

# **10 Films as messed up as 2020**

<https://girlonthebus.blog/2020/04/10/films-as-messed-up-as-2020/>

2020 has been pretty #messedup – and eventful – in the 3 months it's been alive. There were the Australian bushfires, the swarms of locusts, the leaked conversation between Kanye and Taylor Swift, talks of WW3, that huge asteroid that was seemingly on a warpath towards earth (I don't trust NASA, not one bit) and... the covid-19 outbreak. While the year is barely even an infant, it got real scary, real messy, real quick.

With most of us now in lockdown, we're feeling a bit unlike ourselves. Because of this (and because I'm slowly losing my mind) I thought, "Hey! One might say that 2020 is like a really messed up thriller/horror screenplay" – and thus was the birth of this article. Mind you, the films on this list are based on my opinion and are films that I have actually seen. While some of them are not necessarily scary or "messy" (insert *Saw* franchise which is just wtf), their themes or messages are in themselves "messed-up". In this essay I will...

(Har har, uni jokes...) Anyway, moving on.

So, please allow me to distract you, and pass your time with these 10 films – in no particular order – I thought were as messy as 2020 (if not more):

## **The Road (John Hillcoat, 2009)**

If you feel as though you are currently living in an apocalyptic wasteland with the lockdown – this movie is just for that. It will tug at your heartstrings as you watch a father and his son try to survive in a wasteland of cannibals and unseen threats.

The film has a manner of keeping you on constant alert for possible threats, immersing you into the film, sharing the emotions and journey of the characters. *The Road* succeeds in asking viewers the question of "what would you do?" in a possible after-apocalyptic situation...

## **Parasite (Bong Joon-ho, 2019)**

What an... interesting film. Combining themes of class and morals, this film has you feeling both sad and disappointed for the lower-class family at the centre of the film, as they con their way into an upper-class family's home.

While the film has great comedic value, it renders an overall serious tone, and confronts viewers with serious topics of economy. About 1/2 of the way through the film, a curveball is thrown – this is where the film gets quite messy, and where we realise that parasites may be numerous, but seldom easily found...

## **Snowpiercer (Bong Joon-ho, 2013)**

Another Bong Joon-ho masterpiece, this film is set in a semi-dystopian society created by (you guessed it) humans. After releasing an artificial coolant to combat global warming, the earth is frozen into an Artificial Ice Age, leaving the remaining survivors on a train.

Like *Parasite*, and most of Joon-ho's works, this film tackles the major theme of class and morals. It is a good depiction of how, even in a situation of near-extinction, humans still feel the need for hierarchy – even on a train. It has lots of moments of suspense, disgust and sorrow for the members of the “tail section” of the train.

There's fighting, plotting, scheming, revolting, shooting, an engine, weird snobbish people, lots of grey and red, Tilda Swinton and Chris Evans – need I say more?

## **Hereditary (Ari Aster, 2018)**

I am a huge fan of psychological thrillers/horrors (not so much the conventional horror with the infamous jumpscare) so I appreciate the strangeness, and immensely scary material this film offers. Needless to say, Ari Aster is a master at creating strange, heavily cultured, ritualistic films – he has a knack for creating films based on Pagan-like rituals and beliefs, and incorporating them into modern life.

I remember a few hours after watching this with my sister, she left to sleep at our grandmother's, and I was left to sleep that night as the only one in the house that had seen the film. Not much sleep happened that night. Every creak, every squeak, every rustle froze me – I lay on my back not daring to look in the corners of my room (if you've seen the film you'll understand).

P.S. *Hereditary* will make you want to **check your mom...**

## **Midsommar (Ari Aster, 2019)**

I've never taken hallucinogenic drugs, but I'm damn sure this is what a trip feels like. The sister film to *Hereditary*, Ari Aster provides us with another splendid psychological horror about a group of post-grads who go with their Swedish friend to his home village out in the Middle-Of-Nowhere-In-Sweden for the mid-summer festivities.

The film starts out quite disturbingly, and we are able to see lots of foreshadowing (we stan foreshadowing) for the rest of the film – Aster does this by making use of murals, conversation as well as character-relationship dynamics. However, the film is VERY misleading with its bright, warm lighting and colours... don't be fooled.

There's shrooms, dancing, pies, juice, weird-tea, bears, more shrooms, more dancing, weird rituals and a whole lot of minutes full of “what the -” in this *splendid* film.

