

and may be blocked or unbalanced due to trauma; they may also be the source of disconnectivity.

It is not just in extreme emotional states that the spirit can be nurtured or ignored. Normal daily fluctuations in emotional states affect when people eat, how much they eat and which food items they choose to consume.¹ Everyone is familiar with emotionally induced eating, stress eating or feeling like dementors (from Harry Potter) are after you. Negative states of mental health can lead to grabbing chocolate, chips or alcohol — classic self-medication or anesthetic. The human gut reflects the external environment and its health is negatively influenced by physiological and psychological stressors. Physiological properties of food affect human physiology by impacting both neurotransmitters and endocrine responses.² The health of the gut is intricately entwined with the brain via the gut-brain-axis, where neurotransmitters are responsible for thoughts and feelings, more generally referred to as “mood.”

While humans turn to food in times of stress, is food love? Is there a healthy way to use food safely to soothe? Research has shown that social relationships influence eating behavior and that eating behavior can reflect relationships.³ Some research also posits that food sharing can be an important means to establish and increase intimacy, friendship and love.⁴ One interesting study on social behavior found that participants primed with love were more likely to make a healthy food choice than the control group.⁵ Primed with love, what a beautiful thought — and what does that mean?

This continuum of mental health tied to physicality is important to nurture, very simply because the value of a soul cannot be measured by physical means, yet the physical body is where it resides. Paying attention to hunger cues is the first step to validating the body and connecting to the soul. Mindful eating is the practice of connecting the mind and body in an eating experience. This can be done informally and has the dual benefit of bringing the focus onto both the quality of food being consumed and the connection to hunger, fullness, emotional states and patterns of behavior.

Connecting the act of eating with how one feels will nurture both the body and the soul. Begin with a nurturing environment such as a pretty table setting, pleasant music, a window seat with a garden view, a clean house or a joyful companion (pets included!) Focus on connecting to what the body is telling you. Do you feel hunger or fullness, stress, anxiety or joy? Focus on the texture, flavor, color and smell of your meal, the smile on your companion's face or

Food for the Soul

One of my first jobs as a registered dietitian was to work as an outpatient counselor for individuals who were discharged from an inpatient eating disorder clinic. During those early years, I also saw obese patients for weight-loss intervention. After working with both groups I came to realize that there were more similarities than differences in the thought processes behind their behaviors. I viewed both conditions as diseases of the soul, where self-abuse in the forms of starvation and binge-eating had somehow replaced self-love and nurturing as a means-to-an-end psychologically. My doctoral research was a qualitative study of individuals who had maintained weight-loss, their perceptions of personal spirituality and how those two aspects intertwined.

While binge-eating and self-starvation are extremes of the self-love and food regulation spectrum, feelings that are counterproductive to vibrancy such as self-doubt, judgment of self and others, fear/ insecurity, stress or anger/ hatred can plague energy workers or anyone who strives for optimal physical and mental health. Additionally, many light workers are attracted to the healing arts as a path to heal themselves, carrying with them ghosts of despair. Any time trauma is stored it can become a heavy burden for the soul and thereby imposes a metaphorical weight on the body. Root chakras are connected to security and survival



the purr of your cat.

Prime yourself with love! Believe in love, self-love and the love of others as a vehicle to heal. While you enhance your ability to accept and give love, choosing foods to heal chakras can build up the body's reserves and help energy to flow. The root chakra grounds us to the earth, so seeking out the strength of the earth in food choices will connect the soul to its source and nourish the cells. Root vegetables such as beets, rutabagas, garlic, ginger, turnips, potatoes, onions and parsnips are all grown underground. Their beautiful and vibrant colors speak of varied phytochemicals and health benefits. Their source in the soil enriches them with grounding energy. Protein foods are mineral rich. The most obvious choice to influence the root chakra are vibrantly red foods such as rooibos or hibiscus tea, strawberries, red apples, berries and tomatoes. Best of all, these wonderful foods taste even better when shared. €



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Nutty Banana Breakfast Pudding

Recipe by Denise Pickett-Bernard PhD, RDN, LDN
and The IFNA Culinary Collaborative

INGREDIENTS

Serves 4

½ C raw cashews

½ C raw almonds

½ C pecans

1 ripe banana

2 C coconut milk

Fresh or dried unsweetened coconut

Dash of salt

DIRECTIONS

- Place nuts and salt in a bowl and fill to the top with water, covering the nuts.
- Soak overnight.
- Drain and rinse the nuts.
- Process the nuts in a food processor. Add the banana, coconut milk and cinnamon.
- Divide into servings.
- Garnish with coconut.

May be served as is, chilled or warmed.

