

## Good mood food

*This is your brain, and this is your brain on healthy food. Drewbie talks about the best way for mental health in a preview of his new CMC class, "Feeding Your Feelings."*

If you know one thing about me, it is that I love Phish. Two, I love Cleveland. Three, I love to cook for people.

In fact, ask for the proudest moment of my life, and is it the Everest Marathon? Nope. My wedding? Sorry Molly, but no. Standing on the stage to receive our second-place trophy in the Breckenridge Chili Cookoff? Never been prouder.

Sure, it was people's choice, but it was our people. Molly was dressed as a sexy Eskimo, me in a blue-and-pink pastel tuxedo that was more carnival barker than chili cook, and on stage I cried, like usual. But I make a mean pot of chili and am damn proud of it. (I never even cashed the \$75 prize money.)

On April 21, I'll be stepping out of my educational comfort zone with chef Ian Buchanan, director of the Recreational Culinary Institute at Colorado Mountain College. Ian has traveled the globe dining, teaching and creating beautiful works of cuisine, and coincidentally we met at CMC after growing up 15 minutes from each other in Ohio.



**Drew Mikita**  
Dear Drewbie

As often happens when two great Ohio minds are together, we decided to create a course together about food and psychology, dubbed "Feeding Your Feelings." This interactive class investigates the impact food can have on our mood and feelings in three areas: biologically, emotionally and socially.

### WHY WE LOVE COMFORT FOOD

When longing for a "beautiful" November Cleveland day (or, more accurately missing my family) chili brings me home. Cooking up a

pot reminds me of the days when Mom and I would go to Fishers in Peninsula, Ohio, and split a big bowl of chili.

Chili isn't the healthiest thing on the planet, but it has the ability to improve my mood: A pot of chili, Great Lakes Christmas Ale, amazing friends and a Browns loss on TV make me feel right at home, like an internal stomach hug from my grandmother.

The best recipes I make come from a gift my mother made me some years ago: a recipe book written in her perfect, middle-school-teacher-cursive handwriting. It's filled with Aunt Ella's caramel corn, Grammy's crab cake, Gail's pickles and more delicacies prefaced by non-biological aunts and uncles. This book is the first non-living thing I'd grab in a fire — you can't replace directions that include, "Andrew, with clean



GETTY IMAGES / SPECIAL TO THE DAILY

Sharing meals with friends and family can be just as important as finding the right ingredients. Resident psychologist Drewbie talks about the best foods and environments to improve your mood.

### "FEEDING YOUR FEELINGS" SEMINAR

**What:** A hands-on seminar looking at how food and diet impact mood and mental health, taught by psych professor Drew Mikita and chef Ian Buchanan

**When:** Friday, April 21, from 6-9 p.m.

**Where:** Colorado Mountain College-Breckenridge, 107 Denison Place Road in Breck

**Cost:** \$44

This one-time class is open to the public (Food and Psychology registration number 03347). CMC students might be eligible for a course discount. To find out more or to register, call CMC at 970-453-6757.

hands roll the dough." She knows me too well.

I love the book, but it is important to "healthify" some of these traditional recipes with new ingredients and improvements. Many healthy substitutions can be made without ruining the experience of my family's classic recipes.

### EATING TIPS FOR A HEALTHY MIND

Certain foods can help with certain moods. Here are a few of my favorites.

**Depression and overall mood foods:** Fish (cod, haddock, salmon), leafy greens, fruits (particularly berries), walnuts and almonds, juices, carrots, apples, avocados, and delicious dark chocolate. Minimize alcohol (it's a depressant). A glass of wine can go a long way for mental health, but a bucket of wine can do the opposite.

**Anxiety and stress reducers:** Avocados, asparagus,

berries, almonds and walnuts, citrus fruits, salmon, turkey, oatmeal, whole wheat and Greek yogurt. Avoid excessive caffeine, which is a stimulant and can increase anxiety.

**Attention and focus:** Natural berries, flax seed, leafy vegetables, fatty fish, and nuts. Avoid caffeine, sugars and overly processed or refined foods.

**Hydrate to dominate:** Mental health issues can be exacerbated by dehydration. Drink more water, and respect that alcohol and caffeine can dehydrate us.

**Set mood boundaries:** Eating healthy should be an emphasis, at least most of the time, when you're under stress or in a funk. This helps your body produce the necessary chemicals it needs for a fighting chance at happiness. Sugary ice cream is only a bandage.

**Home chef:** Plan, buy and make your own meals! Cooking creates awareness of exactly what is going into your body, and the subsequent influence on your mental health is huge.



SPECIAL TO THE DAILY

Molly and Drew Mikita at the 2012 Breckenridge Chili Cook-Off, where the author took second in the people's choice contest with his homemade chili.

### THE POWER OF BAR NACHOS

In Nepal, Molly and I met her lifetime girlfriend, Erin, at the finish line of the Everest Marathon. Soon after we had dinner at a place called Friends Café in Kathmandu with Samir, Erin's now-boyfriend. We had a few meals here, all of which were amazing and memorable.

The most memorable dish was a shared plate for everyone. It was perfect humus topped with spicy, seasoned ground lamb and a zesty green herb topping, eaten with giant, fresh pieces of naan bread. My mouth is watering just thinking about it. We had it several times — it was that tasty.

We've tried to make the dish at home, and even though it wasn't as good here, it was still yummy. But sitting in our little home, like Friends Café, was fun: Molly regaled us with stories, showed pictures, remembered the food

and the adventures. For a moment, I felt like we were back in our café sanctuary in Kathmandu, only this time with Breckenridge friends.

Shared food — be it fondue, a Nepali hummus dish or even a giant plate of nachos — has a community aspect to it of everyone sharing, experiencing and enjoying. There is also evidence that eating in this capacity allows for a small exchange of bacteria, which can aid our immune systems. It also forces people to share and not overindulge (did you hear that, America?). Food is the center of the experience, with everyone coming together for eating, smiling, laughing — living.

From juice bars to comfort food to bar grub, there are dozens of great places around here to boost your diet and mental health at the same time. Start building your best relationship with food now. Eat it up, Summit County!

SPECIAL TO THE DAILY

LEFT: The author in 1994 working on his final project for a then-labeled "home economics class" — a pot of chili and cornbread. The photo is now in the cookbook his mother gave him with family recipes spanning generations.