## A cure for wellness (Gore Verbinski, 2016)

I wonder what goes through a screenwriter's mind when they write films like this. While the film lacks certain elements, it's a good film to view if you're in the mood for some mindgame-y stuff. The film employs good direction and SOUND (I'm a huge fan of using sound in films), as well as metaphors to create the suspense and distress dynamics, even though the script may be lacking. Plus, the performance by the amazing Dane DeHaan makes up for some things...

I could spend a while talking about this film, it's a great film if you're a fan of piecing together a mystery that's *Shutter Island*-esque, even though the film has a few holes and a mystery that is quite easily pieced together. It's a good, stimulating film to watch, as the protagonist explores the wellness-centre and has a cat-and-mouse encounter almost throughout the entire film.

*Eels, water, fathers, daughters* is my four word description of this film.

## Spirited Away (Hayao Miyazaki, 2001)

Arguably my favourite movie since I was a little human... While this movie is SUPER weird, it moulded me into the strange (still small) human I am now. It's the kind of movie that describes those weird dreams you have at 3am where you question if you're even in reality once you wake up.

As a little 5 year old, I watched this film for the first time and BOY was I confused. It's kind of like watching *The Neverending Story* as a child and growing up to be an adult with a lot of trust and abandonment issues, i.e. me.

Needless to say, *Studio Ghibli* never disappoints with their films – there're dragons, and ghosts, a cute boy (I mean come on, need I say more), a baby, little soot-balls that talk, and a very nice, very pleasant, not at all scary spirit.

If this film leaves you with nothing at all, let it at least leave you with the image of Haku.

## Dogtooth (Yorgos Lanthimos, 2009)

Oh lord, this movie makes me feel grateful for my parents. I discovered this film a while ago when I was browsing through a streaming service – boy am I glad I watched this film.

It's basically about a family in #lockdown, except, they've kept their children in lockdown from birth till adulthood, while everyone else is living a normal life. The children are adults, but have been taught about life incorrectly – calling salt "telephone" and them not knowing what a kitten is (till one enters their yard).

Other than them being taught incorrectly, they've also been told that if one of them loses their "dogtooth" they will get to leave the house. Cue the curiosity of the children, and the further wackiness that comes with that.

This film is easily one of my favourites, while it may not be very pleasant to view, it is a great film to ponder. Besides, foreign films are always weird, in a rather pleasant way?

### **Requiem for a Dream (Darren Aronofsky, 2000)**

Like *Midsommar*, this movie is one trip and a half – as it should be, since it's a film about addiction. The film is created in such a brilliant way so as to immerse its viewers in the feelings and "highs" of the characters, as they each deal with their respective addictions.

Aronofsky enjoys making his viewers feel... weird, and it shows in his direction. With awkward super-close-ups, first person-esque camera angles and overhead shots, he manages to make you so afraid of fridges and cops, even though all you've done is turn the film on.

At the end of the film, you either feel sorry for the characters, feel angry at them, or you might want to vomit at the mere thought of diet-pills. It's safe to say, this film will alter your opinion on drugs, or will at least leave you feeling numb once the film ends.

### **Mother! (Darren Aronofsky, 2017)**

Mr Aronofsky sure loves his Theological metaphors (enter *Noah*, although that's actual theology), when he's not focusing on other psychological ways of messing up his audience (*Black Swan*). The film has a cyclical nature in its narrative, so you'll know that somewhere along the line the film is going to address what you saw earlier in the story.

Its narrative is almost dreamlike, and is focused on Veronica (played by the phenomenal Jennifer Lawrence) as she fixes up her isolated home with her husband, the poet (or "Him"). Their life is seemingly normal, until they get an unexpected visitor one night who ends up being joined by his family. Once the visitor enters, the house ends up in chaos – and I mean some weird stuff starts happening.

If you don't catch the metaphors in this film, that's okay, it took me a little while too. While some metaphors are blatantly obvious and quite offensive once you figure them out, others are a little harder to decipher. What stands out about Aronofsky's films is his attack on human nature, especially in a crisis or in a matter of survival – and perhaps how we are the biggest ruiners of ourselves and our surroundings. Ultimately, the film is a story of creation, destruction, and creation again...

The film is quite a rollercoaster, and while it scores averagely by critics, I do recommend this to anyone who is a fan of Aronofsky, or any sort of metaphorical attack on humanity (although I must say it is not for the faint of heart, or stomach).

