Rae Guidry

Professor K

EN 102

2 October 2019

Medicine Is Not The Only Way

According to an article published in 2017 by the *Nutritional Neuroscience* journal written by Natalie Parletta, major depressive disorder is now the second highest cause of years of life lost due to disability. Our society has become obsessed with the idea of describing depression and anxiety as a personality trait. Mental disorders affect approximately forty million adults over the age of eighteen; this is equivalent to 18.1% of the population every year. In recent studies, a change in diet can improve and prevent depressive symptoms in the brain. Although this has not yet been proven, scientists are constantly striving for a safe and effective way to improve mental health without the use of unnecessary medicines.

A decrease in depressive symptoms is commonly related to an improvement in diet. Examples of such diet include fruits, vegetables, whole grains, fish, and meats. “People with mental illness have been identified as having a poor diet and other lifestyle behaviors that have an impact on health (Parletta et. al 475).” Because of this, those who struggle with depression also have a diminished understanding of what the impact of lifestyle behaviors has on health.

The relationship between diet and mental health is associated by a tie between cardiovascular diseases and the intake of processed foods on a regular basis. Depression and cardiovascular diseases both share the same risk factors. The most commonly shared factor is inflammation, as well as low levels of omega-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids. A study conducted in 2016 showed that incorporating extra virgin olive oil into your diet as a main culinary fat can result as a protectant against cardiovascular disease. Due to addictive qualities, however, a complete change in diet can be rather difficult.   
 The challenge that comes along with diet change is attributed to the addictive nature of high-fat and high-sugar foods. “A Mediterranean diet not only has demonstrated health benefits but is also a highly palatable diet and thus more likely to become a sustainable part of a healthy lifestyle (Baune et. al 1).” As difficult as a total in change in diet might be for those who regularly intake processed foods, the removal of unhealthy fats can eliminate probable cardiovascular disease and prevent symptoms of depressive disorders in the brain.

Another study was performed and later published in a journal titled *Clinical Nutrition.* The research conducted by the authors and scientists was regarding the reoccurring relationship between diet and inflammation, which is then connected to mental health. The main goal of the work was to focus heavily on the uncanny associations between the inflammatory potential of habitual diet and mental health outcomes. As scientists continue to gain information on the topic of diet relating to mental health, researches are actively coming to the realization that biological, social, genetic, and environmental factors play a major role in an individual’s mental health.

According to the most recent study in relation to a certain lifestyle diet change, Mediterranean and Norwegian diets are continuously being associated with not only decreasing depressive symptoms, but also lowering the likelihood of developing the mental disorder in the future. In contrast, a Western style diet of energy dense, high fat, high sugar foods, processed red meats, refined grains, and alcohol have been reported to increase depression. Not only are these changes in diet associated with depression, they are also known for curing and prevention overall well-being and anxiety.

Exercise has been proven to offer physical benefits to multiple systems of the body. Not only does it reduce the risk of certain cancers and provide therapy for an array of physical disorders but, according to the *Harvard Mental Health Letter,* exercise is also a “healthful, inexpensive, and sufficiently used treatment variety of psychiatric disorders.” Studies show that exercise has the ability to reduce the risk of depression and neurodegenerative disorders. In addition to these benefits, physical activity does away with depression, anxiety, addictive behaviors, and body dysmorphic disorders.

Depression is proven to be the most studied disorder as it relates to exercise. Cross-sectional studies and meta-analytic studies have shown that exercise is preventative and acts as a therapeutic way to relieve stress. Physical activity also ranges in difficulty and areas of focus – all benefiting the mind in a specific way. The physiological effects of exercise include changes in serotonin, metabolism, improved sleep, and an increased endorphin release. As beneficial as the physiological effects of exercise and physical activity are, the effects on the brain rise above these factors. According to a lifestyle and mental health article by Robert Marsh, the psychological factors of exercise include “enhanced self-efficacy and self-esteem, the interruption of negative thoughts and rumination, and perhaps the breakdown of *muscular armor,* the chronic psychosomatic muscle tension patterns that express emotional conflicts and are a focus of somatic therapies.” However, the article then goes on to state the probability of mental health professionals to recommend exercise as a form of treatment. Roughly 10% of professionals recommend exercise to patients – this is also the same 10% that exercises regularly themselves.

Along with exercise, a reduction in excessive calories has recently been showing improvements in mental health. A reduction in an unnecessary caloric intake has been proven to benefit the economic and public health aspects of most adults. Human studies suggest that a low-calorie diet can enhance cognitive and academic performance in children, as well as improve the harmful effects of schizophrenia in adults. As stated previously, the Mediterranean diet reduces the possibility of developing Alzheimer’s or Parkinson’s diseases in the future. Considering this information, we can infer that the more productive and proactive we are when it comes to health, the clearer our thoughts become.

