

You probably have heard the expression “you are what you eat.” Certain foods are key components in the manufacture of powerful brain chemicals, called neurotransmitters. Neurotransmitters such as serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine may jog your memory, improve performance, improve sleep and boost your mood.

## 1. Limit refined carbohydrates.

Refined white starch like white bread, crackers, bagels and rice are digested quickly, leading to a dip in energy and rebound hunger a few hours later. Concentrated sources of sugar like soda, candy, fruit juice, jam and syrup can also create radical spikes (and drops) in your blood sugar, which leaves you feeling cranky and tired.

**Good mood foods:** To lessen volatile blood sugar swings, include high-quality carbohydrates such as vegetables, fruit, legumes, brown or wild rice and oatmeal. High quality carbs trigger the release of serotonin which enhances calmness, improves outlook, and may lessen feelings of depression. Foods rich in soluble fiber such as flaxseeds, oats, barley, apples, pears, sweet potatoes, peas and beans help slow down the absorption of sugar in your blood, potentially lessening mood swings.



## 2. Incorporate protein with meals.

The addition of protein to a meal or snack will help slow the absorption of carbohydrate in the blood. Dopamine and norepinephrine are released after eating protein, making you feel more alert and focused for hours after eating.

**Good mood foods:** Choose heart-healthy lean protein such as skinless poultry, seafood, round or loin cuts of red meat, tofu, quinoa, eggs, and low-fat dairy.

## 3. Boost your intake of Omega-3's.

Foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids can be mood-lifting.

**Good mood foods:** Choose oily fish (salmon, Atlantic mackerel and sardines), ground flaxseeds, walnuts, canola oil, soy nuts and omega-3 fortified eggs. Wondering whether or not to take an omega-3 supplement? It's always best to get your nutrients from whole foods as a first-line approach to staying healthy. Always check with your doctor before starting a dietary supplement. For omega-3's, look for supplements that contain 650mg of EPA and DHA combined.

#### 4. Get your B-vitamins.

Folate and vitamin B12 may influence mood by playing a role in serotonin production. Studies have shown that low blood levels of these vitamins are sometimes related to depression.

**Good mood foods rich in folate:** fortified whole grain breakfast cereals, lentils, black eyes peas, soybeans, oatmeal, mustard greens, beets, broccoli, sunflower seeds, wheat germ and oranges.

**Good mood foods rich in vitamin B12:** shellfish, wild salmon (fresh or canned), fortified whole grain breakfast cereal, lean beef, low-fat dairy, and eggs.

#### 5. Don't forget about vitamin D.

Although a link between vitamin D and seasonal affective disorder (winter blues) is still speculative, don't discount this sunshine vitamin. Vitamin D may increase levels of serotonin in the brain.

**Good mood food sources of vitamin D:** fish with bones, low-fat milk, fortified soy milk and egg yolks. Because vitamin D rich foods are limited, it may be beneficial to take a daily multivitamin to reach the recently updated goal of 600 International Units. Check with your doctor before starting a dietary supplement.

#### 6. Stick to a Good Mood Food Eating Pattern.

Eating every 4 to 5 hours throughout the day provides your brain and body with a constant source of fuel. This eating strategy can dramatically prevent dips in your blood sugar and it's easy to do! Eat breakfast within 90 minutes of waking up, lunch, an afternoon snack, and a sensible dinner.

Limit short-term mood boosters such as coffee, chocolate, tea, and energy drinks which deliver a quick energy surge followed by a crash. The energy boost you may feel is often short-lived. Additionally, many commercial energy drinks are loaded with added sugar and can be quite calorie-laden.

#### 7. Stay hydrated and exercise.

Dehydration and fatigue go hand-in-hand. The solution is simple- drink plenty of water (fruits and vegetables count towards your daily fluid intake!) or other unsweetened beverages at regular intervals. Studies indicate that regular exercise can relieve depression and trigger physiological changes that make more energy available throughout the day.

##### *Sources:*

*Snack Foods to Improve Your Mood, Silver Hill Hospital*

*Omega-3 fatty acids in the treatment of psychiatric disorders, National Library of Medicine Study*

*CDC Nutrition for Everyone: Protein*

*National Alliance for Mental Illness: Food for Thought*

*FDA Medicines in my Home: Caffeine and your Body*