## Films that didn't make the cut, but are valid no less:

When writing this article I received some recommendations that weren't in the list: some of which I had never seen, some I had to cut for sake of the length of the article, some I thought weren't the kind of messed up I was looking for or there were other elements of the film that left me unsatisfied. They are:

[Black Swan](#), [Perfect Blue](#), [Shutter Island](#), [The Void](#), [Get Out](#), [Us](#), [Gone Girl](#), [Crimson Peak](#), [Coraline](#), [The Purge](#), [I Spit on Your Grave](#), [Pan's Labyrinth](#), [Train to Busan](#), [A Quiet Place](#), [The Shining](#), [Silence of The Lambs](#), [Saw](#), [The Perfection](#) and [Marrowbone](#).

If there are any films you think are worth seeing as a "wtf" film, or any that you think shouldn't be on this list, let me know in the comments! As always, we at GirlOnTheBus hope you guys stay safe and sane!

## **8 Series as wack as 2020**

<https://girlonthebus.blog/2020/07/04/8-series-as-wack-as-2020/>

2020 has now entered middle age: it's reading murder mysteries; listening to old-school jams from the 70s, 80s and 90s; watching series about stalkers, and lawyers hiding bodies.

But let's not diss 2020 too much, because since its birth, it's also brought about some pretty cool changes: healthcare workers have risen as the superheroes they've always been, there is far less pollution EVERYWHERE (I'm getting teary-eyed), and people are tapping into their creative sides with singing, writing, dancing etc. just to name a few.

Obviously, the amount of ish that has happened in 2020 is astounding, and it seems as though 2020 is going through a midlife crisis - aren't we all? Life is scary, and we need to support 2020 in whatever challenges it's facing (link to the 2020 GoFundMe page coming soon).

I thought I'd help out by suggesting some series that were as messed up as 2020 itself (we're all rooting for you beech) - keep in mind, if you've read my other post [10 Films as messed up as 2020](#), you'll know that the list below is my opinion of #messed-up or the kind of wackiness I thought fit that of this year.

So, allow me to distract you from your obligations (even further) with these 8 Series - in no particular order - I thought were as wack as 2020 (no offense gurl, but you got issues):

### **The End of the F\*\*\*ing World - Jonathan Entwistle (2017-2019)**

What a seriously charming series, and that's not just because of Alex Lawther. This series is pretty wacky from the first episode; Lawther's character is a self-proclaimed psychopath and decides he'll graduate from killing animals to killing his runaway partner, Alyssa, instead.

The 2 main characters are written so incredibly well, and the actors give them their own charm by their performances of quirkiness and... weirdness. The show takes a huge plot-twist, and throws lots of little conflicts and arcs in the way of the characters, but in the end, even with all the wtf's, the show excels in drawing the viewer in. There were moments where I hated the characters, where I wanted to smack them, and there were moments where I cried, felt relief, and laughed for them.

This series is enjoyably comedic, in small ways, but if you're not a fan of really dark humour... this one might be a miss for you.

## **Black Mirror - Charlie Brooker (2011- )**

I could write an entire article purely about this series; it's seriously good. I'm sure most people have heard of or watched this entire series - maybe even in one sitting instead of doing university essays, like me (\*cough cough\*). I'm going to keep this entry as short as humanly possible...

This anthology series has lots and lots of good wtf moments, and has some excellent commentary on society and human nature; my favourite episode being "Shut Up and Dance". While some episodes are a bit... meh, in my taste, there is a vast array of genres and styles all meshed into the series, with each episode delivering its own unique weirdness.

The series has 5 glorious seasons, although there are only about 3 to 6 episodes in each. BUT, with episodes running as long as 90 minutes, each installment constitutes a mini film - canonical storylines, really weird ish, and more... *Black Mirror* is the perfect dose of 'wtf' in every episode (some a little more than others). This is a series that my film-media-wacko student friend and I constantly gush about.

(This is surprisingly short and sweet, and I would like to thank my parents and everyone that has supported me along the way; I couldn't have done it without you.)

## **Maniac - Cary Joji Fukunaga, Patrick Somerville (2018)**

This series has been *seriously* slept on, almost like the drug-induced dreamstate in this series. This is more of a mini-series, since it only has 1 season of 10 episodes, but it holds the same goodness as (if not more than) some 8-season series.

Led by Emma Stone and Jonah Hill, this show about a drug trial, will have you feeling trippy alongside the participants of the trial. It's full of weird and wonderful characters; some you want to hug, some you want to stab with a syringe, but the performances by the actors are what drives this series complementary to the amazing writing, directing and dynamics.

