

Connection between food and mind



The three pillars of a healthy, balanced self are food, body, and mind. Arguably, the mind is the most important aspect of this three-fold relationship, serving as its foundation. Over the past few decades with a plethora of research lending to the idea that the food we eat causes a reaction from the brain solidifies this connection between how we feel after certain things we eat.

Pay attention in the upcoming months. As we enter the melancholy months brought on by the Midwestern winters, we all begin to crave various things: just one more daily coffee, an extra serving of potatoes with dinner, added red meat in the diet, warm desserts and breads, another cocktail, and other yummy foods that we normally avoid or eat more conservatively.

Unfortunately, when we eat foods like these to calm an inner craving, we are affecting the levels of neurotransmitters; important chemical messengers, in the brain. The three main neurotransmitters involved include: serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine.

We have all heard the fact that the amino acid tryptophan- in turkey at Thanksgiving- makes us tired. Tryptophan is the precursor to serotonin, so since carbohydrates like pasta, breads, cereals, candy, and other non-nutrient dense flour products, spark levels of serotonin, tryptophan is also present. Sleepy times will ensue!

The two other important brain chemicals that appear to be influenced by foods, dopamine and norepinephrine, produce a feeling of alertness, an increased ability to concentrate, and faster reaction times. Although it is not absolute, there are two reasons this may happen: serotonin production is blocked by the consumption of protein-rich foods, resulting in increased alertness or concentration, or levels of dopamine and norepinephrine are increased by the consumption of protein-rich foods.

Who wouldn't want to be more alert? Unfortunately, like many drugs, you have the sensation of "coming down" off of any spike of chemicals in the brain. So, when you have foods that do this, you will feel the same sluggish after-affect. We don't need any help with that on a gray, snowy day!

Fortunately for us, there are plenty of foods you should feel free to eat that have a positive affect on the brain and the body. These foods include: water, fresh fruits and vegetables, nuts and seeds, high quality fish, and whole-grain foods. When in doubt, reach for one of these! For more information on fruits and veggies of the season, check out: [Ashley's Top 5 Winter Produce Choices](#).