

The Food-Mood Connection

Whether it's a Hanking for a Hamburger or a Jones for Jelly Beans,
Moods Can Affect the Foods You Crave, and Food Can Affect the Moods You Have



Food does a lot more than just fill your stomach, provide sensual taste experiences and keep you alive. It also alters your brain chemistry, and it doesn't take a rocket scientist to know that your brain chemistry affects your moods. How many times have you been stressed or depressed and soothed yourself with carb or sugar-laden comfort food only to discover that you felt worse afterwards? Or you've drowned your sorrows in rich, dark chocolate and found that you it actually made you feel better?

Because what you eat affects your mood, then it would makes sense that conversely, you can actually control your mood by eating certain foods.¹ And there's a scientific explanation for it. In simple terms, the nutrients in food have an affect on the neurotransmitters in your brain. There's a chemical relationship between these nutrients and the response of the neurotransmitters, and that's what produces various moods. It has also been theorized that carbohydrates stimulate the production of Serotonin

(the brain chemical targeted by anti-depressant drugs) and that eating high-carb foods may relieve some symptoms of depression. At the other end of the spectrum, studies indicate that ingesting more protein and fewer carbs may *lower* Serotonin levels.²

FOOD AND FEELINGS

There have been more studies done on this subject than you can shake a breadstick at, but to quote just one -- A British study of 200 subjects -- 88% reported that changing their diet improved their mental health significantly. Of those, 26% said they had seen large improvements in mood swings, 26% in panic attacks and anxiety and 24% in depression.³

As a quick overview (see sidebar for details), there are certain food/feeling formulas that seem to be quite effective. For stress or anxiety, anything with a high carbohydrate content can calm you down (but only if the carbs come from healthy foods like a sweet potato, most fruits or whole-grain crackers). If you're low on energy, protein will perk you up. Nuts, cottage cheese or a hard-boiled egg will do the trick, and so will legumes like beans, lentils and peas. If you want to fall asleep, eat a large, heavy meal (we've all experienced that drowsy feeling after Thanksgiving dinner). And for depression and sadness, believe it or not, sugar can help, especially chocolate, which contains enough caffeine to give you an extra boost. Sugar actually causes the brain to release endorphins, the same pleasure--stimulating, natural chemical produced by exercise and falling in love.

¹ <http://www.principalhealthnews.com/topic/foodmood>

² <http://depression.about.com/cs/diet/a/foodandmood.htm>

³ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/2264529.stm>