I seriously recommend this show for a good binge - while it might not be in everyone's taste, and because I'm known for being... wack... it does however have a certain charm to it.

## **Legion - Noah Hawley (2017-2019)**

Oh damn, this series is always going to hold a special place in my very small heart. Based on the Marvel Comics character of the same name, this 3-season series doesn't follow the typical comic-hero trope; probably because Legion himself isn't really much of a hero (maybe Google it before I lose myself in comic book talk).

Much like *Maniac*, this show is REALLY psychedelically kaleidoscopic i.e. it's trippy af. While it contains the original comic characters, with similar traits and arcs, this series takes the comic-book series genre to a different place. It doesn't follow the same smooth storyline and

canons as usual comic-based series; it's more of a trippy metaphor for the mind of Legion, because shame, that mister is a bit tripped-up.

Admittedly, the second season was my least favourite, but it does give the main character his biggest character arc, which allows season 3 to be the best one of the three in terms of storyline and character developments.

(Keep in mind again, that Legion as a comic-character, is **not** a hero...)

### [The Umbrella Academy](#) - Steve Blackman, Jeremy Slater (2019- )

OOF, what a good show (I feel like this is my reaction to all of the series on this list r.i.p my sanity). At this point of the article, you can probably guess I'm going to say that this show is wack, or trippy... and you're right: well done!

This is the comic-book series that combines *Legion* and traditional comic-book tropes together; time-travel, weird sibling relationships (👁️👁️), really good character dynamics, and storyline. Similar to *Legion*, you'll need to be a lover of piecing puzzles together when watching this series, and not be easily weirded out to the point where you give up after the first episode (here's looking at my younger sister).

This series is seriously binge-worthy, and it has a season two releasing in July! Plus; the comic books that the show is based on were written by GERARD WAY from My Chemical Romance... that sounds like a deal to me.

### [Westworld](#) - Lisa Joy, Jonathan Nolan (2016- )

BIG OOOOF. This show is easily one of the best series I've ever watched; how are people so smart that they are able to come up with such brilliant writing? From the get-go, this series lets the viewer know that the fictional world holds a deep, dark secret - if you're like me, you'll try to piece the puzzle together before anyone else in the series.

We think A.I is our friend - WRONG, and Westworld will prove it. The series follows the creators of the fictional "Westworld", as well as the robotic hosts of the world. This series is trippy (I know just bear with me) in the sense that once you think you've figured out the conflict, the traitor, the secret... the series tells you "sorry hunny, but no".

When I think about excellent writing, I think of this series - I mean, what else do you expect from a Nolan brother? The acting is amazing, the story is exquisite, the murder is ravishing... please watch this show, you won't be disappointed. Unless, of course, you're into more straightforward series requiring little investigation of your own (shade has been thrown).

## **Another - P.A. Works (2012)**

Now if you're not a fan of animated TV shows, you may as well stop reading the article now. Hear me out: I know this is an anime, and some people don't consider anime to be 'series', but consider that it's exactly the same thing... just animated, and Japanese.

*Another* is a horror/thriller anime, also requiring some detective work of your own; can you figure out who the extra student is? This anime was the first horror anime I'd seen (anime fanatics are quaking), but I was hooked from the get-go. While (I thought) it ended kind of unsatisfactory, it had enough gore, mystery and dynamics for me to make it to the end of the series. This anime is only 12 episodes; anime/ animated series are my favourite, because they have really good storylines and character arcs, even though the episodes are typically only +/- 24 minutes.

If animation is not your thing, or you don't 'stan' the idea of watching something that isn't in English; this anime is worth it if you're into horror... and anime are available in English-dubbed format too (again with the shade).

## **Inuyashiki - Last Hero - MAPPA (2017)**

The final series I'm putting on this list, I only recently watched (literally about a week ago); it has a *Black Mirror*-esque charm to it i.e. it's MESSED UP. I was *shooketh* while watching this series, I had about 5 mini stressed-out-like-I'm-in-high-school-again moments during this. If you are still adamant that animated series/animes are dumb, boy just watch this one.

While only 1 season of 11 episodes ([so far](#)), this mini-series packs a powerful punch. Essentially, it's a sci-fi action-drama, but it tackles a lot of societal themes, as well as the power that technology has over our communities and how it affects our psyche. It follows 2 main characters; one young and one elder, as they tackle life as newly-born robots - reflecting, I did a lot of "no don't do that" screaming while watching.

