

# TMS TRENDS

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## HOW HEALTHIER DIETS DECREASE THE RISK FOR DEPRESSION

Pioneering research from Felice Jacka PhD shows how to get out from under your depression! On January 30, 2017, the journal *BMC Medicine* published her new randomized controlled study called **The SMILES Trial**. This groundbreaking research demonstrates for the first time that people with moderate to severe depression can improve their mood by eating a healthier diet. Professor Jacka's team recruited 67 men and women with moderate to severe depression who reported eating a relatively unhealthy diet. Most were taking antidepressants and/or were in regular psychotherapy. They put half of these depressed people on a modified Mediterranean diet (aka the "ModiMed") and required them to attend dietary support sessions with a nutritionist. The other half continued eating their usual unhealthy diet, but were required to attend social support "befriending" sessions. Before and after the 12-week study, everyone's depression symptoms were graded using several different tests. The test this research group chose to focus on was the MADRS scale (Montgomery-Åsberg Depression Rating Scale), which rates mood on a scale of 0 to 60, with 60 being the most severely depressed. After 12 weeks, people in the ModiMed diet group saw their MADRS scores improve on average by about 11 points. Thirty-two percent (10 out of 31 completers) had MADRS scores so low that they no longer met criteria for depression—remission! People in the unhealthy diet group improved by only about 4 points on the MADRS test and only 8% (2 of 25 completers) achieved remission.

In this particular ModiMed diet, calories were not restricted and body weight stayed about

the same for everyone in the study, so people didn't have to lose weight to feel better.

Surprisingly, the ModiMed diet cost about 19% less than the standard unhealthy diet. The diet plan was apparently easier to stick to than the social support plan, since more people in the diet group (31 out of 33) made it all the way to the end of the study, compared to only 25 out of 34 people in the support group.

The ModiMed diet consists of whole grains, fruits, vegetables, legumes, low-fat/unsweetened dairy, raw unsalted nuts, lean red meat, chicken, fish, eggs, and olive oil. The diet discourages foods such as sweets, refined cereals, fried food, fast food, and processed meat. The diet allows a maximum of two sugar-sweetened beverages per week and maximum two alcoholic drinks per day, preferably red wine.

Researchers say that this diet is better than the average diet because it is low in refined carbohydrates (sugar, flour, etc.), which put your blood sugar, insulin, hormones, and neurotransmitters on a dangerous rollercoaster. This destabilizes mood and increases risk for insulin resistance, which causes brain damage over time. This diet also contains plenty of natural fat and cholesterol, which the brain needs to function properly, and is low in processed oils and omega-6 fatty acids, which tilt the brain towards inflammation and away from healing. Lastly, the diet contains animal sources of protein, which are rich in key brain nutrients such as iron, zinc, and vitamin B 12, all that promote healthy brain functioning.