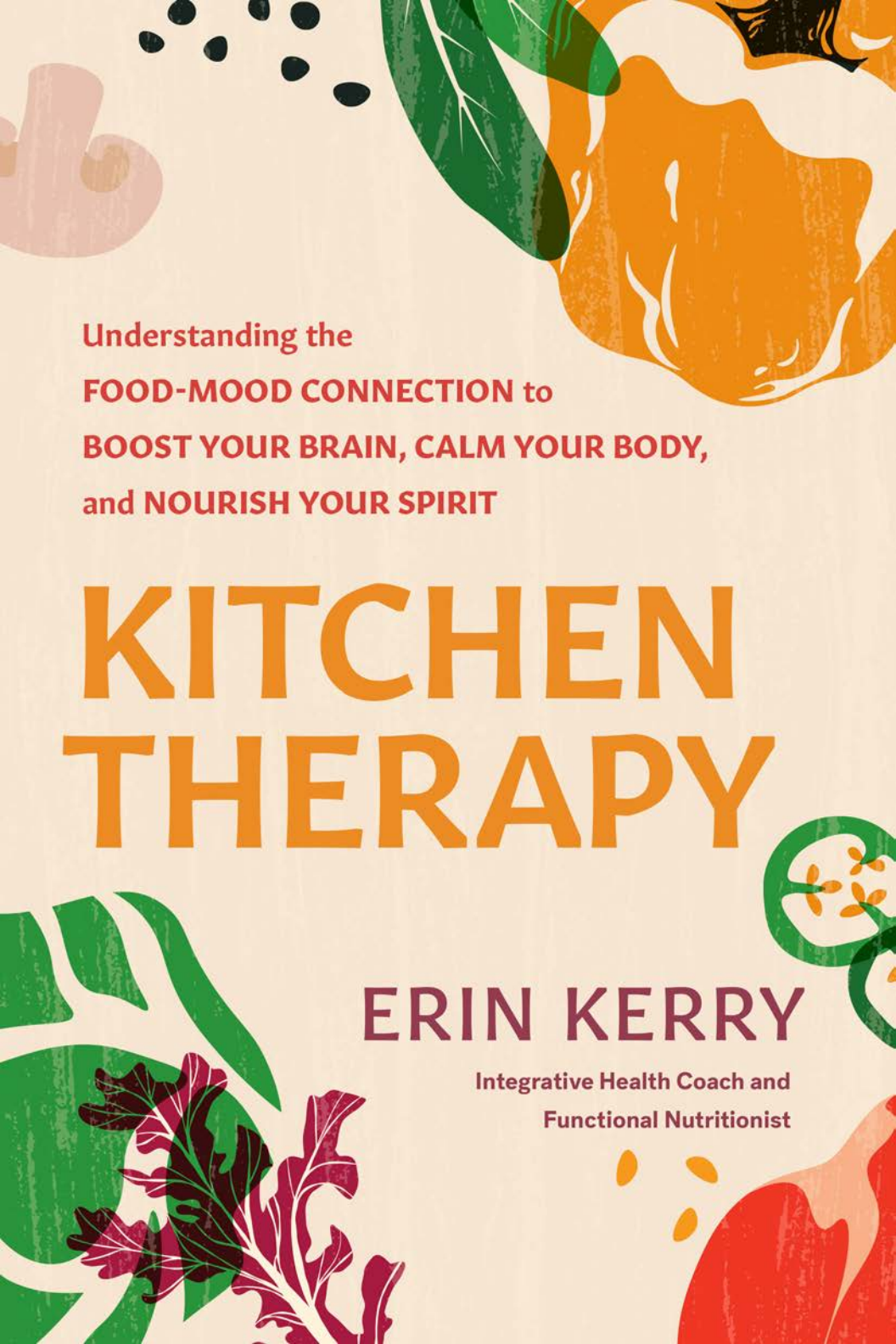

Understanding the
FOOD-MOOD CONNECTION to
BOOST YOUR BRAIN, CALM YOUR BODY,
and NOURISH YOUR SPIRIT
KITCHEN
THERAPY
ERIN KERRY
Integrative Health Coach and
Functional Nutritionist

Erin Kerry has written a powerful and important work. As a neurosurgeon who has walked through trauma and watched the brain heal when it finally feels safe, I love how she shows that food is more than fuel; it's real-time information that can calm your nervous system, quiet chaotic cravings, and help you live the abundant life God designed. *Kitchen Therapy* is a grace-filled invitation to partner with your Great Physician in the most practical place on earth: your own kitchen. If you're tired of the nutrition noise and ready to feel better in your mind, body, and spirit, this book will give you hope you can taste.

