

LABOR CONNECTION

Spring 2025

The Link Between Nutrition and Mental Health



You've likely heard the cliché a million times — “You are what you eat.” So you might nosh on foods reported to lower your blood pressure, strengthen your bones or burn belly fat. You might even load up on brain food to feed your head.

As it turns out, the experts would back you up. Today, there's plenty of research that shows the ways nutrition affects our mental health. What we eat can play a vital role in our mental and emotional health.

Missing key vitamins and minerals can lead to higher levels of stress and anxiety. Nutritional deficiencies may even add to cognitive disorders and dementia.

Just like our body, the brain needs healthy fuel to work its best. Along with vitamins and minerals, it needs healthy fats, fruits, vegetables and lean proteins, including plant-based

proteins. A diet without these healthy foods can lead to a buildup of toxins in the body. These toxins contribute to inflammation. That can cause damage to the brain called plaque, a potential factor in Alzheimer's.

Add These to Your Menu

People who grapple with depression, anxiety and dementia often lack some key vitamins and minerals. Add foods to your diet that are rich in these:

- Omega-3 fatty acids that lower inflammation and are vital to brain health
- B vitamins that make brain chemicals that affect mood and other functions
- Vitamin D that plays a role in mood, sleep, hunger and digestion

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Someone You Should Know



Meet Angelo Feola, Fund Manager, Cement Masons Local 502

Angelo Feola has an enthusiasm and passion for the Cement Mason Local 502 that is clear after only spending a few moments with him. With a career

spanning more than two decades, he has risen through the ranks from an apprentice to a Fund Administrator. His journey is a testament to the power of hard work, dedication and the opportunities provided by the Fund.

The Cement Masons Local 502 Funds, established in 1914, covers all the Cement Masons in DuPage and Cook counties, as well as plasterers throughout the Chicagoland area. With 1,700 active members and 2,800 pensioners, the Funds have been a cornerstone of the industry for more than a century.

As is the case with many in extended union families, Angelo was introduced to the Fund in 1997 by his cousin, a cement mason. Angelo jumped at the opportunity to work outside, beginning a three-year apprenticeship with the Cement Masons.

Passion for the trade

Throughout his career, Angelo has held various positions, including foreman, superintendent and

apprentice instructor. In 2014, he became a Union Trustee, and in 2019, he was added to the Executive Board. His passion for passing on his knowledge to people new to the trades has been a driving force behind his success. Angelo said one of his most significant challenges leading the Cement Masons Fund has been navigating the turbulent ups and downs of the economy.

Having not attended college, Angelo says he is driven to show those who gave him opportunities throughout his career that their faith in him was well served. He feels compelled to work 10 times harder to achieve his goals. His sense of pride and gratitude towards the Fund is evident: "I've always wanted to take advantage of every opportunity given, to prove to those who helped me that they made the right decision."

Laying a strong foundation

In his current role as Fund Administrator, Angelo focuses his priorities on continuing the strong foundation laid by his predecessors. He aims to monitor the Fund's progress, identify problems and ensure that the pension and welfare benefits are maintained. Angelo's five-year vision for the Fund is to continue growth and success, building on the foundation established during the past century.

Outside of work, Angelo is a family man. He has been married for 29 years to his wife, Halina. They have two sons, Angelo and Anthony, who have pursued careers in engineering and finance. The family enjoys hunting, fishing and spending time at their vacation home.

This and That

The Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Illinois Labor team celebrated 2025 St. Patrick's Day at a variety of locations throughout Chicago.

BCBSIL Labor team members preparing for the parade. From left to right Dan Mackenzie, Derek Serbe, Dave Gieselman, Jennie Tatooles and Andy Seymour.





Apprentice Program: **District Council Training Center**

Stan Kulasik, administrator of the District Council Training Center, began his union journey in the trowel trades

30 years ago after moving to the United States. Despite his initial limited English fluency, Stan quickly embraced every craft within the trowel trades, earning the respect of his union peers.

In 2016, he transitioned to an instructor role after completing a rigorous five-year national training program in Maryland.

The program included lesson-plan development, a comprehensive exam and a profession portfolio. Through dedication and leadership skills, he was named administrator of the District Council Training Center in Addison, one of the largest training facilities for bricklayers and allied craftworkers in the country.

Buttressed by Chicago's deep union roots and focus on efficiency, the District Council program stands as a monument within the industry. It serves approximately 600 apprentices across several crafts, including bricklaying, marble setting/finishing, precast erecting, refractory, plastering, tile laying/finishing, terrazzo and tuckpointing masonry. Instructors are selected for their expertise, dedication and track record within the field.

The bricklaying pre-apprentice program, which is the longest-duration curriculum in the center, is comprised of 11 weeks of intensive training. New sessions begin annually. Admission to the program, which spans 26 counties, is based on experience, physical ability and access to transportation. Between three-quarters to 95% of those attending the program will graduate; many who leave early return later better prepared and determined.

The center emphasizes safety and adapting to industry advancements, offering updated training on new materials, equipment and technology, such as the MULE (Material Unit Lift Enhancer) lifting system. MULE lifting reduces strain while increasing efficiency. All trainers are OSHA-authorized outreach trainers. Apprentices are certified in first aid, CPR, silica safety fall protection, scaffolding and more. The union's accident rate remains low, which reflects its commitment to health and safety.

The Link Between Nutrition and Mental Health (CONTINUED)

- Amino acids that enhance brain health and fight depression and brain fog
- Folate that supports the production of “feel-good” serotonin
- Magnesium and zinc, which are vital to the body's stress response, recovery and repair
- Iron for energy, positive moods and emotions; fiber to help feed good bacteria in your system.

What foods should you eat to support your mental health? No one has the exact same dietary needs. But some nutrients are helpful for most everyone. These foods are loaded with the vitamins and minerals listed above:

- Oily fish — salmon, trout, mackerel, anchovies and sardines; shellfish
- Leafy greens — kale, spinach and romaine lettuce; broccoli, olive oil
- Walnuts, sunflower seeds and chia and flax seeds
- Berries and dark-skinned fruit, avocados, eggs, mushrooms
- Legumes — lentils, chickpeas and beans
- Whole grains — rice, quinoa and oats
- Liver and other organ meats
- Dark chocolate

Before making any major changes to your diet, talk with your doctor or a registered dietitian who specializes in nutrition.

Sources: The Best Brain Foods You're Not Eating, The New York Times, 2022; Foods Linked to Better Brainpower, Harvard Health Publishing, 2024; Fitness 4Mind4Body: Diet and Nutrition, Mental Health America; Psychiatric disorders risk in patients with iron deficiency anemia and association with iron supplementation medications: a nationwide database analysis, Biomedical Central, 2020; What Happens to the Brain in Alzheimer's Disease?, National Institute on Aging, 2024



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Heart Disease and Stroke Are Often Preventable

Heart disease and stroke are the first and fifth leading causes of death in the United States, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Each year, about 1.5 million Americans suffer a heart attack or stroke. More than 700,000 of them die.

The good news is that many heart attacks and strokes can be prevented. The right lifestyle changes can significantly lower your risk.

The Role of High Blood Pressure

High blood pressure is a leading cause of heart disease and stroke and has been linked to dementia, according to the CDC.

Nearly half of American adults have hypertension, higher blood pressure than normal. About 75% of adults with high blood pressure do not have their condition under control. You should have your doctor check you and your loved ones regularly for this often undiagnosed and untreated disease.



BlueCross BlueShield of Illinois

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