

Food and your mood.  
by Mike DeCinti

You can't turn on the TV or pick up a magazine today without seeing a story about what you can and can't eat now a day. What was once thought to be good for you now is bad. What you were told to avoid, now has health benefits. And the scary thing is often this changes on a regular basis. It's enough to drive you crazy or at least confused about what you should and shouldn't be eating. So as I was reading my Men's Health magazine this month I came across three articles that I thought I would share. One was about how to read a food label so you know what it is your getting, another was about something you need to stay away from when buying your groceries and the last dealt with the foods you'll want to pick up and how they can effect your mood. Three things that are important to anyone who has made the decision to start living a healthier lifestyle.

When buying "shelved foods" at the grocery store not only do you have a wide selection of products to choose from, but you also have to be smart in picking the right one by reading the food label on the back of the package. The article I read stated that there are four areas that you should concentrate on when picking the best food for you.

1. Fats, especially trans fats. You'll want to avoid these. If the label says the product contains trans fats (look for words like partially hydrogenated oils) than find another product.
2. Sugars. Always choose foods with the least amount of sugar. And if your deciding between two products that have a similar low amount of sugar, move on to number 3.
3. Fiber. The more the better.
4. Number of ingredients. Always pick a product that has the fewest number of ingredients.

If you follow these simple steps, you'll be well on your way to making healthier choices. And just a quick note about trans fats. The second article I read mentioned that since most companies are getting away from trans fats, some have been replacing them with something called interesterified fats, so look for "interesterified soybean oil" or stearate-rich" in the ingredient list and do you best to avoid it.

Lastly, some good news. Here some information on what you can eat. And not only are these healthy choices, but there is research that shows they may also be good for your overall mood. However, portion control is key. Too much of anything will be anti-productive.

- If you're feeling anxious, eat some protein, like a grilled chicken wrap (hold the mayo.) Eating between 4 or 5 ounces of protein helps your brain create dopamine and norepinephrine, neurochemicals that keep you alert.
- Are you stressed? Then have a handful of sesame seeds while at work. Stress hormones deplete your body's supply of magnesium, reducing your stress-coping

abilities and increasing your risk of developing high blood pressure. The seeds will get it back.

- A little restless? Enjoy some nonfat popcorn half an hour before bed. The carbs will induce your body to create serotonin, a neurochemical that makes you feel relaxed.
- Not feeling confident? Eat a “snack-sized” portion of chocolate, especially dark chocolate. It contains a host of chemicals that can brighten your mood by creating a cozy euphoric feeling.
- If you find yourself forgetting things then reach for some pineapple chunks. The antioxidants found in most colorful fruits and vegetables help pick off the free radicals that wear away at our memory.

As I have always said, it's not easy getting healthy, and often times the hardest part is just making that decision to start, but when you do, having a little bit of knowledge like this can be very helpful. And not only will this help with your physical health, but as you can see, by putting the right foods in your body, you'll also improve your mental health.

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