



Nutritional Psychiatry: How Food Can Work Like Medication to Boost Mood

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Zonya.com





True or False?

Research shows that **regular physical activity can reduce symptoms of depression as effectively as antidepressant medication** for many people with mild to moderate depression.

True

[Is exercise effective at treating depression?
Cochrane Systematic Review 2026](#)

Exercise does so much!



Boosts your “feel better” chemicals, serotonin, dopamine and endorphins



Reduces stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline



Improves blood sugar and blood flow to the brain



Builds confidence and resilience



Strengthens social connections



Improves sleep

BDNF

Brain-Derived Neurotrophic Factor

It's “Miracle Grow” for the Brain

- A protein that **nourishes neurons**, prevents neurons from dying and even **triggers the growth of brand-new neurons**
- People with depression often have **lower BDNF levels** and a **smaller hippocampus**—the brain region involved in learning, memory, and emotional regulation.
- Studies show **people who both:**
 - **briskly walk regularly** (150 minutes/week) &
 - **lift weights twice a week****have more BDNF, do better on cognitive tests and have bigger brains** compared to those who don't.



Music Awakens the Brain by...

- Lighting up almost the entire brain simultaneously
 - Cerebellum, hippocampus, amygdala, prefrontal cortex, reward pathways
- Literally making movement easier
 - People often exercise 10-15% longer when listening to motivating music

Let's combine 3 evidence-based mood enhancers:
Movement...Music...Community

Few activities activate so many positive pathways in the brain all at once!

Not only is it fun, its neuroscience!

[Dopamine release during anticipation and experience of music Nat Neurosci 2011](#)

[Effects of music on stress Health Psychol Review 2020](#)

[Effects of music in exercise and sport: A meta-analytic review Psychol Bull 2020](#)

[Music therapy for patients with depression BJPsych Open 2025](#)







GREAT JOB!

YAHOO to Kathy & Mark Richards!



What can you
expect from
me today?

To learn:

- What nutritional psychiatry is
- Which nutrients decrease depressive symptoms and HOW THEY WORK
- What a lot of people are doing WRONG
- The top 20 foods for fighting depression
- Strategies for implementing this knowledge



Nutritional Psychiatry: Your Brain on Food

- Nutritional psychiatry is a **growing discipline that focuses on:**
 - the use of food and supplements to provide essential nutrients
 - as part of an integrated or alternative treatment for mental health disorders
- For many years, the medical field did not fully acknowledge the connection between mood and food.
- **Fortunately, that's changing.**

[Nutritional Psychiatry: From Concept to Clinic, Drugs 2019](#)



The psychobiology of good nutrition

- [Dietary patterns and depression risk: A meta-analysis](#), Psychiatry Research, 2017
 - The Western dietary pattern is associated with an increased risk of depression
 - The healthy dietary pattern is associated with a decreased risk of depression
- [Diet quality and depression risk: A systematic review](#), Journal of Affective Disorders 2018
 - Adherence to a high-quality diet (low inflammatory index & Mediterranean for example), was associated with significantly lower depressive symptoms
 - Similar associations were found for the consumption of **fish and vegetables**
- [Association Between Dietary Habits and Depression: A systematic Review](#), Cureus 2022
 - Following a diet high in F/V, and avoiding pro-inflammatory junk food, fast food may lower the risk of developing depression
- [Evidence of the Importance of Dietary Habits Regarding Depressive Symptoms and Depression](#), Int J Environ Res Public Health 2020
 - **Advice should be given regarding the power of a proper diet to prevent depression**



“The brain’s...

- Nutrient needs are **ten times higher** than those of any other organ.
- Not just calories & oxygen, it needs **specific nutrients** to thrive
- When **these nutrients are under-supplied**, your brain will be the first to falter."

- Aileen Burford-Mason, PhD
Author of *The Healthy Brain*, 2017



Prevalence of Depression in the U.S.