Because of the recent spike in mental health disorders across the globe, pediatric cases of neurodevelopmental and mental health disorders are on the rise. According to the *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity,* “neurodevelopmental and mental health disorders are associated with a higher risk of poor dietary, physical activity, screen, and sleep habits in youth, contributing to an elevated lifetime chronic disease risk.” The goals of this particular study were simple; researchers focused heavily on describing strategies for parenting a healthy lifestyle in children and young adults who have already been diagnosed with some form of a neurodevelopmental or mental disorder.

In addition to the research conducted on the positive effects that diet has on mental health related disorders, many professionals still believe that medicine, and other extreme forms of treatment, are the only way to create any form of relief when it comes to these illnesses. For example, a recent study showed that medicine along with weekly forms of psychotherapy are proven to be the only combination of treatment options that maximize the benefits that a patient receives. Although I do believe that these methods are undeniably effective, I still struggle to understand the harsh reality of electroconvulsive treatment. Electroconvulsive treatment, also known as ECT, is used to treat conditions such as severe depression. After the patient is administered a general anesthetic and muscle relaxer, an electrical current is passed through their brain. This procedure, though harsh, is used in extreme cases only. Hospitalization and ECT often are used in collaboration with each other. These two methods of treatment harness the most extreme rehabilitation, along with the most isolated environment in which patients are easily controlled. The isolation and seclusion that hospitalization entails can cause many patients to feel like they truly are insane. This feeling of insanity can drive a patient to an even deeper, more drastic sense of depression, which makes me believe in the process of community support as being a better treatment option.

Implementing a healthier diet and administering regular physical activity can also reduce the effects of early severe mental disorders. According to Elaine Jennings’ discovery in an article titled *The Importance of Diet and Nutrition in Severe Mental Health Problems*, “approximately 1% of the population will develop psychosis/schizophrenia at some point in their lifetime. In addition to the harmful effects of these particular diseases, patients are subjected to potential weight gain due to increased appetite. On average, those who suffer from such disorders gain approximately five to six kilograms within a time span of six to eight weeks. Recent studies also showed a relationship between obesity and depression. Those who are obese have a 55% chance of developing depression, while those who are diagnosed with clinical depression have a 58% chance of becoming obese. On the contrast, those who are malnourished often experience the distressing effects of early onset dementia.

A number of research studies have been conducted, in which they all share a common result- the lack of macronutrients may play a role in the development of dementia. Homocysteine levels in the blood rise when there is a deficiency in B12 and folate, which is more common in older people and is associated with cardiovascular disease, depression, and cognitive decline (Jennings 71). As previously stated, a Mediterranean diet does decrease the effects of depression and anxiety in the brain; however, it is not proven to decrease the risk of cognitive decline and dementia. Decreasing symptoms of dementia and Alzheimer’s is attributed to a lack of sustainable nutrients within the body, which is then causing a sense of malnutrition in an earlier generation.

Mental focus is also quickly becoming an issue in modern-day society. Today, teens are struggling to stay focused on their current tasks at hand because of the multiple distractions that surround them on the daily. Moreover, the leading symptom of depression is an inability to focus in the classroom and in social situations. Depression is a disease in which the mind is constantly being fed with harmful and negative emotions, which can eventually cause a development of lethargy within the suffering patient. As a collective, we need to begin feeding our bodies with nutritious foods in order to create the lifestyle and mental clarity that we desire. A Mediterranean diet is proven to diminish depressive symptoms in the brain, which can ultimately improve mental focus.

The improvement of mental health due to exercise and proper intake of nutritional foods is important to today’s society. Humans are designed to strive to be better, whether it be mental or physical. From personal experience, however, I believe that mental and physical improvements go hand-in-hand. As I begin to fuel my body with nutrients that I know are beneficial, I am often more likely to participate in physical activity of any kind. The cycle that begins with a personal will to do better, soon becomes a chain reaction in the way I view my everyday life. Positivity, excitement, and a feeling of being content are only a small portion of what benefits I receive from the improvisation of a healthier diet in my own life.

