

PENNY SAVER NEWS

FAX: 932-5261

March 17, 2011

BY: Mary A. Keith, Ph.D., L.D.
Food, Nutrition and Health Agent**HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY**

5339 S. County Road 579

Seffner, FL 33584-3334

Ph:(813)744-5519 x 136, FAX:744-5776
e-mail:mkeith@ufl.edu**What Does Your Food Have to Do with Your Mood?**

Do you believe the ads, books and of course sales pitches about food and mood these days? If so, you could think that the reason you don't feel too perky today is because you didn't get enough African miracle berries, enough purified protein extract or drink enough concentrated tea. Or there are dozens of other potential candidates just waiting to take your money with the promise of cheering you up forever. Surely you're smart enough to wonder about their claims! Because there's not much tested data behind them. But can you do anything with your diet to improve your mood? Actually, yes, you can.

One effect of food on mood that is agreed on is that your blood sugar level will definitely affect your mood. When the amount of glucose in your blood gets too low, you'll start getting cranky. Every little thing will bother you. You'll get frustrated easily. You might get a headache, or notice that your eyes seem a little blurry. Our brains need sugar, and when they don't get it, they don't work as well.

So the A-Number-One thing to do to help keep your mood stable is to keep your blood sugar level. Now hold on! That's not an excuse to snarf down chocolate! What it does mean is that we should: 1. Eat breakfast, or at least something, within 2 hours of when we get up. It means we should: 2. Not go more than 3-4 hours without eating throughout the day. And 3: We should be eating fruits, veggies, beans and whole grains. If we eat sugary foods, our blood sugar goes up fast, and comes down fast. We feel good for half an hour, then we feel lousy again. But if we eat foods with fiber the

sugar from the carbs will go into our blood more slowly. So our sugar levels stay up a lot longer. In fact, we'll be feeling good and making better decisions for at least 4 hours.

You might be tempted by the ads that say we need more protein because the hormone in the brain that actually makes us feel good is made from protein. It's true that we need protein, specifically the amino acid tryptophan from protein, to make it. But a normal diet gives us plenty of protein. And it's the blood sugar that gets tryptophan into the brain. When sugar's low it can't get to the brain to improve mood.

What else might help? There's a little evidence, but it's not enough to prove, that eating oils instead of solid fats will help. If that does turn out to be true, it seems that it will be fish oils that have the most effect. And so far, fish oil pills don't seem to do it. But avoiding trans fats and eating less solid fat (butter, fatty steak or chops) is a good idea for general health, and it certainly won't hurt our mood either.

There are some of us who would love to swear by chocolate, right? So far, it looks like what really makes us feel better about chocolate are the sugar and the fat it has. However the bitter stuff in chocolate, the flavonols, do help to relax our blood vessels. Some researchers think that they might relax the blood vessels in the brain enough to improve circulation up there and make us feel more relaxed all over. It's possible, but not for sure yet.

Then there are coffee, tea and various herbal supplements. Coffee and tea do help us feel more energetic mentally. Guarana is another source of caffeine, plus it may have a few other ingredients that work on the brain. These 3 are all promoted for mental energy, concentration and patience. But mental energy and being in a good mood are not the same thing.

So far no one has found them or anything else to be nearly effective as getting a balanced diet, enough exercise and a daily dose of sunshine. The weather's great these days, so get some mood-enhancing sun today!

If you really believe in the power of chocolate, here's a super simple recipe that might help. Besides the chocolate it has whole grains, vegetable oil (in the peanut butter) and a little protein too (also from the peanut butter). Plus, it's simple enough that the children can help you make it. It is high in fat, so serve with cold skim milk and apple slices for an afternoon treat.

Peanut Butter Squares

2 cups (4 sticks) margarine, softened

1 cup peanut butter

1/3 of a 16 oz pkg graham crackers

3 ½ cups powdered sugar

12 oz pkg semisweet chocolate chips

Put the graham crackers in a plastic bag and crush to make fine crumbs. Combine the softened margarine, peanut butter, cracker crumbs and powdered sugar in a large bowl and mix well. Press into the bottom of a greased 10x15 inch baking pan. Follow package directions to melt the chocolate chips in the microwave or over hot water.

Spread the melted chocolate over the peanut butter and crumbs. Put in refrigerator for several hours until firm. Cut into 2x2 inch squares. Makes about 3 dozen pieces.