The Link Between Food and Mood

How what you eat affects how you feel

The right nutrition can lead to strong bones and muscles, healthy hearts and lungs and a longer lifespan. In addition, food plays a strong role in our emotions and day-to-day moods. Every dieter knows how food can make him or her guilty and ashamed should they choose to binge, just as those who are pleasantly plump (or more) may suffer low self-esteem and food addictions. More importantly than when and how much we choose to eat, however, is what we eat - as the nutrients and vitamins in foods can dramatically change our chemical makeup, changing our mental well-being.

DEFICIENCY: THE CAUSE OF A BAD MOOD?

A deficiency of several nutrients in the body can lead to mental health symptoms, not just the physical symptoms that general practitioners usually notice. Most often, the behavioral symptoms manifest long before the physical signs show.

Depression, anxiety, impaired memory, decreased energy and concentration, as well as general fatigue can all be symptoms of inadequate vitamins or minerals in the body. Other deficiencies have even been known to contribute to dementia, hallucinations and psychosis, and many are known impair learning ability.

Judy Corcelli, a psychiatric nurse at Portage Path Behavioral Health who runs a nutrition based group therapy, explains that there are some chemicals in the body which naturally regulate mood - but without the proper nutrition, the chemicals can't be formed. “Milk, chicken, and especially turkey contain the amino acid tryptophan, which is converted to serotonin,” she explains. Serotonin, a neurotransmitter, is crucial to calming and improving mood. Carbohydrates aid in the absorption of tryptophan, which leads to drowsiness and contentment after a big meal, such as Thanksgiving.

Corcelli also teaches the importance of high quality proteins in her group sessions. Not only is protein important in cell formation, but it aids in making neurotransmitters. “Tyrosine, an amino acid, boosts alertness and energy,” she explains. “So eating protein snacks during the day can help boost concentration and mental functioning.”

What is one of the most common deficiencies? Surprisingly enough, water. 75 percent of Americans are chronically dehydrated, according to nutrition experts, despite the fact that our brains, the control centers for our (continued)
despite an initial increase in energy and positive mood, once the number one drug in America—caffeine.

Just as a lack of vitamins and minerals can cause mental deterioration, some chemicals and foods in excess can also be detrimental to mood.

A wide variety of fruits, vegetables, proteins, and the right carbohydrates can ensure that a body isn’t missing any important vitamins and minerals. If your patients are picky eaters, be sure to discuss with them the benefits of a colorful diet to improve their mood, in addition to their physical health and stamina.

The healing power of antioxidants, such as the ones found in berries, have long been documented. Researchers now believe that consuming more blueberries in particular, decrease and combat degenerative brain diseases such as Alzheimer’s.

Some experts agree a balanced diet equals balanced moods.

“Moderate amounts of caffeine, a stimulant, can improve alertness and concentration,” Corcelli admits. “However, in excessive quantities, it causes cravings, anxiety, depression, emotional instability, insomnia and mood swings.” These symptoms are often associated with caffeine intoxication, which varies greatly between individuals, depending on their sensitivity to the drug.

In general, Corcelli believes that most people eat too much protein and the wrong kinds of fats, too much sugar, and don’t drink enough water. Without a lifestyle change, persons with this diet will surely experience emotional symptoms.

For those already suffering a mental illness such as anxiety disorders, or depression, diet can play an integral role in recovery. According to caffeindependence.org, those suffering from anxiety and panic disorders are often advised to decrease or completely eliminate caffeine and sugar consumption. These chemicals are known to increase and induce anxiety and panic attacks, and should be avoided.

Experts agree that a healthy diet equals balanced moods.

Essential vitamins and minerals have long been thought to play a vital role in emotional and mental health. Mild mood disorders can often be helped by having a proper diet, or taking a supplement. There are several vitamins that are particularly important.

- **B12 and other B vitamins:** Experts have long believed that B vitamins help to ward off depression and other mental illnesses. A deficiency can cause delays in language and motor skills in children, lethargy and decreased attention span. Symptoms of a deficiency range from mild confusion to paranoia and hallucinations. B vitamins also fight fatigue and increase concentration.

- **Beta Carotene:** Research by Dutch scientists indicates that Beta Carotene staves off mental deterioration.

- **Biotin:** A deficiency can cause lethargy, depression, and constant sleeping. Eggs are a great source of this vitamin.

- **Vitamins C and E:** Powerful antioxidants, these nutrients have been linked to sustaining memory. Now, studies show that these vitamins can prevent and slow the progression of degenerative brain diseases such as Alzheimer’s. Vitamin C has also been linked to reducing Cortisol, the stress inducing hormone in the body.