Having struggled with depression and anxiety myself, I have been able to adapt to my surroundings and direct my focus and well-being on activities that will benefit me in the long run. Recently, I have overcome these harmful and mentally straining diseases by immersing myself in my society, eating a nutritious diet, and exercising regularly. Since incorporating a regular pattern of exercise in my day-to-day life, I have experienced a noticeable change in the way I view myself and my future. I used to feel as though I had nothing to look forward to – I had no sense of hope and often found myself feeling like I was stuck in a revolving door of sadness. I saw a therapist regularly and continued to take my medicine, but I was still lacking motivation and drive when it came to my schoolwork and my friendships. After conducting research on my own, I soon decided to switch my diet and exercise regularly. These new additions to my lifestyle did not change my viewpoints immediately, but I soon began to notice changes in myself. I looked forward to exercising and I enjoyed the way I felt after consuming foods that I knew were good for me. Therefore, the better I felt about myself, the better I felt about my friendships and the world around me. I began to like the way I felt, and I wanted to carry on that feeling.

My recovery from these mental disorders was due to my own willingness to improve my well-being. I went to therapy, but I knew I had to want to get better if anything was going to change. Knowing this, I wish society would’ve allowed me to understand that I can’t expect to get better without changing myself a little along the way. Recently, I’ve noticed an increase in teenagers who believe that simply going to a therapist will cure them automatically – but that is not the case. Modern day society is constantly telling us that it’s okay to be lazy, it’s okay to eat unhealthy foods on a regular basis, and it’s okay to be continuously sad because “that’s what being a teenager is about.” I agree that it is acceptable to treat yourself and have a day to yourself once in a while, but I do not agree with the stigma that laziness is normal. Laziness is not normal, and it is disrupting the creativity of children and young adults.

Our society has become obsessed with describing mental disorders as a personality trait. Those who suffer from these diseases are in a constant battle with themselves and need proper care. Proper care, however, doesn’t look like a regular visit to the therapist with no work being done on the outside. Proper care is an implementation of a nutritious diet, regular exercise, and social outings, in addition to visiting a therapist. A diet of whole grains, fish, fruits, and vegetables has been proven on multiple occasions to decrease depressive and anxiety symptoms in the brain. Research also shows that through these lifestyle changes, feelings of depression are often suppressed, along with the probability to develop dementia and Alzheimer’s later in life.

Contrary to popular belief, medicines are not the only effective way to cure mental disorder. A combination of medicines, therapy, and a lifestyle change is proven to be the most effective way to decrease depression and anxiety. Because 18.1% of people are affected by depression each year, advertisement and awareness of these disorders is highly encouraged. Depression and anxiety have no face and cannot be characterized by one certain factor, which is what makes them so broad. The conditions can be deadly but can also be cured with proper treatment. Diet and mental health are proven to be closely related. Studies continuously show the effects that a change in diet has on the mental health of children and young adults. Because these two factors do connect on multiple levels, it is imperative that society embraces their connection and continues to spread knowledge regarding the topic.

Annotated Bibliography

Phillips, Catherine M., et al. “Dietary Inflammatory Index and Mental Health: A Cross-Sectional Analysis of the Relationship with Depressive Symptoms, Anxiety and Well-Being in Adults.” Clinical Nutrition, vol. 37, no. 5, Oct. 2018, pp. 1485–1491. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1016/j.clnu.2017.08.029.

This article discusses the relationship between diet and mental health. According to the article, diets that entail substances such as fruit, vegetables, whole grains, fish, and meats are proving to decrease the likelihood of developing depression. Depression, which is associated with the increase of pro-inflammatory cytokines, can become an increased risk when consuming a Western style diet. The researches held a study in which all participants completed an overnight fast, and then proceeded to the follow up at the clinic. Blood samples were taken and from these samples, the researchers tested age, gender, medical history, and medication. These tests were then used to gather intel on depressive symptoms such as well-being and anxiety. I do plan on using this article in my paper, due to the organizational set up and its relation to my research paper topic.

Parletta, Natalie, et al. “A Mediterranean-Style Dietary Intervention Supplemented with Fish Oil Improves Diet Quality and Mental Health in People with Depression: A Randomized Controlled Trial (HELFIMED).” Nutritional Neuroscience, vol. 22, no. 7, July 2019, pp. 474–487. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1080/1028415X.2017.1411320.

Adults that have been previously diagnosed with depression were selected to receive Mediterranean diet cooking workshops for three months and supplements of fish oil for six months. Along with these supplements and a shift in diet, the subjects were required to attend social groups for approximately three months. After the test was completed, the researchers came to the conclusion that a Mediterranean diet does, in fact, reduce depressive symptoms in a population of adults ranging from eighteen to sixty-five years old.

This article will be put to great use as I begin my paper. The topic of this article in particular is directly related to my topic and provides an intense amount of information. Information and research conclusions are easily identified in this piece and provides me with multiple sources and statistics that can be used within my paper.

