University of Richmond Employee Wellness

Nutrition Psychiatry: Your Brain on Food

Happy National Nutrition Month!

Think about it. Your brain is always “on.” It takes care of your thoughts and movements, your breathing and heartbeat, your senses — it works hard 24/7, even while you’re asleep. This means your brain requires a constant supply of fuel. That “fuel” comes from the foods you eat — and what’s in that fuel makes all the difference. Put simply, what you eat directly affects the structure and function of your brain and, ultimately, your mood.

Like an expensive car, your brain functions best when it gets only premium fuel. Eating high-quality foods that contain lots of vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants nourishes the brain and protects it from oxidative stress — the “waste” (free radicals) produced when the body uses oxygen, which can damage cells.

It makes sense. If your brain is deprived of good-quality nutrition, or if free radicals or damaging inflammatory cells are circulating within the brain’s enclosed space, further contributing to brain tissue injury, consequences are to be expected. What’s interesting is that for many years, the medical field did not fully acknowledge the connection between mood and food.

Today, fortunately, the burgeoning field of nutritional psychiatry is finding there are many consequences and correlations between not only what you eat, how you feel, and how you ultimately behave, but also the kinds of bacteria that live in your gut.

Serotonin is a neurotransmitter that helps regulate sleep and appetite, mediate moods, and inhibit pain. Since about 95% of your serotonin is produced in your gastrointestinal tract, and your gastrointestinal tract is lined with a hundred million nerve cells, or neurons, it makes sense that the inner workings of your digestive system don’t just help you digest food, but also guide your emotions.

Studies have shown that when people take probiotics (supplements containing the good bacteria), their anxiety levels, perception of stress, and mental outlook improve, compared with people who do not. Other studies have compared “traditional” diets, like the Mediterranean diet and the traditional Japanese diet, to a typical “Western” diet and have shown that the risk of depression is 25% to 35% lower in those who eat a traditional diet. Scientists account for this difference because these traditional diets tend to be high in vegetables, fruits, unprocessed grains, and fish and seafood, and to contain only modest amounts of lean meats and dairy. They are also void of processed and refined foods and sugars, which are staples of the "Western" dietary pattern.

Start paying attention to how eating different foods makes you feel — not just in the moment, but the next day. Try eating a “clean” diet for two to three weeks — that means cutting out all processed foods and sugar. Add fermented foods like kimchi, miso, sauerkraut, pickles, or kombucha. You also might want to try going dairy-free — and some people even feel that they feel better when their diets are grain-free. See how you feel. Then slowly introduce foods back into your diet, one by one, and see how you feel.

When my patients “go clean,” they cannot believe how much better they feel both physically and emotionally, and how much worse they then feel when they reintroduce the foods that are known to enhance inflammation. Give it a try!

Source: Harvard Health
Diet can play an important role in lowering your cholesterol. Here are some foods to improve your cholesterol and protect your heart.

**Oatmeal and High-Fiber Foods**
Oatmeal contains soluble fiber, which reduces your low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol, the "bad" cholesterol. Soluble fiber is also found in such foods as kidney beans, Brussels sprouts, apples and pears.

Five to 10 grams or more of soluble fiber a day decreases your LDL cholesterol. One serving of a breakfast cereal with oatmeal or oat bran provides 3 to 4 grams of fiber.

**Fish**
Fatty fish has high levels of omega-3 fatty acids, which can reduce your triglycerides — a type of fat found in blood — as well as reduce your blood pressure and risk of developing blood clots. In people who have already had heart attacks, omega-3 fatty acids may reduce the risk of sudden death.

Omega-3 fatty acids don't affect LDL cholesterol levels. But because of those acids' other heart benefits, the American Heart Association recommends eating at least two servings of fish a week. Baking or grilling the fish avoids adding unhealthy fats.

**Avocado**
Avocados are a potent source of nutrients as well as monounsaturated fatty acids (MUFAs). Research suggests that adding an avocado a day to a heart-healthy diet can help improve LDL cholesterol levels in people who are overweight or obese.

People tend to be most familiar with avocados in guacamole, which usually is eaten with high-fat corn chips. Try adding avocado slices to salads and sandwiches or eating them as a side dish. Also try guacamole with raw cut vegetables, such as cucumber slices.

**Other Changes to Your Diet**
Getting the full benefit of these foods requires other changes to your diet and lifestyle. One of the most beneficial changes is limiting the saturated and trans fats you eat.