- **Pantothenic Acid:** Deficiencies range from fatigue to depression, and even psychosis! A diet rich in peanuts and peanut butter, beans, mushrooms, avocados, broccoli and oatmeal will ward off a deficiency.
Diet Fad Defects:
How some diets shed a sense of humor along with the pounds

Diets fad come and go so quickly that it’s impossible to keep up. Low carb/ high protein, low fat/ high carb, Atkins, Sonoma, Weight Watchers, Sugar Busters - No wonder Americans find it hard to stick to their healthier lifestyle eating resolutions. Just when they find a diet they like, the media tells them about another one!

“What you eat has a massive effect on mood”, states Patrick Holford, author of Optimum Nutrition for the Mind. “You can’t overestimate how much food can directly and rapidly affect how you feel.”

Low Carb/ High Protein Diets - An article posted on Psychiatry24x7.com reminds readers that the high protein/ low car diets, such as Atkins and South Beach, have long had the reputation for leaving people grumpy because they lack the carbohydrates and nutrients needed to produce serotonin, a feel-good hormone in the body. Dizziness, mental fatigue, and depression are also common. But the Atkins diet is only one example of how mind-altering foods can be.

Low Fat Diets - According to Psychology Today, some dietary fats are good, while others are absolutely necessary. A diet low in fat is known to interfere with serotonin receptors, leaving dieters feeling fatigued and depressed. Even diets high in fats, but the wrong kinds, can interfere with concentration levels and intelligence. Diets high in saturated fats and low in vegetables are common among men. To avoid depression and poor concentration, moderation with fats is the key.

Low Protein Diets - In an effort to cut out bad fats, many Americans are sacrificing meat - a valuable source of protein. Proteins are important because they aid neurotransmitters in the brain in communicating. They also help carbs trigger the formation of dopamine and serotonin, important calming chemicals. In addition, researchers at the University of Washington found that lean proteins help trigger the brain response “full,” causing us eat less.

When helping your patients develop a healthier eating style, please discuss the impact of what they eat on their psychological well-being.

Java Jolt?
Make Sure Patients Know the Effects of Caffeinated Beverages

Most doctors are aware of the health benefits and risks of the most widely used drug in the world: caffeine. However, many don’t know about the effects the drug has on mental health and well-being.

Caffeine has multiple effects on the body, which in turn, alter one’s mental state. According to About.com, the effects on the following hormone are the most prominent:

- **Adenosine** - caffeine can inhibit absorption of adenosine, which calms the body, and can make you feel alert in the short-term, but cause sleep problems later.
- **Adrenaline** - caffeine injects adrenaline into your system, giving it a temporary boost, but making you feel fatigued and depressed later. If you take more caffeine to counteract these effects, you end up spending the day in an agitated state and being jumpy and edgy by night.
- **Cortisol** - caffeine can increase the body’s level of cortisol, the “stress hormone”. This leads to other health consequences such as moodiness, weight gain, and heart disease.
- **Dopamine** - caffeine increases dopamine levels in the system, acting in a way similar to amphetamines, which make you feel good after taking it, but extremely low once it wears off.

 Aren’t sure if your patient’s moods are a result of caffeine or something more? Call 330-353-3100 to make a referral.

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For more information about the topics covered in this issue, or to make a referral, call 330-253-3100.

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Tune Up Your Patients’ Moods with a Change in Their Foods
- adapted from the Food and Mood Project

If your patients could use a mood tune-up, one of the simplest places for them to start to feel better is in their kitchen! Ask them the following questions to see if small dietary steps can help improve how they feel emotionally.

- **How much water are you drinking?** Dehydration affects your ability to think clearly and to concentrate.

- **Does your brain need oiling?** Brain cells need “oiling” with essential unsaturated fats if they are to concentrate properly with each other. If you don’t eat enough oil-rich fish, you should consider a supplement to boost levels of brain-enhancing omega-3 oils.

- **Can you control your cravings?** Cravings for ‘white’, refined starchy foods, sugary snacks, chocolate and other stimulants are a sign of dippy blood sugar levels. This can cause feelings of irritability, a dip in concentration levels, fatigue and depression. Eat regular meals and snacks that have ‘brown’ wholegrains, oats, whole fruits, nuts and seeds that release energy more slowly and steadier.

- **What did you have for breakfast?** Eating breakfast prevents a mid-morning dip in mood and energy and keeps blood sugar balanced. Porridge, wholegrain cereals, yogurt with fresh fruit, and wholegrain toast with sugar-free jam are good-mood breakfast foods.

- **How’s your gut feeling?** Your state of mind is closely connected with the health of your gut. Wholegrains, legumes, fruits and vegetables all contain fiber which lead to a happier, healthier digestive tract.

- **Did you check the label?** Most people find they feel better if they avoid sometimes harmful additives such as colorings (E102 or FD&C Yellow No.5), flavor enhancers (monosodium glutamate ‘MSG’), artificial sweeteners (aspartame) and preservatives (sulphur dioxide and BHT.)

- **Are you intolerant?** Food intolerances to substances such as wheat, dairy, and yeast are common culprits to uncomfortable feelings and unpleasant moods. Cut back on food categories to determine which foods you can’t tolerate.