

### Refined Foods and Moods

This a fine balance.

A mood is a feeling, an internal emotional state that can affect how you see the world. But what does that have to do with food?

When you feel down, you desperately need a chocolate or...two. And, when you feel happy you might celebrate by eating out.

This is the basics of how it works.

Scientists have identified naturally occurring brain chemicals that affect mood. Your body makes a group of substances called neurotransmitters, which are chemicals in the brain which enable the brain cells to send messages. These neurotransmitters are:

- Dopamine
- Noradrenaline
- Serotonin – the well being hormone

Dopamine and Noradrenaline makes you feel alert and energized and serotonin makes you feel happy and calm.

This is how these neurotransmitters are linked to food:

Protein are made of a series of building blocks known as amino acids, some of which are important in mood. Tryptophan is the most studied of these. Tryptophan can be converted in the body to the "feel good" neurotransmitter, serotonin. The best sources of Tryptophan are animal proteins such as lean meat, poultry, fish and dairy products.

Glucose is the end product of carbohydrate metabolism. Glucose is also the sugar that circulates in the blood and is a vital source of energy to your body.

A high carbohydrate diet also increases the uptake of tryptophan which increases serotonin release from the nerve cells in the brain. Therefore we can say, a diet based on tryptophan rich proteins and carbohydrates can be mood enhancing. Low Glycaemic index carbohydrates including wholegrain cereals, pasta, granary bread, oats, basmati rice, fruit and pulses, also provide a steady release of energy and serotonin, which could help control and stabilize the mood. Women who suffer bad PMS often have been shown to have lower levels of serotonin in their brains. A low carbohydrate diet, or a diet based on refined carbohydrates, such as pastries, biscuits, cakes, white bread, highly processed cereals etc. could increase irritability and make their moods more unsteady.

Further, if you eat refined foods, containing high concentrations of simple sugars on an empty stomach, the sugars are absorbed rapidly, triggering an equally rapid increase in the secretion of insulin (a hormone needed to control blood sugar levels). This leads to a rapid decrease in the amount of sugar circulating in your blood that can make you feel temporarily irritable and edgy.

Protein foods, specifically red meats have a bad name. But some lean red meat cuts can be as low in calories as a chicken casserole. So do try include a good variety of tryptophan rich protein foods and low GI carbohydrates in your diet. It might just have a better effect on your mood than will a croissant and chocolate for breakfast.

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