



Work Smart Live Smart

Food And Mood

By
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It's 3 o'clock in the afternoon, you are irritated, your head is fuzzy and your eyes are having trouble focusing. You would love to find a corner and go to sleep, but there is no time. How about a coffee or a chocolate bar?

Most of us instinctively reach for sweets or caffeine to give relief from the morning sluggishness or afternoon slump. We use sweets as a way of helping ourselves through stressful times. Those strategies might help, temporarily, but there is a downside to these methods.

Many people choose sweets and caffeine as a substitute for proper nutrition. Poor eating strategies affect our brain chemistry and cause fatigue, apathy, apprehension, edginess and the blues. The brain has first call on the body's available supply of nutrients, therefore, the first effects of nutritional deficiencies are often mental symptoms.

Research shows that low levels of protein in a diet have a negative impact on the body's production of neurotransmitters, which directly affect our mood and energy. Deficiencies in vitamins B1, B6, C, A, essential fatty acids, folic acid, niacin, magnesium, copper and iron also affect the fine balance of these neurotransmitters.

Vitamin and Mineral Deficiencies In Mental Health:

- Vitamin B1 or Thiamine is drained by simple sugars. B1 helps convert blood sugar into fuel. Without it, we can experience fatigue, depressive symptoms, irritability, anxiety, memory problems, insomnia and even thoughts of suicide.
- Research has found a strong correlation between vitamin B6 deficiency and depressive symptoms
- A lack of B12 can lead to mood swings, paranoia, irritability, confusion, dementia, hallucinations
- Folic Acid assists in the creation of many neurotransmitters and can cause fatigue and dementia
- Low levels of Vitamin C can produce depressive symptoms

We know that food has a profound effect on our mood, but what other simple steps can we take to boost our energy, lift our mood and help us to focus?

10 Simple Strategies To Avoid The Sugar Blues

1. Eat breakfast, lunch and dinner. Smaller balance meals are preferable to large meals
2. Use exercise or stretching to increase energy and lift the 'fog'
3. Eat protein earlier in the day – we metabolize proteins in a way that we get the full energy from them up to 5 hours later
4. Include fish in your weekly diet as the essential fatty acids they contain increase energy and improve mood
5. Eat complex carbohydrates such as whole grains and vegetables instead of simple sugars found in chocolate bars and candy, which give the quick high but a low plunge
6. Don't confuse thirst with hunger. Drinking a cool glass of water can boost energy in the middle of the afternoon slump
7. Avoid food additives such as colorants and preservatives which can have a negative allergic reaction in the body
8. Don't buy foods high in sugar. If it is not sitting in the cupboard or desk drawer you are less likely to make snap decisions
9. Have healthy snacks readily available. Plan ahead and keep them in desk drawers, lockers or even in the glove box of your car
10. A daily supplement may be helpful, but don't rely on it to replace healthy eating. Eat a variety of foods.

We have all heard the saying 'We are what we eat', but most of us connect this with the body's physical reactions. Our brain is just as dependent on the food that we consume. Healthy food choices help us avoid the erratic blood sugar levels and associated mood swings, which can keep us mentally healthy.

Stress and wellness specialist, **Beverly Beuermann-King** translates current research and best practices information into a realistic, accessible and practical approach through her dynamic stress and wellness workshops, on-line articles, e-newsletters and media interviews and through a collaboration called *Awakening The Workplace*. Visit www.WorkSmartLiveSmart.com for more on Beverly and her wellness work.

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