

The Kitchen, Cooking and Its Impact on Our Psychological Wellbeing

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Abstract

The kitchen significantly influences psychological health as it impacts mood, stress levels, and cognitive functions. Participating in food preparation and cooking can be a deeply therapeutic activity, offering a mindful break from the turmoil of daily life. In this article, we explore the effects of the kitchen and cooking on our psychological wellbeing.

Keywords: the kitchen, cooking and its impact on our psychological wellbeing

Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health as a condition of well-being where an individual recognizes their own capabilities, manages the typical stresses of life, works effectively and productively, and contributes positively to their community.

The kitchen has a big impact on psychological health because it affects mood, stress levels and cognitive abilities. While a messy or disorganised kitchen can exacerbate anxiety and frustration, a well organised kitchen can lower stress, improve focus and even lift our spirits. When considering our kitchen, it is common to concentrate on its functional elements such as cooking, cleaning, and dining. However, as a pivotal area of the home, the kitchen serves a greater purpose than merely meal preparation; it is an environment that can foster relaxation, mindfulness, and enhance overall wellbeing.

We can promote a sense of calm, lower stress levels and enhance our general psychological wellbeing by designing a kitchen that is well-organized and welcoming as well as embracing the therapeutic and social aspects of cooking. By providing a respite from everyday stresses and encouraging relaxation, cooking itself can be a therapeutic and mindful activity.

Engaging in food preparation can serve as a profoundly therapeutic experience, providing a mindful respite from the chaos of everyday life. An efficiently designed kitchen transforms meal preparation into a soothing ritual, enabling you to concentrate on the process without the pressure of time constraints or stress. With ample counter space, accessible storage solutions, and a tidy, inviting atmosphere, cooking becomes a more

pleasurable and serene endeavour. An optimal kitchen layout can facilitate a reconnection with the present, which has been demonstrated to alleviate anxiety and foster tranquillity.

An aesthetically pleasing kitchen can also promote healthier eating habits. When fresh ingredients are readily accessible, and the kitchen environment inspires cooking over opting for convenience foods, it can positively influence mental well-being. A bright and welcoming space can encourage the preparation of nutritious meals, subsequently enhancing mood and energy levels. Furthermore, feeling satisfied with our food choices can elevate self-esteem and foster a greater sense of achievement.

Previous Literature

Findings from a cross-sectional survey reveal that family functioning greatly contributes to psychological flourishing, thereby enhancing overall family well-being. Engaging in shared cooking and dining activities has been shown to positively affect family well-being, highlighting their essential role in reinforcing emotional connections, promoting communication, and enhancing family unity (Chen et al, 2025).

Disorder in the kitchen can foster a feeling of disarray, resulting in stress and irritation whereas, a well-ordered kitchen can induce tranquillity and alleviate anxiety. When every item is in its designated spot, and we can swiftly locate what we require, we will spend less time searching and more time appreciating the environment. Furthermore, the kitchen serves as a venue for creativity. Whether we are trying out new recipes, baking with

loved ones, or simply rearranging our surroundings, creativity has been associated with better mental well-being.

A kitchen that offers ample space for exploring new concepts, along with motivating colours and finishes, can ignite creativity and provide a constructive outlet for stress. Studies indicate that exposure to natural light can enhance mood and alleviate stress. A kitchen designed with expansive windows or optimized for natural light can foster a more vibrant and positive atmosphere. Incorporating natural elements, like houseplants or wooden finishes, can further promote tranquillity. These green additions have been proven to enhance concentration and diminish feelings of anxiety. Establishing an environment that promotes mindfulness, organization, social interaction, and creativity all of which can cultivate a supportive atmosphere for enhancing mental well-being. <https://krystalkitchens.co.uk/the-mental-health-benefits-of-your-kitchen-creating-a-space-for-wellbeing/>

Therapeutic Interventions

Culinary interventions are employed in therapeutic and rehabilitative environments and can have the potential to enhance psychosocial outcomes (Farmer et al, 2018). The practice of cooking likely developed as a means of survival; individuals discovered that cooking improved the digestibility of food and diminished harmful bacteria, thereby enhancing both survival rates and nutritional health within a population (Carmody & Wrangham, 2009).

Cooking not only impacted biological aspects but also shaped social interactions and fostered a sense of community among humans, as it played a significant role in enhancing pair bonds. Cooking interventions grounded in evidence, particularly in the fields of occupational and rehabilitation therapy, have been implemented to enhance nutritional status, weight-related results, and culinary skills. Cooking is employed as it represents a common daily activity, requires physical involvement, and engages executive functions. Cooking tasks have been utilized to assess motor skills in clinical groups, including individuals with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, strokes, and cardiovascular diseases, as well as to evaluate executive function planning in those with traumatic brain injuries, substance abuse issues, cancer, strokes, and among the elderly (Aycinena et al., 2017).