In 2021, the estimated number of people who had at least one major depressive episode in the previous year:

- **8.3% adults (21 million)**
 - Females (10.3%) vs. males (6.2%)
- **20% of children aged 12-17 (5 million)**
 - Females (29%) vs. males (11%)



The Standard American Diet = SAD



A **higher** consumption (7-8 servings a day)
of **fruit & vegetables**
has been shown to **cut the odds** of developing
depression by as much as **62%**.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/29759102>



How Do Fruits and Veggies Do That?

Important “happy” neurotransmitters/monoamines include:

- Serotonin
- Dopamine
- Norepinephrine



Monoamine Theory:
People who are depressed have elevated levels of **MonoAmine Oxidase (MAO)**

- “Eats” your levels of neurotransmitters... you become depressed



Vegetables and fruits contain *natural* **MonoAmine Oxidase Inhibitors (MAOI)**

- Explaining the improvement in mood associated with increase fruit and vegetable intake



FOOD
Is
Powerful
Stuff!



Even people that think they eat healthy...



BY THE NUMBERS

🙌😄🙌 Barely 3 servings of Fruit and Veg

🙌😄🙌 Barely 13 g of fiber

🙌😄🙌 Over 12 tsp of added sugar

People that KNOW HOW to eat healthy...



BY THE NUMBERS



10 servings of Fruit and Veg!



30 g of fiber!



Less than 3 tsp of added sugar!

Mint Chocolate Chip Banana Ice Cream



EatRealAmerica.com



Chocolate
Banana Ice Cream



Mixed Berry
Banana Ice Cream



Pina Colada
Banana Ice Cream

12 Antidepressant Nutrients

- Iron, folate
- Omega-3 fatty acids (EPA and DHA)
- Magnesium, potassium, selenium, zinc
- Vitamin A, vitamin B1, B6, B12, vitamin C

[LaChance, Laura R, and Drew Ramsey. "Antidepressant foods: An evidence-based nutrient profiling system for depression." *World journal of psychiatry* vol. 8,3 20 Sep. 2018,](#)





The Antidepressant Food Score

- Foods were analyzed for their highest density of these nutrients.
- Then given an Antidepressant Food Score (AFS).
- Let's talk about the top 20 foods that made the AFS list!

[LaChance, Laura R, and Drew Ramsey. "Antidepressant foods: An evidence-based nutrient profiling system for depression." *World journal of psychiatry* vol. 8,3 20 Sep. 2018,](#)

Your
comfort
zone

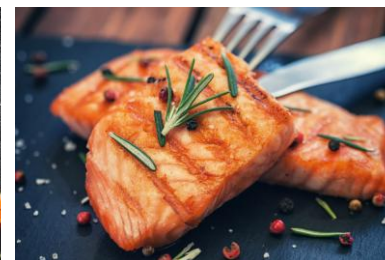


Massaged Kale Salad



20 Top Anti-Depressant Foods

1. Watercress
2. Spinach
3. Swiss Chard
4. Kale & Collard Greens
5. Herbs: Parsley, Basil, Cilantro
6. Broccoli
7. Cauliflower
8. Brussels Sprouts
9. Red Cabbage
10. Peppers
11. Pumpkin & Butternut Squash
12. Kohlrabi
13. Lemon, limes and oranges
14. Strawberries
15. Blueberries
16. Oysters & Clams
17. Crab
18. Salmon
19. Rainbow Trout
20. Tuna



These make it EASY!



Due to concerns about mercury contaminants

- Avoid:
 - Shark
 - Swordfish
 - Tilefish
 - King Mackerel
- Choose:
 - Salmon
 - Trout
 - Herring
 - Sardines
- Also limit:
 - Albacore tuna: not more than once a month
 - Light tuna: not more than twice a week