W. LEE WARREN, MD, neurosurgeon, author of *The Life-Changing Art of Self-Brain Surgery*, and host of *The Dr. Lee Warren Podcast*

"Food is mood," and Erin Kerry captures this truth perfectly in *Kitchen Therapy*. As a therapist who focuses on nervous system regulation, I see firsthand how food shapes our emotional well-being. Erin's approach isn't just about eating healthier; it's about using food to *regulate* your body and brain, reduce stress, and improve mental health. This book offers practical, science-backed tools to help you nourish your nervous system and transform your relationship with food. Whether you're struggling with anxiety, fatigue, or emotional overwhelm, *Kitchen Therapy* gives you the insights and strategies to bring balance back into your life—one meal at a time. If you're ready to harness the healing power of food, this book is your next step.

DR. ROSEANN CAPANNA-HODGE, licensed therapist, author of *The Dysregulated Kid*, and host of the *Dysregulated Kids* podcast

Kitchen Therapy is the kind of therapy so many people have been missing. Erin Kerry cuts through the nutrition noise and shows you how to use food to support your mood, your mind, and your ability to function at a higher level. This isn't about food rules—it's about finally understanding how to fuel your brain and body so you can feel better for good.

CHELSEA BLACKBIRD, The Christian Nutritionist

What I love about *Kitchen Therapy* is how it honors the whole person. Erin doesn't reduce health to rules or quick fixes, but instead invites a deeper awareness of how our bodies, emotions, and faith are all connected. There is a sense of compassion woven throughout that is much needed in conversations about food and wellness, both inside and outside the church. Erin invites us to a posture of listening to both our bodies and God, where true healing begins. This is a meaningful resource for anyone seeking a more integrated and grace-filled approach to care. *Kitchen Therapy* will be a resource I recommend to my clients!

GINA BIRKEMEIER, MAC, LPC-S, NCC

Finally a book that tells Christian women that they're normal and not failing spiritually if they crave brownies sometimes! I appreciate Erin Kerry's gentle approach to nourishing our bodies and minds well, while understanding the way God designed us physiologically. Every woman could benefit from Erin's suggestions for more rest and less stress around food.

HEATHER CREEKMORE, podcast host and author of *The 40-Day Body Image Workbook*

As a psychiatrist working at the intersection of hormones, metabolism, and mental health, I know how rarely patients are told that food is medicine for the mind—not just the body. *Kitchen Therapy* offers something even rarer: a holistic approach to nourishment that is completely free of guilt and diet culture noise. Erin Kerry honors the complexity of our relationship with food—physical, emotional, and spiritual—while equipping readers with the science and practical tools to truly heal. This book doesn't ask you to be perfect; it invites you to be curious. For anyone who has felt dismissed by conventional medicine or defeated by conflicting nutrition advice, *Kitchen Therapy* is the compassionate, knowledgeable guide you've been waiting for.

STEFANI REINOLD, MD, MPH, board-certified psychiatrist and podcast host of *The Hormone Psychiatrist*

This is a must-read! Whether you're struggling with uncomfortable symptoms or just want to improve your relationship with and understanding of food, Erin provides a clear path toward healing, health, and wholeness in a way that is approachable, encouraging, and clarifying.

ROBIN LONG, founder and CEO of Lindywell



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KITCHEN THERAPY

ERIN KERRY

Integrative Health Coach and
Functional Nutritionist

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Kitchen Therapy: Understanding the Food-Mood Connection to Boost Your Brain, Calm Your Body, and Nourish Your Spirit

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Disclaimer

The author has made every attempt to provide information that is accurate and complete, but this book is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice. This book is not meant to be used, nor should it be used, to diagnose or treat any medical or psychological condition. Readers are advised to consult their own medical advisors whose responsibility it is to determine the condition of, and best treatment for, the reader.