April Bowling, et al. “Shaping Healthy Habits in Children with Neurodevelopmental and Mental Health Disorders: Parent Perceptions of Barriers, Facilitators and Promising Strategies.” International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity, no. 1, 2019, p. 1. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1186/s12966-019-0813-6.

Researchers conducted a study based on current information that states that neurodevelopmental and mental health disorders are commonly associated with a poor diet, minimal physical activity, and unsatisfactory sleeping habits in children ages kindergarten through tenth grade. The study aimed to gain a better insight on how to implement better eating and sleeping habits in children and young adults. Researchers concluded that instilling better eating habits in children with neurodevelopmental and mental disorders is difficult. In the future, the research must work better alongside existing health promotion materials.

This article is informational and well-written, but I am not for certain if I will be able to use it in my paper. The topic is not directly related to my research paper topic, so there is a chance I will not be able to find useful information within it. However, it will be beneficial to me should I decide to broaden the informational spectrum of my research.

Haghighatdoost, Fahimeh, et al. “Association between the Dietary Inflammatory Index and Common Mental Health Disorders Profile Scores.” Clinical Nutrition, Jan. 2018. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1016/j.clnu.2018.08.016.

The association between diet and mental health is related to inflammatory properties of the average human diet. Researchers studied this association as well as the risk of a worsened mental health disorders profile. This study in particular evaluated adults in a cross-sectional study and a mental health profile score was calculated using regression analysis. Scoring was determined by the severity of mental health problems.

The information found in this article will coincide nicely with the already developed research that I have found thus far. The association between diet and mental health is the main point of my paper, so I do see myself taking advantage of this information.

Tolkien, Katie, et al. “An Anti-Inflammatory Diet as a Potential Intervention for Depressive Disorders: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis.” Clinical Nutrition, Jan. 2018. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1016/j.clnu.2018.11.007.

The analysis of the relationship between an anti-inflammatory diet to the presence of depressive symptoms in the brain was the main focus in this article’s study. The researchers led a review and meta-analysis of recent writings regarding whether there is a link between the inflammatory potential of a diet and risk of depression or depressive symptoms. The end result proved a relationship between a proper diet and depressive symptoms.

Null, Gary, et al. “Nutrition and Lifestyle Intervention on Mood and Neurological Disorders.” Journal of Evidence-Based Complementary & Alternative Medicine, vol. 22, no. 1, Jan. 2017, pp. 68–74. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1177/2156587216637539.

This group study focused on how a diet of veganism, fruit and vegetable juicing, regular exercise, and other healthy methods affect those with common mental disorders. The participants in this study suffered from a range of mental disorders such as: anxiety, depression, poor memory, dementia, Alzheimer’s disease, Parkinson’s disease, history of stroke, and even multiple sclerosis. At the end of the research study, the group took testimonies from the participants in which multiple people stated that they felt a substantial difference in their mental state.

Information found in this article can allow for a broader, more interesting topic to be found within my paper. I believe that if I implement some of these research findings, I can develop a different side topic within my paper. If I allow for a more diverse scope when it comes to my research paper, I will hopefully begin to write a paper that can be interesting to all who read it.

Hamer, Mark, et al. “Examining Techniques for Measuring the Effects of Nutrients on Mental Performance and Mood State.” European Journal of Nutrition, vol. 55, no. 6, Sept. 2016, pp. 1991–2000. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1007/s00394-015-1143-3.

This study explains how even though a shift in diet has been linked to the improvement of certain mental states in the past, these effects can be difficult to recognize. The main goal of this research study was to evaluate the methods that are used to measure mental performance and mood. A group was invited to come to an agreement based on the utility of objective and subjective measurement in this field.

Because this article focuses so heavily on the research side of my topic, I will be able to use some, but not all, of its information. I can only use so much information regarding how certain studies are conducted – so because of this, I will choose parts of the information and relate it to my research topic in some way.

Eleanor Busby, et al. “Mood Disorders and Gluten: It’s Not All in Your Mind! A Systematic Review with Meta-Analysis.” Nutrients, no. 11, 2018, p. 1708. EBSCOhost, doi:10.3390/nu10111708.

Removing gluten from the average, everyday diet may be the key to treat mood disorders. Researchers performed a review of studies for effects of gluten on mood imbalances in patients with or without gluten intolerance. Even though multiple studies about the relationship between gluten and the appearance of depressive or anxious symptoms in the brain have been conducted, this obvious connection between the two has not yet been proven.

I do not plan on using the information provided in this article for my paper, strictly because of the correlation between my topic and this information. Because my paper is not focused on the effects of gluten in day-to-day life, I do not think this will be beneficial to my research paper as a whole.