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Tips To Get Happier

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By Dr. Mercola

Did You Know You Can Boost Your Mood Via Your Diet?

What you eat or don't eat can have a significant impact on your mood. While excess sugar has been linked to [depression](#), certain foods are linked to positive emotions. Namely:

Vegetables, Especially Leafy Greens

Dark leafy greens like spinach are rich in folate, which helps your body produce mood-regulating neurotransmitters, including serotonin and dopamine. One 2012 study found people who consumed the most folate had a lower risk of depression than those who ate the least.

Not to mention, research from the University of Otago found eating fruits and vegetables of any sort (except fruit juice and dried fruit) helped young adults calm their nerves. Department of Psychology researcher Dr. Tamlin Conner said:

"On days when people ate more fruits and vegetables, they reported feeling calmer, happier, and more energetic than they normally did."

Mushrooms

Mushrooms are rich in the antioxidant selenium, low levels of which have been linked to anxiety. Mushrooms are also one of the better food sources of vitamin D, which supports healthy mood (however, your best option to optimize your vitamin D levels is regular sun exposure; if that's not possible, a vitamin D3 supplement may be necessary).

Turmeric

Curcumin, the pigment that gives the spice turmeric its yellow-orange color, is thought to be the primary component responsible for many of its medicinal effects. Among them, curcumin has neuroprotective properties and may enhance mood and possibly help with depression.

Dark Chocolate

Like exercise, chocolate may trigger your brain to produce the "bliss compound" *anandamide*. It also contains other chemicals that prolong the "feel-good" aspects of anandamide.

Chocolate has even been referred to as "the new anti-anxiety drug." One study in the *Journal of Psychopharmacology* also revealed that drinking an antioxidant-rich chocolate drink equal to about 1.5 ounces of dark chocolate daily felt calmer than those who did not.

Organic Black Coffee

Research has shown that coffee triggers a mechanism in your brain that releases brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), which activates your brain stem cells to convert into new neurons, thereby improving your brain health.

Interestingly enough, research also suggests that low BDNF levels may play a significant role in depression and that increasing neurogenesis has an antidepressant effect. One Harvard study even found women who drink four or more cups of coffee a day have a 20 percent lower risk of depression than those who drank little or none.

Green Tea

Green tea contains theanine, an amino acid that crosses the blood-brain barrier and has psychoactive properties. Theanine increases levels of gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA), serotonin, dopamine, and alpha wave activity, and may reduce mental and physical stress and produce feelings of relaxation.

Positive Thoughts Reduce Stress and Influence Your Immune System

Feeling happy isn't only a matter of emotional health. Positive thoughts and attitudes are able to prompt changes in your body that strengthen your immune system, decrease pain and chronic disease, and provide stress relief. One study found, for instance, that happiness, optimism, life satisfaction, and other positive psychological attributes are associated with a lower risk of heart disease. It's even been scientifically shown that happiness can alter your genes! A team of researchers at UCLA showed that people with a deep sense of happiness and well-being had lower levels of inflammatory gene expression and stronger antiviral and antibody responses.

Interestingly, if you're wondering how to maintain a state of happiness in the long run, *self-acceptance* appears to be one of the most important factors that can produce a more consistent sense of happiness.

In a survey of 5,000 people by the charity Action for Happiness, people were asked to rate themselves between 1 and 10 on 10 habits that are scientifically linked to happiness. While all 10 habits were strongly linked to overall life satisfaction, *acceptance* was the strongest predictor. In all, the survey resulted in the following "10 Keys to Happier Living," which together spell out the acronym GREAT DREAM:

1. **Giving:** do things for others
2. **Relating:** connect with people
3. **Exercising:** take care of your body
4. **Appreciating:** notice the world around you
5. **Trying out:** keep learning new things
6. **Direction:** have goals to look forward to
7. **Resilience:** find ways to bounce back
8. **Emotion:** take a positive approach
9. **Acceptance:** be comfortable with who you are
10. **Meaning:** be part of something bigger