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# Feeling Down? How Fueling Your Body Can Lead to Happiness

Maintaining neurotransmitter balance is essential for mood and emotional health. Chemical imbalances can increase the risk of mood disorders including anxiety and depression.

HEALTHY LIVING

As we celebrate March 20, which has been designated as the International Day of Happiness by the United Nations, let's look at how nutrition can help with our overall mood and happiness.

Have you ever heard the proverbial saying, "You are what you eat?"

Well, it's true. Not only does what we ingest have an impact on our health and wellbeing, but it also can affect our mood and state of mind.

Happiness and nutrition support each other and have a symbiotic relationship.

Our brain has neurotransmitters, which are often called the body's chemical messengers. These molecules send messages to various parts of our body. Working in conjunction with our hormones, they regulate many bodily functions, including mood and emotions.

Serotonin and gamma-Aminobutyric acid (GABA) are neurotransmitters that regulate mood and help keep us calm. Dopamine, epinephrine, and norepinephrine are neurotransmitters that excite and give us energy.

Maintaining neurotransmitter balance is essential for mood and emotional health. Chemical imbalances can increase the risk of mood disorders including anxiety and depression.

To function properly, our bodies rely on nutrients, vitamins, minerals, amino acids, omega-3 fatty acids, as well as fiber and probiotics to feed these neurotransmitters.

## The Modern American Diet

According to [Self Magazine](#), "in The Happiness Diet: A Nutritional Prescription for a Sharp Brain, Balanced Mood, and Lean, Energized Body, Dr. Drew Ramsey, a clinical psychiatrist and Tyler Graham, a health and fitness editor, say the American way of eating has not only turned us into one of the unhealthiest nations in the world, but also one of the unhappiest."

The modern American diet consists of an unhealthy amount of sugar, alcohol, simple carbohydrates, and processed food, which all decrease neurotransmitters.

Sugar and foods that quickly turn into sugar can trigger mood swings and contribute to mood disorders.

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## Boost Your Mood Naturally

We know that exercise, enough quality sleep, and managing stress impact how we feel. Research also shows that the food we consume can play a big role in our mental wellbeing.

Are you feeling down and in need of a boost? Think about what you eat and drink.

Is your diet packed with sugar, alcohol, simple carbohydrates, and processed food?

Keep a food journal and log what you eat and drink every day. This is a good point of reference to see how your diet may be impacting your happiness.

You may also be deficient in various vitamins and minerals.

Vitamin and mineral deficiencies can lead to periods of low mood and depression. Supplements are a great way to boost any micronutrient shortfalls. Micronutrients are chemical elements or substances, like calcium and vitamin C, that are essential in trace amounts to the growth and health of a living organism.

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## 10 Nutrients That Can Help Enhance Your Mood

1. Vitamin D – aka the ‘sunshine vitamin,’ boosts serotonin levels and is essential for brain health and mood. Exposure to the sun’s UV rays is the best way to get vitamin D naturally. A vitamin D deficiency is quite common, and is also directly linked to Seasonal Affective Disorder, a form of depression that people experience during winter months when they have less exposure to the sun.

- Good sources for vitamin D include oily fish like salmon, mackerel, and canned fish with the bones (like sardines), cod liver oil, eggs, and cheese. Many dairy products including milk are also fortified with vitamin D.
- You can take a vitamin D supplement as needed.
- To learn more about the importance of vitamin D, [click here](#)

2. Calcium is linked to bone health and is an essential mineral that works in conjunction with serotonin to reduce stress, anxiety, and PMS symptoms. Calcium deficiency symptoms include overall fatigue and sluggishness, irritability, and anxiety.

- Good food sources for calcium are dairy products, dark leafy greens like spinach and kale, oily fish, almonds, and chia seeds.
- As women approach menopause and beyond, taking a calcium supplement could be beneficial. Calcium needs vitamin D to absorb, and many calcium supplements also contain vitamin D.

3. Omega-3 Fatty Acids are important for maintaining healthy brain function. They also may reduce the risk of depression.

- There are three types of omega-3 fatty acids: DHA (docosahexaenoic acid), EPA (eicosatetraenoic acid), and ALA (alpha-linolenic acid).
- DHA and EPA are mostly found in fish and fish oil.
- ALA is mostly found in nuts and seeds, vegetables, and grass-fed meat. While all are necessary, most health benefits, including brain function and mood come from DHA and EPA.

4. B Vitamins relieve stress. Additionally, B1 (thiamine), B2 (riboflavin), B3 (niacin), B6 (pyridoxine), B7 (biotin), (B9) Folate, and B12 (cyanocobalamin) support brain function, stabilize your mood, manage stress, and increase dopamine. Folate, the natural version of folic acid, is especially beneficial for reducing depression.

- Eat a variety of whole foods including eggs, fish and shellfish, meat and poultry, nuts and seeds, legumes, soybeans, and vegetables to ensure you get all the necessary B vitamins.

5. Zinc assists with digestion and our immune system and helps our concentration and memory. Zinc deficiencies may increase the risk of mood disorders and ADHD.

- Meat, oysters, legumes, whole grains, nuts, seeds, eggs, dairy, potatoes, and dark chocolate contain zinc.

6. Magnesium is another essential mineral. It boosts mood and balances hormones. If you are magnesium deficient, you may experience higher levels of anxiety. Magnesium is often used to treat depression.

- Good sources of magnesium include salmon, mackerel, and halibut, dark leafy greens, pumpkin seeds, avocados, dark chocolate, almonds, and cashews

8. Amino Acids are an essential nutrient and are the building blocks of protein. Tryptophan, lysine, and tyrosine are amino acids that increase hormone and neurotransmitter levels associated with mood and stress. Amino acid deficiencies increase the risk of mood disorders.

- Nine essential amino acids can be found in meat, poultry, fish, eggs, nuts, legumes, and bananas.

9. Iodine is a mineral necessary for thyroid and brain function. Iodine increases levels of the neurotransmitter's serotonin and dopamine, regulating mood.

- Found mainly in shellfish and seaweed, it is also added to table salt. Low iodine levels cause fatigue and brain fog.
- Other natural sources of iodine include whole eggs, milk, yogurt, and lima beans.

10. Fiber is important for gut health as it passes through the intestines, removing toxins and waste. The modern American diet does not contain enough fiber as processed grains have the fiber stripped away.

- Mood transmitters (serotonin, dopamine, and GABA) are produced in both the brain and the gastrointestinal tract. This means that fiber and probiotic foods help improve our mood. Fiber deficiency can decrease brain function and cause depression.
- Fiber is only found in plants like fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, seeds, and legumes.

## In Summary

To help regulate and balance our emotions, mood, hormones, and neurotransmitters, and for overall optimal health, it is important to eat a whole food diet rich in vitamins, minerals, and amino acids. This includes consuming a variety of meat and poultry, fish and shellfish, nuts and seeds, legumes, and always plenty of fruits and vegetables. Adding supplements is also beneficial.