The case examples in this book are composites based on the author's professional interactions with hundreds of clients over the years. All names are invented, and any resemblance between the composites and real people is coincidental.

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An Invitation to Silence the Nutrition Noise



"I want to learn how to eat to feel better, but I don't know what food is good for me."

Those were the words my new client Liz wrote on her intake form before our first meeting. Liz struggled with anxiety and chronic stress, and even though she received support for her mental health struggles from her medical practitioner and close relationships, she still felt stuck and overwhelmed by anxiety. When she learned about my coaching work and my passion for mental health nutrition, she wanted to see if this "nutrition stuff" (her words) might help ease her anxiety.

In our first meeting, I learned that food itself was a source of anxiety for Liz. She was consumed with fear of eating the wrong thing to the extent that she had a poor relationship with food and her body's ability to use it for energy. She worried about sugar grams and calories. She allowed her kids to enjoy treats such as ice cream or baked goods but felt guilty when she consumed them herself. Her fear of eating the wrong foods, on top of her simmering anxiety, made it difficult for her to be in tune with what foods truly made her feel well. She went back and forth between "clean eating" and complete

free-for-alls in her diet. She didn't know how to create consistent eating habits, and she needed my help.

Liz is representative of many clients I work with as a health coach at a counseling center. For so many people wanting to adopt nutritional changes for their physical and mental health, choosing to eat healthy requires navigating a plethora of contradictory head noise.

Thanks to our modern culture of information overload, we're constantly exposed to dietary advice that surfaces in the background of our thought processes at mealtimes, sometimes interfering with our ability to enjoy nourishing food that's right for *our* unique body. Does any of the following contradictory nutritional advice sound familiar?

> *"Make sure you're eating frequently throughout the day to regulate your blood sugar. But don't eat too frequently, as it raises your fasting insulin too much."*
>
> *"Eat healthy fats but not too many because fat can compete with carbs for storage."*
>
> *"Don't eat ultra-processed foods—except for expensive, name-brand, organic, non-seed oil, grain-free chips. Those are okay."*
>
> *"Fast for twelve hours every day. But don't fast for too long because it can increase stress hormone production."*
>
> *"Nutrients matter more than calories. But calories still matter a little bit."*

I could go on, but you get the point. It's confusing out there, which can lead to complete overwhelm. I've had clients like Liz tell me that they open their refrigerator and stand there paralyzed, unsure

what to eat, so they close the door and avoid eating until they're hangry—angry or irritable from hunger. This leads to overconsuming food that doesn't make them feel great, physically or mentally.

What else gets lost in the nutrition noise? The timeless truth that food brings comfort, pleasure, and even community. While the macronutrients of carbohydrates, fat, and protein fuel our cellular energy, the act of eating fuels our emotional well-being. Eating is a holistic experience that impacts mind, body, and spirit.

THE MEANING BEHIND *KITCHEN THERAPY*

The word *therapy* comes from the Greek word for healing. Therapy is also defined as "the act of caring for someone."[1] *Kitchen therapy* is my way to describe the holistic impact food has on our lives. *What we eat, how we eat, and even who we eat with can play a huge role in how we feel. And how we feel impacts how we serve our God-given purpose in this world.*

During a time when an estimated 32 percent of US adults consume fast food *on any given day*,[2] getting back into the kitchen consistently can pose a challenge. Cooking takes time. Creating meals from whole food ingredients can seem complicated and inconvenient. Yet it's a vital aspect of holistic nourishment. I know this well because I experienced an incredible transformation in my own relationship with food when I took it back to the kitchen and discovered the undeniable fact that food *is* mood. As a survivor of PTSD, depression, and bipolar disorder, I found that being proactive with my nutrition is essential for my mental well-being.