*Inuyashiki* had me wondering what I'd do if somehow, under miraculous circumstances, I were to become an alien-robot 🤖... would I use my new-found alien-robotic abilities for good, or for 'evil'? That much power should never be put into a clumsy person such as myself...

Again friends, say it with me now: THE A.I ARE NOT OUR FRIENDS 😞

## **BONUS ENTRY (because I'm obsessed)**

**Shingeki no Kyojin (Attack on Titan) - Wit Studio, Production I.G (2013-2019), MAPPA (2020)**

OKAY GUYS, yes, another anime; but probably my favourite series on this entire list. THIS is the show I could spend eternity talking/writing about.

Anyone that is close to me knows how obsessed I am with this anime; the amount of times I've rewatched this series, and the amount of Tumblr blogs I've followed about SnK.... countless (I may need you to get help).

One of the most popular anime on the scene, this series has some amazing writing; Hajime Isayama, the writer of the manga, is the genius mastermind of a writer that I can only dream of becoming. He really thought of EVERYTHING (just... breathe). Again, this anime is really fun to watch even if you aren't a fan of piecing puzzles together, but it's even better when you start analysing every frame, line, scene, character dynamic; when you try and figure out the story without the story revealing itself it becomes even more mysterious. The biggest question being: "Where do the titans come from?"

Yes, sure, it's about huge humanoid people-eating beings; we all know... but what this show is REALLY about, is humanity and how the enemies we face aren't always the monsters, but those among us. Plus, there is a LOT of spinnny, action scenes (here's to you [Levi](#)) and devoting of hearts... SASAGEYO!

**Series that didn't make the cut, but are valid no less:**

When writing this article I received some recommendations that weren't on the list: some of which I had never seen, some I thought weren't the kind of messed up I was looking for or there were other elements of the series that left me unsatisfied. They are:

**Haven, Rick and Morty, You, Servant, Dexter, Banana Fish, Death Note, Mindhunter, The Haunting of Hill House, Chambers, American Horror Story, Hemlock Grove, Penny Dreadful, Sharp Objects, Tell Me a Story, True Detective, Marianne and Hannibal.**

If there are any series (and anime) you think are worth seeing as a "wtf" series, or any that you think shouldn't be on this list, let me know in the comments! As always, we at GirlOnTheBus hope you guys stay safe and sane!

## **'Not even water!?: Ramadaan for non-Muslims.**

<https://www.hercampus.com/school/uct/not-even-water-ramadaan-non-muslims>

**Teaser: Ever asked your Muslim friend if they weren't hungry while fasting? Please don't.**

The Islamic month of Ramadaan comes around once a year for Muslims around the globe - you may know it as the time of year where Muslims fast everyday for an entire month. As a Muslim, observing Ramadaan for the better part of my life, I have experienced many weird and wonderful questions and perceptions about this month from my friends. If you are as intrigued about this month as they always are, you've probably wondered about the same things as mentioned below.

### **1. It's seriously not even water... at least till sunset.**

When we say we can't eat or drink anything from sunrise to sunset - we mean ANYTHING. The time of eating before sunrise is called Suhoor, and the time of breaking fast at sunset is known as Iftar (or 'boeka' in Cape Malay culture) - we eat as much or as little as we want to at this time. So don't worry.

Fasting days range from being 12 hours to longer than 18 hours depending on your location. Fasting is difficult during the first few days, if not the first 2 weeks, of the month, but Ramadaan is about a lot more than eating and drinking. So, if observed properly, we do make it through the days. Besides, we know Eid is waiting for us at the end of the month and that's a whole other celebration on its own.

### **2. It's a lot more than just "not eating and drinking".**

During this month, Muslims believe that the gates of heaven are wide open, and gates of hell are shut. This means that the month is the optimal time for us to repent, and to better ourselves spiritually.

You may have heard some say that it is "to feel how the poor people feel" - yes. But the biggest part of Ramadaan isn't the abstinence from food and drink, it's about abstaining from the worldly things that can make us drift from who we are as people. The month is greatly about connecting with our faith, giving charity, and releasing ourselves from worldly bounds. This is the reason behind some Muslims often saying "I can't swear; I'm fasting", abstaining from things like films/tv, music or sex (like with food/drink, this is permissible after sunset).