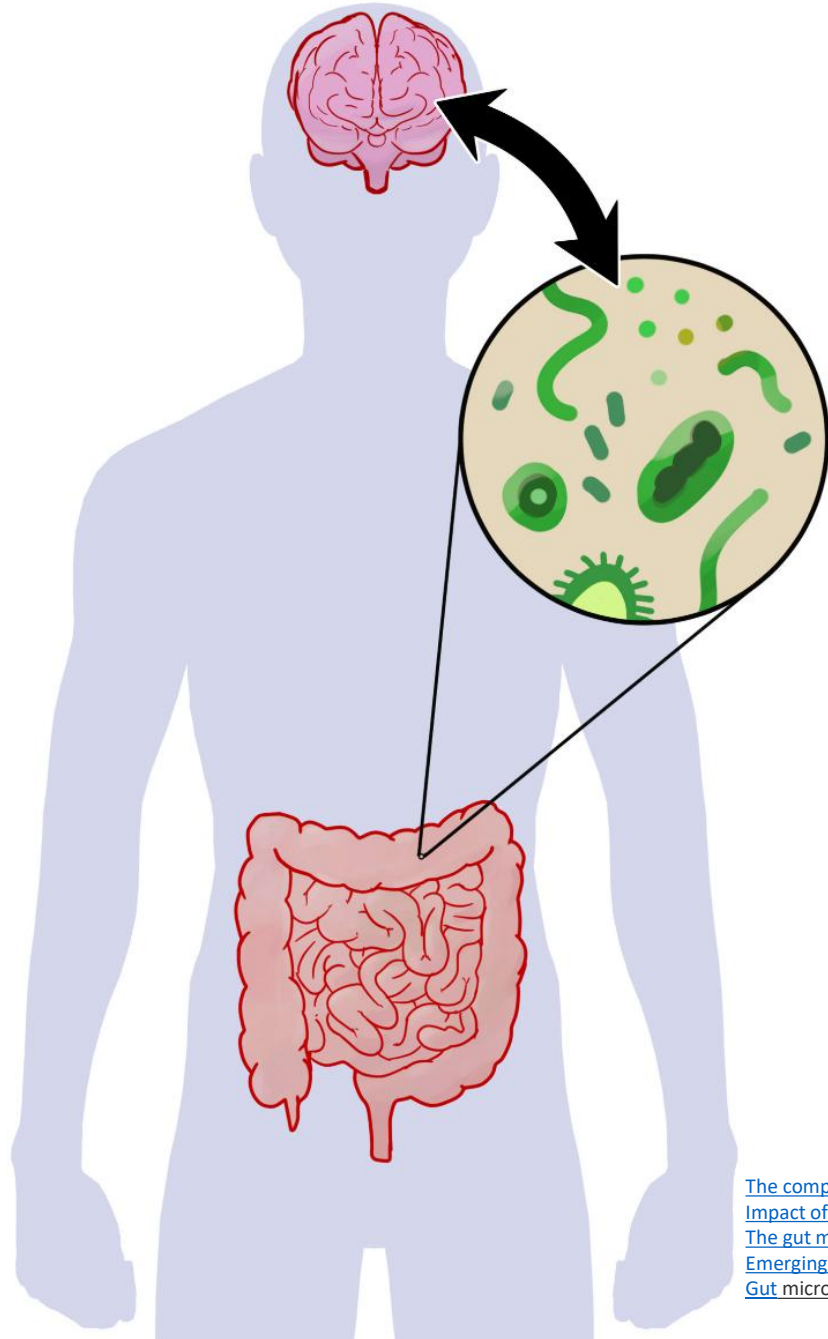
And yes, protein is important too...



- Protein can be a double-edged sword.
- Too much animal protein puts you at risk for heart disease and cancer.
- Beans, lentils, nuts, seeds, organic soy are great plant-based proteins.
- Processed meats should be avoided.
- 80 grams is plenty for most people.
- You absolutely can get the protein you need with plants alone

Benefits of a Healthy Microbiome

You're feeding TRILLIONS!



