

Food For Thought: Nutrition for Better Brain Balance

Eating is a necessary activity we all routinely engage in, but rarely consider its purpose. You often eat because you're hungry, but sometimes only because a clock tells you its lunchtime even when food isn't really needed. It is also commonly a vehicle for spending time with people.

Is there a more foundational intent and how do you decide what to consume?

The American Heritage Dictionary defines nutrition, as “The process of aiding the growth and development of a living organism” and states, “The ingredients of nutritious food should be beneficial, healthful, and invigorating.”

Food should help strengthen and advance your life and propel you toward your full potential. Eating must therefore replenish the specific nutrients that optimize the functioning of your system. It needs to provide the building blocks for healthy tissue construction as well as the fuel and instructions needed to drive your various body processes.

How do we normally make our food selections? We are motivated by the pleasures of taste sensation but also by unconscious drives for comfort and to modify our feelings or moods. As a result, we often overeat, create nutrient deficiencies, and promote addictive urges without awareness.

Food changes your chemistry and modifies your feelings either toward greater well-being or distress just like many drugs. A key factor is how food affects your brain and nervous system. It influences various neurotransmitters that impact how you think and feel as well as the messages delivered to every organ in your body.

Your brain and nervous system are responsible for perceiving incoming sensory information, coordinating all bodily activities, and exercising thought and emotion. They touch everything essential for your existence and gives meaning to your life.

Would it be helpful to know how your dining selections affect your brain function? I think so, since your brain holds the key to you

living a long, healthy, and happy life. It can cause you to enjoy playing lovingly with your child one moment and then react with angry rage the next.

Countless stressors threaten your brain balance every day. Balance is defined as “a stable physical, mental, and emotional state where equilibrium is maintained.” Your nervous system must continually orchestrate your adaptation to a perpetually shifting environment. It must continue to create harmony from the nutrients we provide it in our diet to allow us to thrive.

Eric Braverman, M.D., in his book *The Edge Effect*, develops the ideas of world-renowned brain function researcher Rodolfo Llinas, M.D., illustrating how brain biochemical imbalances lead to decreased physical and mental health. He discusses “how electricity in the human body reaches the brain and is processed through four biochemical neurotransmitters: dopamine, acetylcholine, GABA, and serotonin.”

“Small neurotransmitter imbalances can get amplified into bigger health problems. On the other hand, a chemically balanced brain could not only restore you to good health, but is essential to maintaining a sound mind and body over the long haul. It can create a sharpness that will enable you to love others, remain calm, and effectively put your intelligence to its best possible use. It can be a powerful tool to manage memory, attention, personality and temperament, and physical health.”

Further valuable light is shed upon our neurochemical functioning by Pierce Howard, Ph.D., in his encyclopedic treatise, *The Owner's Manual for the Brain*.

Neurons in your brain's frontal lobe produce the neurotransmitter dopamine. It monitors your metabolism. It controls your energy, excitement about new ideas, and motivation. It influences blood pressure and digestion, intelligence, abstract thought, goal-setting, and long-term planning. Deficiencies can lead to addictive disorders, obesity, severe fatigue, and Parkinson's disease.

Protein (from flesh, legumes, and tofu) is necessary to make dopamine and keep alertness elevated and your memory stable. Meat (especially chicken, turkey, and duck), cottage cheese, and wheat germ are powerful sources. The protein should also be rounded out with large amounts of fruits and vegetables.

Neurons in your parietal lobe produce acetylcholine, which is a building block for the myelin sheath surrounding nerves. It is responsible for facilitating information flow along the nerves and controls brain speed. When levels are balanced, you are creative and feel good about yourself. It is also necessary for activating REM dream sleep.

Fat from dairy, meat, or oils is the dietary source. Deficits lead to memory loss, generally decreased brain function, and advanced aging. This includes childhood learning disabilities on up to Alzheimer's disease.

Temporal lobe neurons produce GABA, which controls your brain's rhythm. It's involved in the production of endorphins leading to calmness of body, mind, and spirit.

Complex carbohydrates from whole grains, vegetables, nuts, legumes, cantaloupe, and oranges are important components. It is also necessary to avoid refined sugar and flour products. Deficiencies of this biochemical can result in headaches, hypertension, palpitations, seizures, a diminished sex drive, and heart disorders.

The neurotransmitter serotonin is produced in your occipital lobe and regulates your brain's ability to rest and resynchronize. It provides a healing, nourishing, satisfied feeling to the brain and body. It facilitates deep, peaceful sleep, the ability to enjoy food, and to think rationally.

Major dietary sources include pork and turkey, cottage cheese, wheat germ, and avocado. Fruits, vegetables, whole grains, seeds, and beans should accompany these generally. Deficiencies include depression, hormonal imbalances, PMS, sleep and eating disorders.

The food you eat for your body is fuel for your brain. Are you providing the right raw materials to facilitate your peak brain performance and optimal health?

You do not have to be a victim of poor health. You can thrive with a high level of body, mind, and spirit vitality and your dietary choices play a crucial role. In addition to making smart food selections for you and your family, it is important to add scientific, pharmaceutical

grade supplements to compensate for depleted soils and a stressful, hurried lifestyle.

Your brain is your most critical organ and a primary feature of your human uniqueness. Think about what you put in your mouth, because what you put in your mouth changes how you think!