Because of my personal story of overcoming trauma and mental illness, I'm passionate about sharing nutritional tips and strategies that support brain health. Even if you haven't been diagnosed with a mental

illness, I know after working with hundreds of clients of all ages and stages that you have likely experienced chronic stress or trauma, which impacts how you nourish yourself physically, mentally, and spiritually. Chronic stress and trauma impact your relationship with your body and with other people, whether or not you're aware of it.

I want to help you understand the multi-faceted effect food has on your mind, body, and spirit. I want to clear up the confusion about what to eat so you can feel confident in knowing the best types of food for you. I aim to provide you with tips and tricks that helped me heal my own relationship with food after years of eating only for dieting purposes. In fact, I want to help you like I helped Liz, so you can stop riding the dieting roller coaster and establish sustainable eating practices that help you to feel your best and live your best—no matter what season of life you find yourself in. That's exactly what *Kitchen Therapy* is designed to do. I also want to empower you to individualize your nutrition with a fresh approach.

A FRESH APPROACH TO INDIVIDUALIZING NUTRITION

My nutrition training comes from the field of functional medicine. The Institute for Functional Medicine defines this methodology as "a systems biology-based approach that focuses on identifying and addressing the root cause of disease. Each symptom or differential diagnosis may be one of many contributing to an individual's illness."[3] This means that there are many drivers behind chronic symptoms, and nutrition is a big one. Functional medicine also affirms that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to healing because we are not one-size-fits-all human beings. Each person is designed with a different gut microbiome, genetics, genetic expression, life experience, and ancestral DNA. The food that makes me feel amazing doesn't make

my closest friend feel amazing—and that's okay! However, when we learn to tune into our body's needs and combine that with nutrient density and gentle nutritional principles, we can learn to support our body so we can thrive and live out our God-given purpose. I hope this fresh approach to nutrition brings you relief from cookie-cutter diet programs and nutritional guidelines.

In part 1, "Principles of Kitchen Therapy," I share my dietary philosophy and the research that brought me to the concept of kitchen therapy. You'll find out how food plays a role in your mental health, reframe the concept of cravings, and learn how the right type of meal combination can create safety in your nervous system.

In part 2, "Kitchen Utensils," you'll learn about the different components necessary for creating kitchen therapy. You'll become acquainted with gut-brain communication and how your body decreases mental stress through the signals of gut microbes. You'll learn practical tips for getting started with meal prep, mentally and physically. You'll discover how community connection and spiritual health impacts your physical nutrition, and vice versa. And you'll learn ways to check in with your symptoms so you can advocate for your health.

In part 3, "Take It to the Kitchen," you'll get a breakdown of which foods make you most stress resilient, and learn which foods create energy or drain it. You'll be equipped with food lists and support for any mood symptoms, whether you're struggling with low motivation, depression, anxiety, or you just feel blah. I'll also provide you with simple, delicious recipes and a two-week plan to help reset your physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. I'm so excited about this reset because it's a way to pull together everything you've learned and put it into practice. While it isn't a magic fix for all that you struggle with, it absolutely will open the door for you to implement

changes that will make a huge impact over time. I know this because a short nutritional reset was the catalyst for my own healing journey.

Every chapter ends with a "Food for Thought" section, which is designed to deepen your understanding of the principles discussed in the chapter and empower you to identify your next steps. There may be reflection questions and/or action items to practice. The intent is to help you apply and internalize what you're learning in a transformative way—mind, body, and spirit.

If you're tired of asking "What should I eat to feel better?" and you're ready to finally find a sustainable system that keeps you fed, nourished, and energized, then stick with me. We're going to cover a lot of ground, but it will be so worth it in the end!

PART 1

PRINCIPLES OF KITCHEN THERAPY

I remember the first time a client cried in my office about food. "I don't know why I'm crying about this," she said as she grabbed a tissue. "It's silly."

It wasn't silly. What I explained to her then and what I want you to understand now is this: Your relationship with food is tangled up with memories, desire, and a soul-deep ache you likely don't know how to name. It's not silly to have big emotions tied to food. However, it *is* silly for me as coach to ask a client to make dietary changes without first addressing their relationship to food. Silly, unwise, and futile.