- Digestive health
- **Mood, depression, brain fog, ADHD**
- Immunity (70% comes from these microbes)
- Diabetes & heart disease
- Arthritis/Allergies/Asthma
- Appetite and weight control



[The complex interplay between the gut microbiome and osteoarthritis, Int.J.Mol.Sci 2024](#)
[Impact of gut microbiome on skin health, Gut Microbes 2022](#)
[The gut microbiome and the immune system, Explor Med 2022](#)
[Emerging role of gut microbiota in autoimmune diseases, Front. Immunol., 2024](#)
[Gut microbiota variations in depression and anxiety: a systematic review, BMC Psychiatry 2025](#)

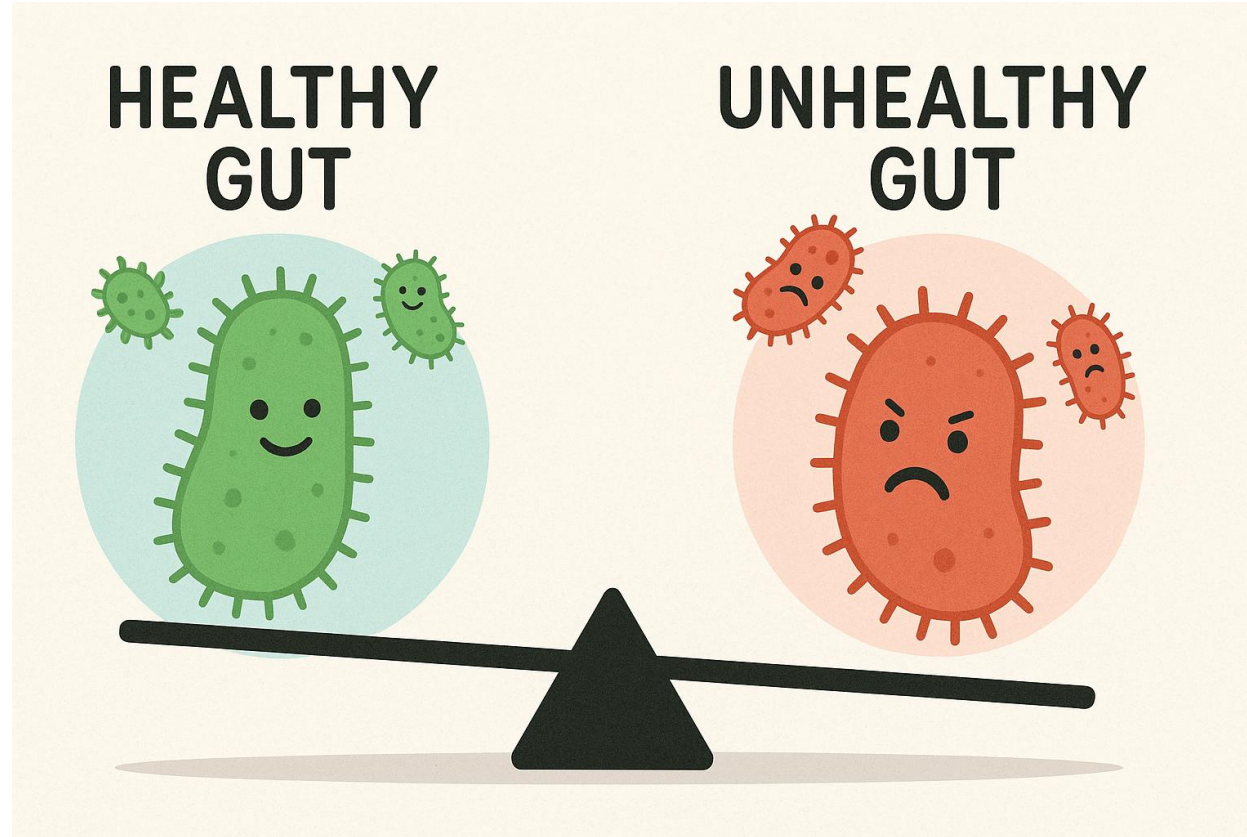
[The Role of the Microbiome in Asthma: The Gut-Lung Axis, Int J Mol Sci 2018](#)
[Exploring the Impact of the Gut Microbiome on Obesity and Weight Loss: A Review Article, Cureus 2023](#)
[Gut microbiota and diabetes: From correlation to causality and mechanism, World J Diabetes 2020](#)
[Unravelling the Gut Microbiome Role in Cardiovascular Disease, Biomolecules 2024](#)

Nutritionally - what helps and hurts our microbiome?

