

Redefining Our Relationship with Food

eating healthy for your mind and body

By Clinical Nurse Specialist Anna Katzman

Food is not our enemy. Rail-thin models on the runway, anyone affiliated with many of the glossy, fashion magazines, and the friend whose complaints about her thighs come out of her mouth (while her 60th potato chip of the day goes into it), may have you thinking otherwise.

They're wrong. It's time to stop fighting food and instead embrace it, for what it can do for us. We "eat to live" – that's a given – but we also eat for both energy and satiety. And, to protect ourselves from our real enemies – disease, and aging.



We can feel good about what we eat and we can even feel good as a result of what we eat. Here's how...

Chemicals feel good. Take serotonin, found in both your local pharmacy in a prescription bottle of Prozac and your neighborhood grocery store, in a turkey.

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Yes, a turkey. Turkeys contain tryptophan, an essential amino acid, which when broken down by the body becomes serotonin.

Serotonin is considered the "feel good" hormone as it improves our mood and helps us sleep.

"Women have only $\frac{3}{4}$ the amount of serotonin that men do", says nutritionist and author [Kate Scarlata](#). "Serotonin level takes a dip in the afternoon and decreases with P.M.S..."

Foods such as turkey can replenish serotonin. However, proteins interfere with the production of serotonin, according to Ms. Scarlata, who suggests that eating carbohydrates such as graham crackers is a more effective way to maintain serotonin levels.

When carbohydrates are broken down by our bodies, insulin is released into the bloodstream where it clears the blood of most amino acids, while leaving tryptophan a clear path to get to the brain and convert to serotonin.

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Protein serves us better to maintain satiety and energy. Proteins such as nut butter, lean chicken, hummus, some produce, and some fats at meals “will lock and load you”, according to Ms. Scarlatta.

She adds, “The key to energy and satiety is keeping up your blood sugar and stabilizing it.” Low blood sugar can make you irritable, (try that for an excuse next time), cranky, and tired.

Maintaining energy may be achieved by your body’s releasing sugar from carbohydrates over time rather than all at once: reserve ¼ of your plate for a carbohydrate that contains fiber, as the fiber slows down the digestion of the carbohydrate, Ms. Scarlata suggests. “Think of it (the fiber) as a slow release medication where you’re slowly releasing sugar into the bloodstream.”

What we do not want hanging around in our bloodstream are free-radicals, those nasty things that float around in our bodies looking to attach to our cells, make them oxidate, and turn them cancerous. While you may not like broccoli, free-radicals do.

The more you scoop up a handful of broccoli (which contains Vitamins A and C and the most selenium you can get from any fruit or vegetable) or other cruciferous, antioxidant vegetable, the more those vegetables will scoop up free radicals and clear your body of them before they can cause cancer...

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Aging we usually attack with lotions, potions, hair coloring, and the more-drastic approach, surgery.

Try enlisting Vitamin C. “Vitamin C is important in collagen formation which keeps skin elastic and also helps in wound healing”, says Ms. Scarlata, who recommends getting it from “whole foods, the way they exist in nature”, such as whole fruits instead of juices.

Food is our friend and while not quite a “life partner”, food is our partner for life.

As with any relationship, what you put into it is what you get out. So choose your friends (and your partners) wisely, for their ability to make you happy, energize you, and for their loyalty in protecting you from disease and more-rapid aging.

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