However, diets laden with refined carbohydrates are linked with cognitive decline. Highly processed and/or sugary carbohydrates increase inflammation and the risk for anxiety and depressive symptoms. Sugary foods negatively affect gut health, too.

Make at least half your carb choices minimally processed ones, especially at night. Choose whole-grain breads and cereals, beans, and whole fruits and vegetables. Try sorghum, farro, buckwheat, oats and quinoa in place of pasta, white rice and skinless potatoes. Their nutrients and fiber counter inflammation and help keep blood sugar levels in check.

OMEGA-3 FATS

These polyunsaturated fats have anti-inflammatory powers. They function as antioxidants, too, protecting brain cells from excessive oxidation caused by stress, smoking, drinking too much alcohol, extensive sun exposure, air pollution and other environmental toxins. They support the brain's ability to regenerate and create new pathways for brain cells while removing cells that are no longer needed.

Omega-3s are found in certain types of fish, such as tuna, salmon, trout, sardines and sea bass. Grass-fed beef and eggs from free-range and pasture-raised chickens are good choices, too. Plant sources of omega-3s include walnuts; chia, hemp and flax seeds; seaweed and algae. It's worth noting that canola, soybean, flax seed and walnut oils contain more omega-3s than other vegetable oils. Also, monounsaturated fats, like those in olive and avocado oils, have anti-inflammatory properties, too.

MAGNESIUM

Nearly half of us are not getting the daily magnesium recommendation of 400 mg. Older adults, people with type-2 diabetes, and those with digestive troubles or who take medications for reflux are at higher risk for low magnesium levels. Along with fighting inflammation, magnesium helps with the body's use of serotonin, dopamine and other brain chemicals that promote a sense of well-being. It also helps protect the brain from harmful substances.

Magnesium is readily found in nuts and nut butters, seeds, beans, dark green vegetables, yogurt, whole grains and fortified cereals.



FIBER

Fiber works to create and feed a healthy microbiome. An unbalanced gut causes inflammation and reduces the production and absorption of key vitamins, minerals and chemicals known to support mood and mental health. A healthy gut improves the digestion and absorption of nutrients and activates pathways and communication between cells that influence mood, memory and more. An estimated 95% of Americans are not eating enough fiber. Choosing beans, whole grains, nuts, seeds, and whole fruits and vegetables gets you there.

VITAMIN D

Some research suggests vitamin D can influence mood and mental well-being. It helps protect brain cells, lower inflammation and is involved in the production of serotonin. A blood level above 50 nmol/L or 20 ng/ml is considered adequate for good health.

About 40% of Americans are not getting enough vitamin D, especially those of us living in gray, wintry climates. Look to fortified dairy foods and cereals, plus salmon and trout, as good food sources. A short window of time in the sun (as little as 15 minutes) can do a world of good, too.

HYDRATION

About 55-65% of the body is made up of water. Two-thirds of it is found inside cells and is used to ensure they function well. Adequate hydration carries nutrients where they need to be. Dehydration negatively affects memory, mood and focus.

Some foods and dietary factors may negatively impact mood:

- Too much saturated fat
- Trans fats (partially hydrogenated oils)
- Fried foods
- Added sugars (above 6 tsp./day for women, 9 tsp./day for men)
- Ultra-processed foods, including meats and highly refined carbohydrates
- Artificial sweeteners
- Excessive alcohol and caffeine

a few important footnotes:

- Much of the research on diet, mood and mental well-being is linked to correcting nutrient deficiencies, not exceeding daily recommendations.
- Mood is impacted by many inputs – food and otherwise – versus any single nutrient or factor on its own.
- Negative moods and stress often draw us to eat high-sugar, high-fat and sodium-rich foods. These foods may offer a temporary mood boost but may otherwise bring on feelings of guilt and disappointment and cause harmful inflammation in the body. Choose healthful swaps like popcorn and nuts instead of chips, or dark chocolate and dried fruit in place of sugary candy. Self-care activities like taking a walk may also better support mental well-being.



seasonal supper

This season, we're sharing a few easy ways to ensure grilled pork chop perfection:

STEP ONE: Pick the right cut. Bone-in chops cook more evenly and have extra connective tissue (fat), ensuring marked juiciness and maximum flavor in the final product.

STEP TWO: Make a simple brine with water, salt and a pinch of sugar. Brining for just 20 minutes is enough to produce a dramatic effect on the finished texture of your chops.

STEP THREE: Cook pork chops to the right temperature. An internal temp of 140° for a thick chop will result in a perfect final temp of 145° after resting. This is the USDA-recommended safe cooking temperature. (Just 13 years ago, the USDA was recommending 160°. Those 15° are critical!) At a safe 145° temperature, a perfectly grilled pork chop will still be slightly pink in the middle.

STEP FOUR: Finish with a glaze and/or dipping sauce to add a final layer of flavor. Products featuring a sweet, mild heat – like Kowalski's Raspberry Chipotle Sauce – are ideal.

PRO TIP

Insert an instant-read meat thermometer sideways into the center of chops, chicken breasts and steaks to get the most accurate reading.

GRILLED RASPBERRY CHIPOTLE PORK CHOPS RECIPE:



Selection and availability of products and ingredients vary by market.

KOWALSKI COMPANIES IDENTITY STATEMENT: Kowalski Companies is a civic business. All stakeholders are obligated to organize, educate and set policy according to democratic principles and standards. We do this in partnership with other demonstrations of the Midwest Active Citizenship Initiative to renew and sustain democracy and to create a world that is abundant and just.

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