High fiber diet
(30 g/day)

Polyphenols
(rainbow F/V)

Fermented foods



Ultra-Processed
Foods

Sugar (over 6-9
tsp daily)

Deleterious
Additives

When harmful bacteria outgrow
the good bacteria = **dysbiosis**

Additives Known to Disrupt the Gut Microbiome

Additive	Common Food Sources
Carboxymethylcellulose (CMC), Cellulose gum	Ice cream, baked goods, sauces, processed snacks
Polysorbate 80 (P80)	Salad dressings, margarine, ice cream, sauces
Carrageenan	Dairy alternatives, chocolate milk, processed meats
Saccharin, Sucralose, Aspartame, Ace-K	Diet sodas, sugar-free products, low-calorie snacks
Sodium benzoate, Potassium sorbate, Calcium propionate	Baked goods, soft drinks, condiments
Synthetic dyes (Red 40, Yellow 5/6, Blue 1)	Candy, beverages, processed foods
Titanium dioxide (E171)	White candies, chewing gum, powdered foods
Phosphates (excess)	Processed meats, soft drinks, cheese
Sulfur dioxide / sulfites	Dried fruits, wine, processed seafood



[Common dietary emulsifiers promote metabolic disorders and intestinal microbiota dysbiosis in mice, 2024](#)
[Polysorbate 80 and carboxymethylcellulose: A different impact on epithelial integrity when interacting with the microbiome, 2025](#)
[Ultra-processed foods and food additives in gut health and disease, 2024](#) [5 Food Additives to Watch Out For](#)

ALWAYS READ THE INGREDIENT LIST!

*"While the burden to avoid harmful ingredients in our food supply shouldn't fall to the consumer, **the reality is that it does.**"*

*— Center for Science in the
Public Interest, CSPI*

INGREDIENTS: CARBONATED WATER, SUGAR, GLUCOSE, CITRIC ACID, NATURAL FLAVORS, TAURINE, SODIUM CITRATE, COLOR ADDED, PANAX GINSENG EXTRACT, L-CARNITINE L-TARTRATE, CAFFEINE, SORBIC ACID (PRESERVATIVE), BENZOIC ACID (PRESERVATIVE), NIACINAMIDE (VIT. B3), SUCRALOSE, SALT, D-GLUCURONOLACTONE, INOSITOL, GUARANA EXTRACT, PYRIDOXINE HYDROCHLORIDE (VIT. B6), RIBOFLAVIN (VIT. B2), MALTODEXTRIN, CYANOCOBALAMIN (VIT. B12).

Caffeine content: 114 mg/12 fl oz. Not recommended for children, pregnant or nursing women and persons sensitive to caffeine.

Ingredients: Carbonated Water, Citric Acid, Taurine, Natural and Artificial Flavors, Colors, Caffeine, Sodium Bicarbonate (Baking Soda), Magnesium Carbonate, Acesulfame K, Sucralose, Xanthan Gum, Niacinamide, Pyridoxine HCl (Vitamin B6), Calcium Pantothenate, Vitamin B12.

INGREDIENTS: WHOLE GRAIN WHEAT, HIGH OLEIC CANOLA AND/OR SOYBEAN OIL WITH TBHQ ADDED TO PRESERVE FRESHNESS, SEA SALT.

CONTAINS: WHEAT.