I like to get to the root of what drives a client's eating behaviors: cravings, eating patterns, comfort rituals, and routine habits. I want to understand their relationship with food because that relationship helps me determine what is most needed for healing—for the therapeutic food journey.

In part 1, we're going to examine some basic principles of kitchen therapy. It's a way for you to think beyond "eat this, not that" lists. It's an invitation for you to evaluate how your mood is influenced by the food you eat. It's a chance for you to unravel your cravings—and possibly learn to stop beating yourself up about them. And most importantly, it sets the stage for you to think about food in a new way, a way that brings safety and comfort to a nervous system that often gets so frazzled by life's stressors.



1

UNDERSTAND THE FOOD-MOOD CONNECTION



My son Rhett is a classic youngest child. When he was born, I was already parenting a middle schooler and a toddler who occupied a lot of my attention. So he's always gotten away with things the other kids haven't.

One day when Rhett was just under two years old, I was prepping dinner in the kitchen when he decided to do a little science experiment in the living room. He found some ball inflation needles—the tiny, stainless-steel needles used with an air pump to inflate basketballs. Being my most curious child, he thought it would be fascinating to see what might happen if he put those needles into the electrical outlet. He proceeded to put not one, not two, but *three* needles into the socket and, wouldn't you know it, by the third one, he shocked himself. I heard a yelp of pain and went rushing into the living room to find Rhett waving his hand around and saying, "Hot!"

I felt terrible, of course, but I'm happy to report that he was okay (and I was somehow able to safely extract the needles).

This story about Rhett serves as a fitting analogy for stress and our bodies. Think of every stressor in every life season as another needle added to the socket. Our bodies can withstand a lot of stress: illnesses, sleepless nights, emergency room visits, grief, acute trauma, marriage and parenting struggles, job losses, and moving across the country. Our resilience comes from generations of ancestors who went through famine, plagues, and wars. Our bodies are adaptable and can handle most of the shifts and changes that involve being human.

However, in the twenty-first century, we're also exposed to more "micro-stressors" daily than any of our ancestors experienced. In fact, recent research indicates that middle-aged people in the 2010s experienced 19 percent more stress than middle-aged people in the 1990s.[1] (Which makes me wonder if that percentage has increased even more since then.) Micro-stressors are repeated demands on your brain or body that may seem insignificant individually, yet their cumulative load presents added challenge to the stress response system over time. For example, we carry handheld devices that alert us to everything from mini emergencies to catastrophic news all day long. The air is filled with environmental toxins that didn't exist a hundred years ago. So is the water. And we're exposed to foods and additives that weren't even in production for most of human history.

You might not think of such things as sources of stress, but your body picks up on these physiological stressors in the same way it does emotional stressors. And your body may be just one stressor away from an electric shock to your health.

I frequently meet with women (and some men) who are dealing with mystery symptoms. They go to the doctor because they don't feel right, get some labs run, and everything comes back "normal." They

don't receive any conclusive answers, just a pat on the back and a copay, and they're left to decipher—on their own—why they don't feel right. Perhaps this is a scenario you or someone close to you has experienced.

But there is a puzzle piece I think is often missed at our doctor appointments, one that has been instrumental in my own mental health journey and a crucial component of kitchen therapy. That missing piece is the food-mood connection. Food is mood. Everything you eat or drink plays a role in how your brain functions. When your brain functions better, everything in your body functions better. Your emotions are more stable. Your pain is decreased. Inflammation is lowered. *Your body feels better, and you become more stress resilient.*

Unfortunately, most people today associate dietary changes with just one thing: weight loss. With weight loss, seeing is believing. We *see* the effect of dietary changes, so we *believe* our food choices are making a difference and we're motivated to continue. However, that's not always the case when it comes to recognizing the connection between dietary changes and mental health. We can't see the impact neuroinflammation has on our decision-making, so we can't tell that by decreasing inflammation, we're improving mental clarity. It's hard to know something works if we can't see the direct effects. Which means when we eat with the goal to improve mental health, the effects are more difficult to track. But just because we can't always track the brain-boosting effects of making nutritional changes doesn't mean change isn't happening at the intercellular level.

