



## IS THERE A CONNECTION BETWEEN MOOD AND FOOD?

Eating the right food can help to pick you up if you're feeling down, and it can even prevent you from becoming ill. A healthy, balanced diet is one of the basic foundations of general well being, and should protect you from nutritional deficiencies that can leave you feeling irritable, washed out, or really down. There are certain established bits of knowledge of how food affects your mood that you can put into practice.

### Did you know?

- **Low fat diets** can make you depressed. Research has linked diets that drastically cut down on all types of fat with an increase in symptoms of depression.
- **Vitamin B6, vitamin C, Folic Acid (Folate) and Zinc** are needed to make the feel-good brain chemical serotonin from the tryptophan that is found in meat, poultry, fish, beans and lentils. Carbohydrate cravings may be a subconscious attempt to raise serotonin levels. Serotonin is absorbed more quickly into the brain after eating a carbohydrate meal.
- **Caffeine** increases mental alertness and concentration and can improve performance. For mild cases of depression which do not need medical attention, a little caffeine can be an effective antidepressant. A cup or two a day is safe. However, too much caffeine can lead to dependency.
- **Eggs improve memory and concentration.** One nutrient that many of us are apt to be low on, in our attempts to avoid high-cholesterol foods, is choline. Choline is a B complex vitamin that is a precursor to the brain neurotransmitter, acetylcholine. It is concentrated in high cholesterol foods like eggs and liver. Low levels of acetylcholine have been linked to Alzheimer's disease and poor memory. What a good excuse to put eggs back on your diet plan!
- **You can avoid the highs and lows** of mood and energy associated with fluctuating blood sugar levels by choosing foods that are digested slowly. These foods have a low Glycemic Index and include wholegrain rye bread, oats and basmati rice.

### Many people turn to food for comfort.

Major life events and daily life hassles can trigger emotions that lead to overeating or poor food choices. Some foods may have seemingly addictive qualities. For example, when you eat palatable foods, such as chocolate, your body releases trace amounts of mood and satisfaction-elevating opiates. That "reward" may reinforce a preference for foods that are most closely associated with specific feelings. Related to this is the simple fact that the pleasure of eating offsets negative emotions.

### How do you regain control of your eating habits?

- **Learn to recognize true hunger.** If you ate just a few hours ago and don't have a rumbling stomach, you're probably not really hungry. Give the craving a few minutes to pass.
- **Look elsewhere for comfort.** Instead of unwrapping a candy bar, take a walk, treat yourself to a movie, listen to music, read or call a friend. Plan enjoyable events for yourself.
- **Snack healthy.** If you feel the urge to eat between meals, choose a low-fat, low-calorie food, such as fresh fruit, vegetables with fat-free dip or unbuttered popcorn.
- **Eat a balanced diet.** If you're not getting enough calories to meet your energy needs, you may be more likely to give in to emotional eating.
- **Exercise regularly and get adequate rest.** Your mood is more manageable and your body can more effectively fight stress when it's fit and well rested.

#### **Struggling with a personal or family issue?**

#### **CALL YOUR EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (EAP).**

To make an appointment with an EAP counselor, call [1 \(800\) 828-6025](tel:18008286025) or [\(508\) 842-2780](tel:5088422780)  
Mondays through Thursdays between 8:30 AM and 6 PM Eastern Time or between 8:30 AM and 5 PM on Fridays.

*In case of an emergency or crisis, call any time.*

Counseling locations throughout the nation.