DIST. & SOLD EXCLUSIVELY BY:

ALDI

BATAVIA, IL 60510

Food Transparency at Our Finger Tips

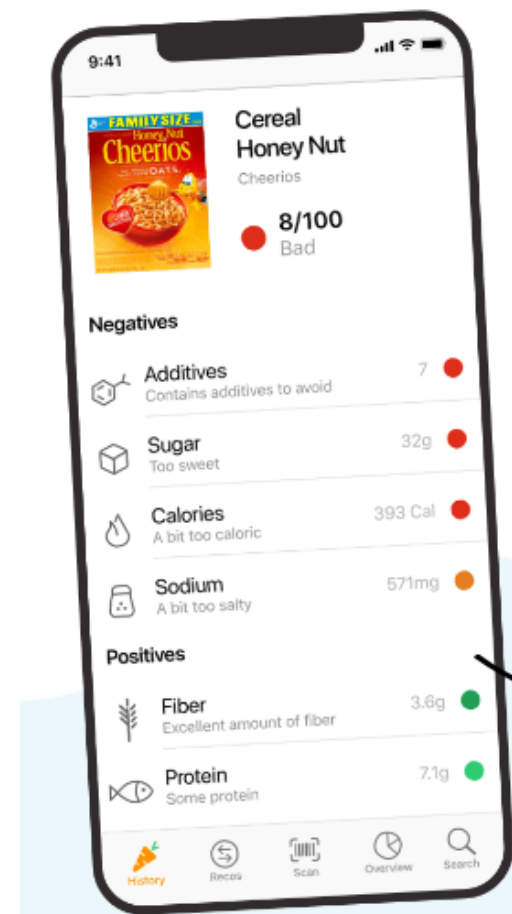


Food Label Apps can be incredibly helpful

Examples include:

Fooducate, Open Food Facts, Food Scanner, and **Yuka**

1. **Scores** food (and often cosmetics) Bad, Poor, Good, Excellent
2. **Alerts** you to additives: low, mod or high risk
3. **Suggests** healthier alternatives



TRUE OR FALSE

Eating $\frac{3}{4}$ cup mushrooms
twice weekly reduces the
risk of cognitive decline by
50%

And that's not all!

Source: <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2019/03/190312103702.htm>
<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30775990/>



Eating mushrooms (plus green tea)
decreased breast cancer risk by **64%**!

Source: [Researchers at the University of Perth on 2,000 Chinese women](#)
<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/19048616/>

It's time to re-try mushrooms!



- Grind 'em and Hide 'em
- Add to soups & stirfry
- Roast 'em & Stuff 'em
- Eat them in place of a burger
- **Always eat them COOKED**



Visit EatRealAmerica.com/Free-recipes/ and consider membership to the 1.400 recipes!

“You don’t rise the level of your goals. You fall to the level of your habits.”

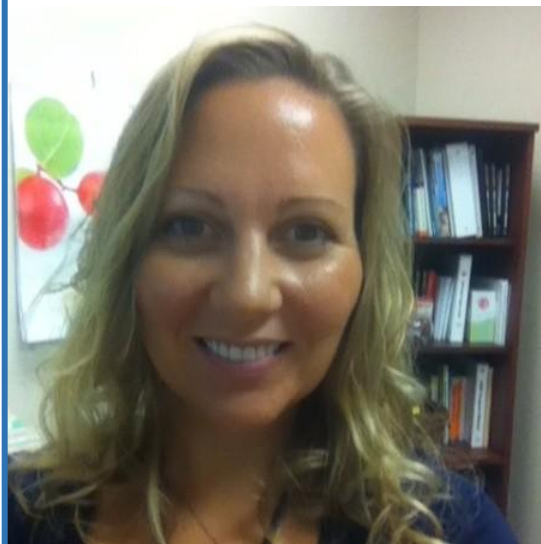
-James Clear, Author of Atomic Habits

School District of Lee County

Results from 4-Week Online Employee Cohort

Completed January 2023

Based on 323 participants



It's all about the pre and post test. Test what they've learned. What behaviors have changed. How they feel. And their satisfaction with the program.

Heather Parker

Employee Wellness Coordinator, Lee County Schools, FL

Measuring Behavior Change: Pre & Post

% Yes Pre	% Yes Post	The Habit Changes They Made
13%	91%	I know the top 20 antidepressant foods and include at least 5 <u>daily</u> .
64%	98%	I understand sugar is kryptonite for my <u>brain</u> , and have a sensible strategy in place for keeping added sugars to a healthy moderate level.
63%	99%	I understand the value of omega-3s on the brain, and how to best maximize my intake via fish, flax, chia seed or supplements.
24%	96%	I understand the gut-brain connection and know 3 daily habits to keep my microbiome in tip top shape.
27%	97%	I feel confident in my knowledge of nutrition supplements that may benefit my brain health.
29%	78%	I know (and do!) simple yoga moves daily that bring down my stress hormones through proper breathing and stimulation of my <u>vagus</u> nerve.