Saturated fats — such as those in meat, butter, cheese and other full-fat dairy products — raise your total cholesterol. Decreasing your consumption of saturated fats to less than 7 percent of your total daily calorie intake can reduce your LDL cholesterol by 8 to 10 percent.

Source: Mayo Clinic

---

**Healthy Cooking: Banana Chocolate Chip Muffins**

**Ingredients:**
- 1 1/2 cups whole wheat flour
- 1 tsp. baking soda
- 1/4 tsp. salt
- 3 ripe bananas
- 1/4 cup honey
- 1 tbsp. vanilla
- 1 tbsp. olive or melted coconut oil
- 1 egg
- 1/2 cup plain Greek yogurt
- 1 tbsp. almond milk
- 1/2 cup chocolate chips

**Directions:**
1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Spray a 12-cup muffin tin with nonstick cooking spray. In a medium bowl, whisk together flour, baking soda, and salt.
2. Add bananas, honey, vanilla, oil, egg, yogurt, and milk to a blender. Blend on high for 1 minute or until well combined, smooth, and creamy. Add wet ingredients to the dry ingredients, and mix until just combined. Gently fold in the chocolate chips.
3. Divide batter evenly into the muffin tin. Sprinkle the tops with a few more chocolate chips. Bake for 20-25 minutes or until a toothpick comes out clean with a few moist crumbs.
4. Cool muffins for 5 minutes, and remove from the tin to finish cooling on a wire rack.
5. Enjoy! The muffins are best served warm and even better the next day.
How Does Nutrition Affect Exercise?

The muscles you engage during exercise, whether it’s cardio, resistance training or flexibility work, rely on the nutrition you provide them through your diet. Supplying your body with nutrients before you work out, after you work out and in the recovery period between workouts can impact the quality of your session and affect your fitness goals. In some cases, fueling up during an exercise session can improve your results as well.

**Protein for Strong Muscles**

Your dietary protein serves several functions related to exercise. As the predominant component of muscle tissue, protein helps build new muscle fibers and repairs tissues damaged during your workout. Including sufficient high-quality protein in your daily diet—up to 2 grams for each kilogram you weigh—allows the increase in muscle mass that can, over time, boost your physical power during subsequent workouts. In addition, consuming protein that contains branched-chain amino acids, such as those found in the milk protein whey, can promote muscle recovery so you can work out again sooner.

**Carbohydrates for Energy**

Carbohydrates, both starches and sugars, provide the energy your muscles need to perform work. The carbohydrates you eat before you exercise not only burn as fuel but also accumulate in your muscles and liver as glycogen, a storage form of starch your muscles call on during exercise to keep them going. This nutrient is also important after you exercise, because intense physical activity depletes your glycogen stores. Replenishing glycogen during or following a workout speeds recovery in preparation for your next exercise session. Taking in between 1 and 1.5 grams of carbohydrates per kilogram of body weight soon after exercising helps maximize the process.

**Vitamins and Minerals for Metabolism**

Vitamins and minerals are involved in many of your body’s functions that come into play during exercise, such as energy production and muscle contraction. Lack of any of these nutrients can therefore affect your ability to work out as you would like to. For example, your blood cells carry oxygen that is bound to an iron-rich protein, and if your dietary iron is low, you may become easily winded and fatigued during exercise. Vitamin C can help you absorb iron, and a deficiency of this vitamin can indirectly affect your iron levels. Electrolytes, such as sodium, help maintain fluid balance in your cells by pulling in water, and too little sodium in your diet can lead to muscle cramps as you exercise.

**Water for Hydration**

Water is one of the most critical nutrients in exercise. Staying properly hydrated involves replacing the fluids you lose through sweating and heavy breathing. Hydration keeps your heart rate from climbing too high, which, in turn, helps regulate your body temperature. According to the American Council on Exercise, every time you lose a liter of fluid through sweat, your heart rate increases by eight beats per minute. If fluid loss continues, your core temperature can become dangerously elevated. Drinking plenty of water before, during and after exercise helps ensure you complete your workout so you can meet your fitness goals in a safe manner.

Source: SFGate
Let the wellness madness begin…

UR Well Employee

2019 WELLNESS FAIR

Thursday, March 21
9 am - 4 pm
Weinstein Center for Recreation