### **3. Why do girls sometimes get 'off-days' from fasting?**

You may have noticed your girlfriend fasting during days after Ramadaan, or before the next Ramadaan - often called "paying/fasting in" their days. This is because it is inevitable for

women to receive their periods during the month of ramadan, which exempts them from fasting those days.

This may sound like a break or even a blessing, since you won't need to fast on those days, but... those days need to be fasted back. So, technically it's like getting paid leave, but you have work those hours back. Those missed fasting days when women are on their periods are to be fasted back before the next Ramadaan comes around.

#### 4. Things not to ask/say to your fasting friend

Having fasted (and being Muslim) for so long, I am still amazed and amused by some of the comments or 'suggestions' my non-Muslim friends make while I'm fasting.

- **“Just have a little; Allah won't mind!”** - this one always makes me chuckle, because while we know that Allah will forgive us, it defeats the purpose of the entire month: spirituality. Plus, our fast will be disregarded... and we don't want that.
- **“You can't even have water!?”** - another favourite of mine. No, seriously, not even water... at least until the evening/tomorrow before sunrise.
- **“Are you going to bring me (insert food) tomorrow?”** - we don't mind sharing food with anyone. Food is a blessing. Requesting this may however seem insensitive, considering you haven't been fasting, and they've been fasting long and hard for that food.
- **“Is it like dieting?”** - not really. With healthy dieting, there is a set plan, with meals and times involved. Fasting is a whole-day event, where no food/drink is taken whatsoever. And then we shove our faces with samosas and donuts in the evening so...
- **“Why are you wearing a scarf all of a sudden?”** - it is common knowledge that some Muslim women wear headscarves, while others don't. During Ramadaan, some may choose to cover up more than they usually do - this isn't deserving of judgement. It is simply their choice to observe such dress during the spiritual month (or any other time for that matter).
- **“Aren't you hungry/thirsty”** or **“Don't you hate Ramadaan?”** - this question for me is equal to “aren't you getting hot wearing that?”. Yes, I am hungry and thirsty (just as how I'm hot during summer). Anyone who hasn't been eating or drinking for most of the day would be... and they'd probably be upset too. This doesn't mean we hate Ramadaan - we appreciate it.

#### 5. What's it like fasting during lockdown?

Tough. A huge part of Ramadaan is the sense of community: exchanging food and cake for Iftar, gatherings for Iftar at family/friends, meeting at the mosque for salaah and so much more. We miss out on this during lockdown, we feel isolated, and the days sometimes feel

longer. But in the end, the month also teaches us patience, and that “after every hardship: comes ease”.

## 6. **How to support your fasting friend**

More than anything, we want to have support - even if you don't understand what the month is entirely about. While it is an annually recurring event, it's still hard for most muslims to do - we go from spending our time listening to music, watching tv shows, swearing in 500 languages (guilty as charged), to observing humble practices, all while still living through a materialistic world. So, support your fasting friend by little reminders:

- Try not to let them cuss/make them angry (and try to not cuss around them)
- Understand if your friend is trying to better themselves in this month (even if they do some rowdy things before or after)
- Do not mock them/flaunt around them if you yourself aren't fasting,
- Don't say things like “I could never do that”, “don't you feel hungry?” - it IS hard, and they probably are hungry,
- Be understanding that it is to better themselves, and that afterwards they won't come out being saints.
- Gift them something for them and their family to share. I always felt warm and fuzzy inside when my friends would give me a chocolate to share with my family at Iftar.

Ramadan means a lot to many Muslims, and is quintessentially an uplifting time of betterment for each person observing. Some Muslims observe the month more strictly than others - but this should not warrant judgement (especially from friends). Teasing, while a friendly jest, may be a more sensitive matter during this month - so it is important to understand that your friend might be trying their best.

And while we know you mean well with the strange questions, remember to support your fasting friend. And please do not ask them to bring you a 'barakat' (leftover food from Iftar/Eid) - we may just blank-stare at you. **Ramadan Kareem!**

# How Diet Affects Our Mood

<https://www.hercampus.com/school/uct/how-diet-affects-our-mood>

*TW: this article may be sensitive to those recovering from disordered eating*

Do you ever feel cranky, annoyed, or just downright not in the mood for any and everything? It may be due to what you're eating. It has been found that poor nutrition is a huge cause of experiencing low mood, and that improving diet may help to protect not only physical health, but mental health too. But often we find ourselves consuming copious amounts of junk 'pick me up' foods to lift spirits – but these foods may in fact be making you feel worse. Here are different ways that food affects our mood:

## **1. Processed foods**

Long-term exposure to unhealthy eating habits and diet is a risk factor for depression, as found in a 2014 study in [Plos One](#). Foods such as those high in sugar, and processed food trigger the same pleasure centres in the brain as addictive drugs do – the cause of that sudden 'spike' in energy. Eating foods like fried food, refined cereals, sweets, high-fat dairy, and processed meats lead to you feeling more anxious and depressed. Instead, a 'whole foods' diet including fibre-rich grains, fruits, vegetables and fish can help keep your mood more stable.