Here is a fact I want you to remember: *You can't have optimal mental health if you're not providing the body with the raw materials it needs to build a healthy brain*. It's like trying to bake a cake without flour or eggs. It's not going to turn out right. Food brings your body the supplies needed for building better mental health. What you eat determines how you feel. But the reverse is also true. How you

feel determines what you eat. When you understand how both these dynamics play out in your everyday life, you can begin to make the changes you need to make for lasting mental health.

YOUR MOOD IMPACTS YOUR CHOICE OF FOOD

I've never met a person who doesn't experience the occasional craving. The most discussed cravings in my office are Cheez-Its, Chick-fil-A, coffee, and sugar—and over the holidays, peppermint bark wins out over other treats. While cravings can be rooted in both physiological and emotional needs, your current mood state plays a direct role in what you choose to consume.

Even a small shift in mood, due to seemingly imperceptible changes, can lead to a change in cravings. For example, just one night of poor sleep can shake up the balance between *ghrelin* (your hunger hormone) and *leptin* (your fullness hormone), leading to an inability to determine if you're really hungry or really full. Likewise, I've always found it interesting that one side effect of mood stabilizing medications or antidepressants can be an increase or decrease in hunger.

Here are some additional examples of how changes in mood can alter how the body responds to cravings.

Stress. When you're stressed or overwhelmed, you're likely to experience a change in appetite, either by forgetting to eat or by overconsuming carbs and sugar to get that glucose hit in the brain. Carbs are the brain's preferred source of fuel, and it makes sense that you crave sources of sugar when you're in a survival state. Unfortunately, by overconsuming refined carbs and sugars, you increase the insulin load in the body, which leads to an inability of the brain to use glucose as fuel. So it backfires and you get hangry, foggy, and irritable, leading to a need for more food.

Boredom. Boredom never fails to keep us snacking. In fact, in recent years the term "snackification" has become popular, describing the modern-day shift from eating three solid meals a day to snacking on small bites gradually throughout. There are many potential reasons we do this, but I believe a huge one is a need for stimulation.

Our fast-paced culture breeds a desire for instant gratification and an increasing need for the "new and shiny" to keep our brains engaged. When dopamine (the focus and motivation neurotransmitter) runs out, there is always something to replace it. Most processed foods have been engineered to be hyperpalatable and hook our brains to make us feel the need to snack. So seeking out stimulating snack foods is a way to stay engaged during a long day. I have many clients who struggle to say no to the office snacks after lunch when they're tired and their motivation has run out. This is not abnormal, but it's definitely not helpful if you want to be more intentional with food consumption.

Anxiety. Anxiety *prevents* some people from eating, which then leads to massive blood sugar dips, serving to increase their anxiety and make them feel worse. For other people, anxiety keeps them in a disconnected state from their body, so they eat without being fully present, leading to indigestion and uncomfortable symptoms after a meal. When that happens, it's hard to distinguish if it's the food choice that caused the symptoms or the way the food was consumed. After all, a body in panic or stress simply won't digest.

Fluctuating hormones. An underemphasized factor that impacts women's moods is fluctuations of the menstrual cycle. If you're a cycling female, you have four phases in your monthly cycle—menstrual, follicular, ovulatory, and luteal—and the associated hormone fluctuations impact your neurotransmitters, such as serotonin (your "happy neurotransmitter") and GABA (gama-aminobutyric acid, a calming neurotransmitter).

As your hormones fluctuate, so do your brain's chemical messengers, which play a huge role in your cravings. It's no surprise then that you might seek out chocolate and comfort foods before you start your period. When progesterone starts to decline, so does the body's production of GABA. Meanwhile the stress hormone cortisol needs to stay balanced to support all these changes, but when cortisol gets out of balance, mood symptoms shift. Add to that a hormonal imbalance of any kind, or a life stage such as pregnancy or perimenopause, and your cravings will be driven by your mood—via your hormones—more than ever before.