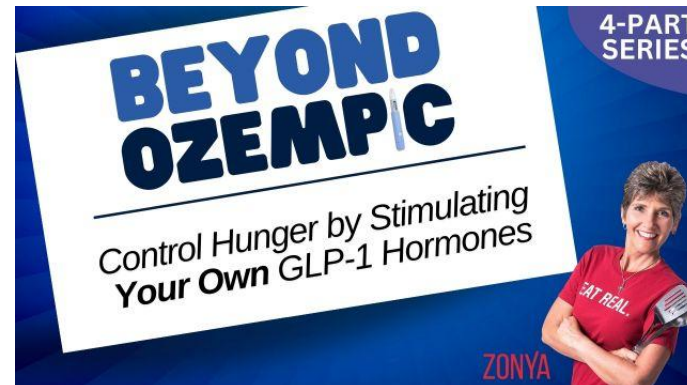
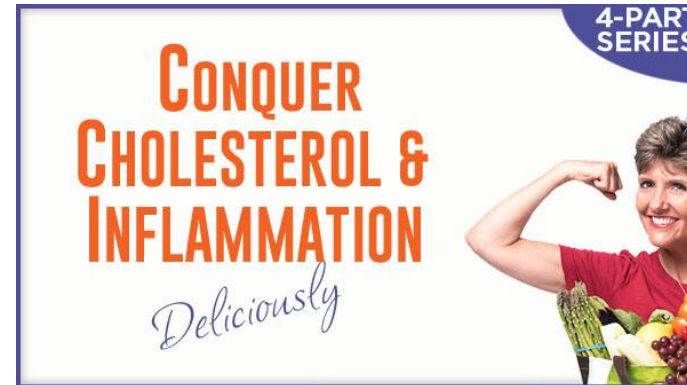
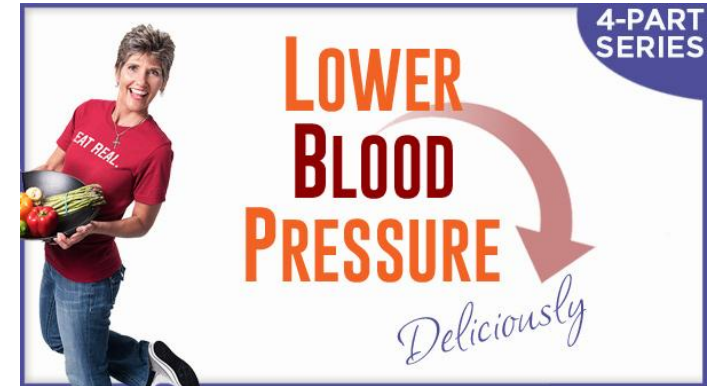
4.8 = The average "Greens IQ" score (out of 12) at the beginning of the program

10.7 = The average "Greens IQ" score (out of 12) at the end of the program

222 (69%) reported that in the last few weeks, they felt sad or blue less frequently.

School District of Lee County

11 Zonya Programs | 2020-2026



School District of Lee County

11 Zonya Programs | 2020-2026

7,261
Total
Registrants

81.7%
Completion
Rate

\$6,887,803
Total Cost
Avoidance

8.5:1
Average
ROI

99%
Would
Recommend
to Others



Ice Cream, Cookies & Stuffed Mushrooms Recipes + Sample Outcome Report

Scan this QR code



Or go to

<https://talk.ac/zonya>

and enter this code when prompted

ICECREAM

The most powerful prescription
may not come from a pharmacy.
But rather from...

your **FORK** • your **FEET** • your **FRIENDS**



Thank You! Questions?



Contact me anytime at:
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