

THE TOP 7 THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT FOOD AND MOOD

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1. You're So Sweet – Our Sugar Intake Is Depressing

Over the course of the past century, we've moved away from a nutritious diet to a highly refined one. We're eating more sugar and refined carbohydrates than ever and aren't eating nearly enough of the whole foods that support neurotransmitter production and balanced moods.

A balanced mood requires a corresponding balance in the levels of neurotransmitters and hormones that have a strong influence on our mental well-being. What's important to realize is that these influential neurotransmitters are derived from the nutrition found in whole foods like whole grains, beans, vegetables, nuts and seeds.

Refined foods like bread and sugar actually deplete the body's reserves of important building blocks like vitamins and minerals needed to maintain balanced blood sugar, and therefore energy and mood. Refined sugar also decreases your body's ability to handle pain. If you're eating regular doses of sweets, you'll feel that headache or back pain quicker and more intensely.

Conversely, whole grains provide the body with long-lasting energy in the form of complex carbohydrates, minerals and B vitamins which support a healthy nervous system.

2. Caffeine: Wake Up to This Mood Killer

We use caffeine to wake us up, but when we slurp up our cup of coffee, tea or Red Bull, we're also directly inhibiting your body's production of serotonin. Serotonin is a neurotransmitter that affects mood, sexual desire and function, appetite, sleep, memory and learning, and some social behavior. If you consume regular amounts of caffeine throughout the day, your brain and body won't be able to chemically balance your mood. Common symptoms of serotonin deficiency include heart and intestinal issues, problems with sleep, which is also directly affected by caffeine, muscle pain, migraine headaches, and cravings for sugar, carbohydrates, and alcohol.

3. Dear Diary, What Am I Eating That's Making Me Feel Awful?

It can be difficult to connect your diet to your mood. What if you ate something two days ago that's causing your depression, stomach pain or headache today? It can take four days for a specific food to affect you or clear the body.

To better understand your eating patterns and how they're affecting your body and mood, keep a food-mood diary. Write down what you eat and when. Write down how you feel as well. Not only will you start to see patterns of your food habits, you'll start to see if something is negatively affecting your health.

4. The Great Fake Out: Artificial Sweeteners are Depressing

Many artificial sweeteners, especially aspartame, can block serotonin receptors. As with caffeine, artificial sweeteners can inhibit the brain's ability to use serotonin correctly which can lead to depression, as well as obsessive-compulsive disorder, anxiety, panic, and even excess anger. Serotonin is a neurotransmitter that affects mood, sexual desire and function, appetite, sleep, memory and learning, and some social behavior.

The B Vitamins, including B6 which is especially important here, can be found in natural foods such as bell peppers, spinach, garlic, cauliflower, banana, asparagus, broccoli, kale and collard greens.

5. That Morning Muffin Is Wrecking Your Gut And Your Mood

People who can't properly digest gluten, a protein found in grains such as wheat, barley, rye and most oats, are known as *celiac*. When a gluten-sensitive person eats these grains for many years, their digestive system is damaged. This damage can cause tears in the intestinal lining, which then leads to malabsorption of nutrients.

If the patient's depression is related to malabsorption of nutrients, then eating a gluten-free diet can help, because the digestive system will heal and nutrient absorption will improve. A healthy digestive system leads to better tryptophan absorption from foods such as organic soy foods, whole grains, beans, hazelnuts, peanuts, sesame seeds and sunflower seeds. Tryptophan is necessary for the body's production of serotonin, which is a central neurotransmitter involved in regulation of mood and anxiety.

Testing for gluten intolerance and celiac disease is a wise step if these symptoms sound familiar. A gluten-free diet is easier to live with these days, as many gluten-free products are available in health food stores and restaurants.

6. Milking Your Mood

Dairy is one of the top five food allergens. An allergy to a certain food like the dairy found in milk, cheese and butter can cause symptoms such as anxiety, attention deficit disorders, fatigue, gas, headaches, irritability, and joint pain.

Another dangerous aspect of dairy consumption is lactose intolerance. Most humans lack the digestive enzymes necessary to digest the milk sugar lactose, leading to digestive problems.

Dairy foods also contain casein, a protein. If you don't properly digest casein, or have a casein allergy, you may have symptoms such as gastro-intestinal problems like diarrhea, gas or bloating, respiratory problems like asthma, or skin problems like eczema. Long term exposure to dairy foods can cause malabsorption problems similar to someone who suffers from celiac disease. This long-term malabsorption or allergy symptoms can lead to depression, anxiety, and irritability.

Switching your dairy foods to plant milks, dairy free cheeses or vegan, trans-fat free margarines is the best path to avoiding mood-killing dairy.

7. Preserve Your Mood & Avoid Food Preservatives And Colorings

Blue ice cream, red and green cake decorations, crackers dyed the color of the rainbow—all are a visual treat for children and adults. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has approved hundreds of food additives, flavor enhancers, and colorings but this doesn't mean they are safe.

Artificial colors and flavors such as yellow and red dyes, and MSG are also called “excitotoxins” because they excite our brain’s neurons to be overly active, and can even cause them to die. Consuming these additives over years has been linked to neurodegenerative diseases and mood disorders. MSG can be hidden on food labels with the terms hydrolyzed vegetable protein, vegetable protein, natural flavorings, yeast extract, and even “spices.”

Avoid food preservatives, flavor enhancers, aspartate, found in NutraSweet, L-cysteine, and food colorings by buying less processed, colored foods.



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