Maybe you've never really thought about how your various mood shifts impact the way you choose to eat. Perhaps you tend to eat what sounds good to you in the moment, or you adhere to a way of eating that you feel is healthy for your body and conveniently fits your lifestyle. As your health coach, I encourage you to start noticing how your mood impacts your choice of food. You might be surprised to find common denominators you haven't noticed before, whether in relation to your menstrual cycle or the day-by-day mood fluctuations that cause you to look for certain foods more than others.

Becoming more aware of your mood-food connection is a powerful first step in kitchen therapy. But just as your mood most definitely impacts your choice of food, it's also important to investigate another undeniable influence: how food affects mood.

YOUR CHOICE OF FOOD IMPACTS YOUR MOOD

How are you feeling today? *No, really*. What feelings have you experienced already today? Anxiety? Sadness? Happiness? Peace? Overwhelm? Frustration? What if I told you that what you ate this morning impacts your mood throughout the day? In fact, *everything* you eat, drink,

think, and believe affects the formation of neurotransmitters, which are the chemical messengers that create your mood state.

This would have been hard for me to believe over two decades ago when I was first diagnosed with bipolar disorder. I tried everything to balance my mood, including over ten different medications. Never once did anyone suggest that food could help me think more clearly or that food would calm the storm I so often felt brewing in my head. I had to learn the hard way—from failed personal experiments—that what I ate gave my cells crucial information that either enhanced or decreased my ability to focus, have energy, and feel mentally well. I don't want you to learn the hard way. I want you to experience the mental clarity that comes from implementing kitchen therapy. But first, you need to understand how it all works. So let's start with a food analogy.

How do you feel about avocados? I'm a huge fan, especially when they're mashed with spices, cilantro, and jalapeños, and served with chips at a Mexican restaurant. You know what I'm talking about—guacamole. My husband makes the most incredible guacamole, and he's passed the knowledge on to our two boys, who've been making their own since the older one was in third grade.

One important element to making good guacamole is finding the right avocados. You want your avocados to be slightly soft, not too hard or too mushy. When you cut into the skin it should be somewhat flexible instead of rigid or soft. When you look inside, you want to see the pit in the middle, surrounded by bright green flesh—no brown spots or lines. It's the same thing with a healthy cell in your body.

Your body is made up of trillions of cells. When cells are healthy, the cell membrane (think avocado skin) should be flexible. The cell membrane is a barrier of protection, but also a transporter of

information. Its job is to pick up on signals from the outside world and use the signals for the inside of the cell to get to work. Cytoplasm is like the green flesh of the avocado, which protects organelles (parts of the cell that carry out important functions) such as mitochondria. Mitochondria are responsible for generating energy based on the nutrients the cells receive from outside, and the DNA nucleus (the pit of the avocado) is the control center, regulating the activity of the cell.

Here's the problem: If your cells aren't getting enough nutrients—such as vitamins, minerals, amino acids, and phytonutrients—they won't be able to use the food you eat for energy. If your cells encounter more toxins and free radicals than antioxidants to help break down the toxins, they'll stop thriving. Your cells will start to look like the avocado at the bottom of the pile in the grocery store, left to shrivel and darken inside. When cells are damaged, this is called oxidative stress. Oxidative stress is what leads to inflammation, which is arguably the root cause of most health conditions people face today.

That may be oversimplifying a complex process, but for the sake of the kitchen therapy conversation, let's take this one step further. If healthy cells are needed to make the body healthy, and healthy cells form neurotransmitters (through neurons) that impact mood at the brain level, then eating food that makes cells sick can make your mood symptoms worse. Eating food that improves cellular health makes mood symptoms improve.

The bottom line: *What you eat gives every cell in your body information that can change how you feel.* You can't break down food for energy if you're not receiving adequate nutrients and utilizing them in your cells. But the act of consuming food isn't just about creating physical change in the body. There are so many other benefits to nourishment, which is why we need a fresh, holistic perspective of nutrition.

Okay, But What *Is* Inflammation, Anyway?

Inflammation is a word that gets thrown around a lot by health practitioners, coaches, and influencers as a big bad guy, but what might surprise you is that the purpose of inflammation is to facilitate healing. Inflammation is your body's natural response to help you heal from injury, tissue damage, infection, or irritation.

