

## Food and your Mood...what's the link and why?

Maybe you've experienced being "hangry", or maybe you head to the fridge when you're sad, maybe you "reward" yourself with a treat when you've achieved something, and maybe you've not been able to eat at all because you've been really down.

Maybe you can't understand why you're happy one minute and want to crawl into a hole the next, or have no mental energy despite being in the best shape of your life.

Maybe you are human and maybe you have experiences like millions of others and maybe you don't talk about them or even face these issues with yourself?

Maybe, maybe, maybe we all need to start to understand that the age old saying 'You are what you eat' really does have relevance. Even more over you are what you absorb but for simplicity sake we'll just stick with 'you are what you eat'.

Now, it's safe to say we all have our ups and downs and if you took a bit of time and had a think about it you'd probably realize that a lot of the downs are associated with times when your diet, exercise levels, or health in general may not have been at its best. This of course is not the case in all mood related disorders and I am in no way saying food can fix mental health full stop but nutrient dense whole foods can help to improve areas of mental, emotional and physical health.

Let's look at some common occurrences that can alter your mood or emotional wellbeing:

- For most of us **eating regularly** (every 2-4 hours) can help to keep blood sugars balanced. This means having a meal or snack that contains protein, fiber, carbs and fat. The combination of these foods will help with the breakdown and release of sugar into the bloodstream and satiety signals to the brain. Skipping meals and leaving yourself feeling starved will often lead to overeating and most likely the wrong types of food. So don't skip meals and keep healthy snacks to hand when possible. See bottom of page for a few ideas.  
\*Note: Fasting is a whole other topic and there are pros and cons but that is a post unto itself\*
- **Eat more Protein**, not because you are going to be deficient but because it can help with the production of Dopamine, that little 'feel good' neurotransmitter I discussed at length in my ['Food Addiction'](#) post. Simply put, protein is made of amino acids, one of those is called Tyrosine and plays an important role in the production of Dopamine. Tyrosine can also be made by another amino acid called Phenylalanine and both can be found in foods like, Soy, Legumes, Dairy, Eggs, Turkey and Beef (2).
- Reduce your intake of **Saturated Fats**, if not for your waistline and your heart health, for your brain and emotional health. While it's ok to have some in your diet the average person consumes almost double what is considered to be healthy (30g for men and 20g for women). Research has found that saturated fats may disrupt Dopamine signalling when consumed in large quantities (4). This does not mean avoid coconut oil, butter, and full fat dairy it just means being aware of how much you consume and how you feel afterwards.

- **Keep variety** in your 'diet'. Eliminating whole food groups is not a good idea despite how popular a craze may seem. While many 'diet models' have their pros and cons unless you are well educated and doing it correctly you're better off with just eating a balanced diet, honestly. A reduction in Iron, Zinc, B Vitamins, Vitamin D, Magnesium and Omega 3's have all been associated with lowered mood and decreased energy so keeping whole grains, vegetables and fruits in your life is very beneficial.
- Choosing the right type of **Carbohydrates** can help with mood stability as well since the fiber in whole grains, oats, vegetables and some fruits slows the release of sugar into the bloodstream helping to avoid spikes in blood sugar levels. Unlike Refined Carbohydrates which sends a rush of sugar to the bloodstream leaving insulin overworked and eventually unresponsive to the influx of sugar, resulting in Type 2 Diabetes.
- Try to include **Omega 3 fatty acids** in your diet daily as they contain EPA, DHA and ALA which have strong anti-inflammatory properties proven to be beneficial in mood related disorders and potentially obesity, due to its inflammatory nature (6) . These can come from a variety of sources with the most notably being Salmon, Mackerel, Anchovies or Sea Bass. However if you don't eat fish you can also try: Chia, Hemp and Flax seeds, Edamame, Kidney Beans, and Seaweed (7). There are many Supplements available as well. I personally use Nordic Naturals EPA Xtra which contains 60% EPA to 40% DHA ratio recommended for increasing mood.
- **Exercise**, simply increasing your exercise to at least 30 min a day, 60 is best, may reduce your risk for depression (8). While no one can say for certain why this link between physical movement and our emotional state is so connected. Some hypothesize it is the increase in oxygen around the body, the release of "feel good" endorphins in the brain, or just the fact that it may distract you from your worries. Whatever the root cause, study after study has confirmed that those who move for 30-60 min daily feel better than those who don't (9).

With Nutrition research only really starting to find its feet in the past decade more work needs to be done to really understand the link between our Moods and the Foods we fuel with. Our Microbiota plays a large role (as discussed in my ['The Gut Brain Axis'](#) post) along with Chronic Inflammation, Oxidative Stress, and Neuroplasticity (the brain's ability to form new connections through wiring and function). One thing is agreed across the board though and that is the benefit of a well balanced diet, low in sugar, refined carbohydrates, saturated fats, and high in whole grains, vegetables, fruit, lean protein from fish or poultry, lots of water and regular exercise . Making the shift can be hard but it can be done and once new habits are formed you'll never want to break them nor will you have to.

**Healthy Snacks Ideas:** Apple and Nut Butter - Rice Cakes with Nut Butter, Hemp Seeds and Banana - Roasted Chickpeas - Veggies and Hummus - Mixed Nuts - Tuna and Avocado mixed - Snap Peas and Cheese - Hard Boiled Eggs...the list is never ending and if you want more info please feel free to contact me to discuss.