Cooking necessitates the combination of cognitive, physical, and socioemotional processes. The process of learning to cook entails both modelling and skill mastery. Therefore, social cognitive theory may elucidate how an effective food system, which depends on cooking, could gain from activities that foster positive mood, self-confidence, and self-esteem to enhance the sharing of food and ideas. The ability to cook was linked to improved family relationships, enhanced mental health, and reduced self-reported depression levels (Utter et al, 2016).

Acquiring culinary skills and engaging in cooking can serve as a distinctive avenue for adolescents to cultivate essential life skills and make positive contributions to their families. Comprehensive regression analyses investigating the correlations between cooking proficiency/frequency and various health and well-being indicators. Utter et al (2016) indicated that around 80% of students/adolescents affirmed their capability to prepare meals using basic ingredients. Furthermore, cooking proficiency was positively correlated with improved nutritional outcomes, enhanced mental health indicators, and stronger familial bonds, while also being linked to reduced depressive symptoms and increased overall mental well-being.

In their research, Güler and Haseki (2021) found that culinary activities encompass both casual and serious leisure experiences that contribute to psychological well-being. This indicates that culinary pursuits possess diverse leisure attributes. Initially, individuals enter the kitchen seeking pure enjoyment and relaxation, reflecting hedonic well-being. However, those

who engage in culinary activities with the expectation of achieving happiness often depart with eudaimonic benefits, having acquired new skills and knowledge, as well as experiencing self-actualization and personal growth. The act of eating is inherently gratifying. Consequently, cooking, which culminates in eating, possesses a robust intrinsic reward mechanism. Engaging in cooking collaboratively fosters communication and provides an opportunity to refine our skills in cooperation and conflict resolution.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/minding-the-body/201505/kitchen-therapy-cooking-mental-well-being>

(Hagan., 2015)

The act of cooking and dining is often linked to uplifting memories and feelings, enhancing one's overall mood. Programs focused on community cooking can alleviate social isolation and foster social interactions. Furthermore, cooking serves as a therapeutic method to tackle mental health challenges such as grief, anxiety, and depression, as reported by the BBC. https://www.bbc.co.uk/food/articles/cooking_therapy

A comprehensive review examining the impact of food-related activities on psychological well-being in later life found moderate evidence from nine qualitative and two quantitative studies, which varied in quality; indicating that such activities play a role in sustaining women's gender identities, the ethnic identities of both men and women, and community identities (Plastow et al, 2015). Thorough dietary management approaches can positively impact the prevention and reversal of frailty. Tailored nutrition education, along with personalised dishware and food supplements, notably enhanced participants' consumption of vegetables, dairy products, and nuts, while also elevating urinary urea nitrogen levels. This intervention resulted in a significant decrease in frailty scores ($p < 0.05$) and a near-significant reduction ($p = 0.063$) in scores related to geriatric depression (Wu et al, 2018).

In their 2021 study, Silver and colleagues examined how culinary education influenced home cooking habits, coping mechanisms, and resilience amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The intervention involved 12 weekly 30-minute individual telemedicine culinary coaching sessions. Participants in the intervention indicated that they utilized home cooking skills, including meal planning and time-saving methods, during the pandemic. The primary findings suggest that telemedicine culinary coaching can serve as an effective means of imparting home cooking skills and encouraging self-care practices as coping strategies during stressful periods.

A well-rounded and nutritious diet, regular physical exercise, and mental well-being significantly contribute to overall health and play a vital role in the progression and outlook of various diseases. The Southern European Atlantic diet exemplifies a dietary pattern that may yield favourable health outcomes due to its rich nutrient content of high biological value. Coupled with its cooking techniques, encouragement of physical activity, reduction of carbon emissions, and the promotion of family meals, this diet fosters these beneficial health effects. Research in the field of nutri-epigenetics has shown that epigenetic markers linked to food, nutrients, and environmental influences can alter gene expression, thereby impacting both health and disease (Lorenzo et al, 2022).

Despite longstanding public apprehension regarding artificial and synthetic food colours, it is important to acknowledge that the intentional colouring of food and beverages, such as red wine, has been practiced for thousands of years. The visual presentation of food is increasingly influenced by technological advancements, including virtual and augmented reality, and food colour will remain a significant factor in shaping consumer preferences. The application of food colouring by contemporary chefs and others can occasionally carry symbolic significance, and certain food colours may develop distinctive or branded associations (Spence, 2023).

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the kitchen frequently serves as the central hub of the home, where loved ones come together to enjoy meals and quality time. A spacious and inviting kitchen promotes connection, providing a nurturing space for dialogue, laughter, and relationship-building. Engaging social interactions and robust relationships are essential for maintaining good mental health, alleviating feelings of loneliness and isolation. Interactions within families are crucial in influencing well-being in physical, psychological, and social aspects.

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