Have you ever gotten a cut on your finger? Within a day or two, you'll likely start to notice swelling around the cut. That's your body's way of jump-starting healing by sending out an army of white blood cell soldiers. This is *acute inflammation*, which has a helpful short-term purpose. However, if you kept getting an injury on your finger in the same spot, inflammation would increase, and the finger wouldn't heal. That would then be a chronic condition.

Similarly, if your body is trying to heal from internal damage—such as toxin exposure from cigarette smoke, persistent nutrient deficiencies, ongoing blood sugar dysregulation, gastrointestinal distress due to a food sensitivity, or an overactivated immune response—*chronic inflammation* can occur. This can then result in a chronic disease diagnosis, such as type 2 diabetes, autoimmune disease, inflammatory bowel disease, and even anxiety or depression.

FLIP THE SCRIPT ON NUTRITION

I invite you to flip the script and consider a holistic approach to nutrition, a practice that nourishes not just your body and mind, but your spirit as well. You are so much more than a physical being that exists to eat, work, and sleep. You are created for a higher purpose, which means you've been designed to be nourished by much more than food. Jesus put it this way: "It takes more than bread to stay alive. It takes a steady stream of words from God's mouth" (Matthew 4:4, MSG). This kind of nourishment is what I call *primary nourishment*. It is the nourishment that comes from your relationship with your heavenly Father. When you are well nourished spiritually and emotionally as well as physically, you can feel better to serve your God-given purpose.

The concept of primary nourishment reminds us that God's provision extends beyond physical health and what we eat. *How* we eat and choose nourishment matters too. If God intended for us to eat *only* for the purpose of creating cellular energy, I don't think he would have given us such a wide variety of flavors and textures through plant foods and animal protein. If food is to be used only as fuel for cells, I don't think God would have dictated the celebration of so many feasts in the Old Testament. The experience of eating itself, whether out of celebration or comfort or community, impacts the mind and the body. Your level of stress while eating impacts how food is digested and absorbed. Even the pace at which you eat changes how your body breaks down food. God created your body to enter an optimal "rest-and-digest" state when you are experiencing a safe, calm environment while eating, which means you can take joy in his creative display of available food items!

God designed your body with a purpose. When you receive the basic nutrients that help your body function best, you are even more

equipped to live out your purpose. When you are nourished with those nutrients in a safe environment with support and love, your body responds even more optimally.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

As you begin the journey of nourishing your body with kitchen therapy, I invite you to set aside any ideas you may have about using nutrition for body modification. Maybe there is a time and place for that in your life, but I don't want that to be your starting place. Instead of thinking about how food impacts your body's appearance, I encourage you to start by evaluating how food impacts you mentally. Here are two options to help you do that.

- ***Step away from the scale and the tape measure.*** Make a promise to yourself not to measure your nutritional progress by how your body changes or doesn't change. Follow through on that promise by not weighing or measuring yourself for a time.
- ***Document your cravings.*** For the next five days, become a student and observer of your relationship with nutrition. You can use the "Cravings Journal" chart in the appendix (pages 214–215), recreate it on a pad of paper, or just use the notes app on your phone to document the following:
  - The time of day when you crave a certain food.
  - The intensity of your cravings on a scale of 0 to 10 (zero being you already forgot about it and 10 being you will go out of your way to have that thing *now*).

- How you're feeling in that moment or what's going on in your day. Are you bored? Sad? Overstimulated? Tired?

Your chart might look like this:

TIME OF DAY	FOOD I'M CRAVING	CRAVING INTENSITY (0–10)	FEELINGS
10:30 a.m.	Donut	6	Anxious
2:15 p.m.	Diet Coke	4	Overwhelmed
8:30 p.m.	Chocolate-covered almonds	8	Bored

After five days, review your notes and see if you can discern any patterns. For example, maybe you always seem to crave a sweet coffee drink at 2:00 p.m. for a pick-me-up when you're bored at work. Or maybe you have a certain snack drawer you gravitate toward mid-morning because your breakfast wore off and you're just plain hungry. Take note and save that valuable information for the next step in our journey together!