## **2. Refined carbohydrates**

While sugars occur naturally in complex carbs like fruits, vegetables, and grains, it is also found in refined foods like pasta, breads, cakes, and sodas. These simple sugars contain too few complex carbs for blood sugar levels to remain stable – hence the sudden energy, and then fatigue. Eating too many refined carbs leads to promotion of inflammation in our bodies; loss of appetite, change in sleep patterns, and a heightened perception of pain (physical and mental). Now, sugars aren't the devil – sugars like those in complex carbs are more nourishing, while sugars like those in refined carbs are less so. Opt for eating more nutritious sugars like those in fruits for a snack, but also know it's ok to have sweets once in a while. What's important is to control our intake and recognize what is better for us.

## **3. Sugary drinks**

We know the issue that sodas and concentrated drinks pose to our blood sugar levels – we've heard it many times before. But even though we've been told that fruit juice is 'healthy', it also negatively impacts our blood sugar levels. While whole fruits

contain fibre that fills you up and helps slow down how your blood takes in energy, fruit juice does not always have that fibre content. This means that your body is producing insulin at a faster rate, meaning you get 'hyped up' and quickly come crashing down – much like with refined carbs. Not only does it affect your metabolic rate, but because you will be left feeling “hangry”, it may also affect your feelings of anxiety and depression. Instead, try to drink mostly water with meals and throughout the day to keep your body hydrated instead of other beverages - but having a milkshake or drinks is also good now and then.

#### **4. Whole foods**

The best meal you can afford your mental and physical wellbeing, is a 'whole meal'. This kind of meal (or diet) includes eating non-processed, non-refined ingredients i.e., natural, and complex foods. Complex carbs (sweet potatoes, rolled oats, beans, quinoa) and high-protein foods (fish, lean beef, chicken, eggs) help to increase our serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine; brain chemicals that are affectors of motivation, concentration, and mood. Consuming a diet of whole, unrefined foods with enough protein, healthy fats (nuts and seeds) and fibre helps stabilize blood sugar after meals – meaning less insulin production, leading to better mood instead of the sudden 'high' and then crashing 'low'.

#### **5. Gut health**

A recent explanation as to how food affects our mental wellbeing, is the effect of diet on gut health. The gut microbiome (bacteria, viruses, archaea etc.) uses neural, inflammatory, and hormonal signalling pathways to interact with the brain, so if this microbiome is compromised, so is our mental health. Other than genetic factors (and exposure to antibiotics) the effects of Western diet results in this compromise e.g., conditions such as “leaky gut” is the result of a diet low in fibre and high in saturated fats, refined sugars, and artificial sweeteners. However, consuming high-fibre and unsaturated foods promotes good metabolism to be anti-inflammatory – meaning the gut microbiome communicates better with our brain. Probiotic supplements have also been found to improve both gut health and depression in people with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), and that they help to support health by keeping the gut ecosystem balanced. So, probiotics equal happy gut, which equals happy emotions.

#### **6. Emotional eating**

Sometimes we're in such a low mood, or it just hasn't been our day, week, month or even our year, so we turn to food as comfort. Often (if not always) these foods are

high in sugar. Eating these high-sugar content foods to escape a bad mood or emotional state, is called emotional eating. Reasons for why we binge/do emotional eating, is because often negative emotions leave us feeling 'emotionally empty', making food the way to fill that void. This enables a false feeling of "fullness", especially when we do not understand how to better navigate and support our emotional wellbeing.

While an emotional difficulty, one way of helping ourselves is mindful eating - taking the time to 'focus' on our meals; eating slowly, no distractions and savouring the experience of healthy foods. When these mindful practices are applied, studies have shown that people practice less bingeing and emotional eating. However, if you do experience excessive emotional eating or bingeing, it is best to seek emotional support to help with feelings of low self-esteem or negative self-thoughts.

Food is great – it keeps us alive; it keeps us energized. Some foods are better than others, and some foods do things to our bodies that aren't favourable, but what's important to remember is that when we view food as fuel, we learn to not be afraid of it. Learning healthy eating habits and recognizing what is good for our bodies and what we should keep under control helps in understanding our emotions. While 'junk food' may seem like the bane to our existence, it is okay to indulge occasionally, but it is also important to remember to do everything in moderation.

***I think I'll sit here for a little longer***

Oh sullen sky, it's been a while since I've had the pleasure.

Fidgeting with the inflicted scabs on my fingers;

Their never-ending freshness

apparent of how often my mind seems to wander.

Atop a hill, with crisp breeze and honey sweetness of fragrance,

it's been a sojourn to the spot I now sit.

The bustling and non-stop commotion of real life has clouded my judgement

and dulled my senses.

How I wish the simplicity of the feel of soft black soil was still satisfying to my fingertips:

the way they are now accustomed to the rigidity of computer keys.

Or how a dripping, melting ice cream

on a hazy summer's day

resulting in sticky hands and body would be exciting –

an added frame to my stained roll of film.

I'd edit, cut and rewind all the parts where I wished for what I am now

and replace rose tinted naivety

With realism...

Yet,

part (if not all) of me wishes the rosy tint  
would have been brighter, and more brilliant

“It’s time to go back now, time to resume  
to find new pastures where the grass remains green”.

But, oh sullen sky

though the hill is golden with drought, and the clouds swarm in

I think I’ll sit here for a little longer with you,

old friend.

- Saadiqah Schroeder (2021)

## ***Ode to Ocean***

When I was a little girl  
I dreamt of an aeroplane;  
as a boat.  
Titanium panels, creaking wings  
unfurl –  
I would dream I was sinking  
when I knew I could  
float.

Heaving, bleeding instead of  
breathing  
I am the captain of lying, hurting  
deceiving.

Could it be (after all this time)  
I'm the one off stream?  
The nightmares were just my own  
made-up schemes?  
In my meddling, trifling affairs with my insecurities  
it is me who refused to see the wood for the  
trees?

At the end of the dream, I'd tell myself I could do it  
but would find  
I'm the worst at it.  
Though the birds could swim, and the fish could fly  
It is me, who would dream I shouldn't  
survive.



## White

As the sun shone through the trees, and the clouds

An unexplainable brilliance in its beaming - I still cannot explain.

Onto your dew, glistening, it travelled for the display of majesty.

The explosion of hues, I am unable to put into words

Oh what a sight to behold for anyone of visibility!

Were it your beauty, or the sun's, that had me awestruck?

A competition between two extremities, yet harmoniously synchronous

Ha! How I wish I had captured it better than my memory

But as the star grew higher, and eyes wandered your way:

the light in yours were dimmed, to that of a pale grey

The clouds had formed, and the storm began to brew

And yet

You still shone as brightly... brighter, than you did before

Though words may pierce like lead, and evil eyes slash like daggers

It is the weight of the world that makes you greater.

Thinking back to that day; light trekking through the foliage and skies

To meet you...

How I still am yet to adequately describe the dazzling colour of the sunshine.

*Saadiqah Schroeder (2021)*



## ***The Clouds I***

Passing through the sky - jolly, merry

A laugh, not a cry, not a waving goodbye

Shaking hands "hey how are you".

See you at the overcast!

Growing growing

Cloudlets moaning

"time to go home"

... before the gods arrive.

*~ Saadiqah Schroeder (2020)*

## ***The Clouds II***

A rumble

A rip

A screech, banshee cry

Dimlit terror, crackling smite

Brimstone to the believers

Earthful bliss to the heathens

The Gods have awoken

Come now, run

Hide

“there is no escape”

The hounds will find you

Blood curdling, sweat trickling instances

Shrouded colourless to extinct your terror

I still find you.

## **If feet could fly**

If feet could fly

I'd have joined Icarus

far away

soared through the universe, swimming through the Milky Way

Breeze in my lungs, freedom in my soul

But my feet stay rooted

ankles distended

never light

Reaching for a pipe dream

Strapped on sandals

stretched forward, wings spread farther than Hermes'

take-off: combusting soil, concrete

The come up of roses

Exiled from Olympus

abandoned by Talaria, falling down

with a thud,

into Gaia's core

Seeped away, mangled