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## Eat Yourself Happy: Choose Foods that Boost Mood and Vitality

I have a history of depression, though thankfully I haven't had an episode in almost ten years. I turned my mood around by making major changes in my personal and professional life, and will tell you more about that in another post.

I'm a practicing medical doctor (GP) with a degree in Dietetics, and am fascinated by the potential for certain foods and simple wellness practices to prevent and treat major medical conditions or diseases. I've written for years about the ability of food to protect and boost your mood, though in some cases of depression anti-depressant medications might still be necessary. That said, understanding the relationship between food and mood can help increase the effectiveness of anti-depressant medications, and may also help prevent relapse.

I protect myself from recurrent depression and deliberately "feed" my daily mood by following the following dietary rules for a good mood:

### 1) Eat Breakfast & Eat Regularly

Have you ever been in a terrible mood, only to realize that you haven't eaten in hours? If I skip a meal (which occasionally happens, if I'm really busy or really focused on a task), I'll get really irritable and even weepy, and wonder what's wrong with me - until I realize that I haven't eaten! As soon as I sit down and eat something solid, the bad mood disappears. Eating a balanced breakfast and making a point to eat regularly (don't ever let yourself get too hungry), will keep your blood sugar and mood stable.

### 2) Eat Enough Protein

I love carbs and would easily eat them all day if I could. Eating protein with every meal (think fish, chicken, eggs, nuts, yogurt, milk, soy, chickpeas, etc.) helps the food last longer in your stomach and bloodstream, prevents blood sugar crashes, and also keeps you "up" and alert for two to three hours afterwards. It's a good idea to eat a healthy, low-glycemic carbohydrate source with the protein (as opposed to following a stringent low carb diet) as a diet too high in protein and too low in carbs will make most people feel moody.

### 3) Avoid Simple Sugars

Carbohydrates are the classic feel-good food. Carbohydrate-rich foods enable the mood-enhancing amino acid tryptophan to enter the brain, where it's used to produce the neurotransmitter serotonin. However, if you eat carbohydrates that produce a short surge of glucose in your bloodstream (think carb foods made from white sugar, white flour, white rice, etc.) you'll get a short-lived sugar high and then get hit with a mood-wrecking crash. For a consistent positive mood, choose whole grain, high fiber carbohydrate sources with lasting power.

#### 4) Eat Fish Three Times a Week

I try to eat fish as often as I can. I'll often treat myself after a long day at the clinic by calling to order wild salmon sushi takeout as I head out the office door. Fish such as salmon (especially wild) and tuna are rich in mood-protecting omega-3 fatty acids. Research has found that people who eat fish less than once a week have almost a third higher incidence of mild to moderate depression when compared to people who eat fish more frequently. Note: don't eat too much fresh tuna, as it's high in mercury.

#### 5) Get Enough Folic Acid (hint: eat more leafy greens!)

Most of us are familiar with folic acid and have heard that this B vitamin should be taken as a supplement by all women of child-bearing age to prevent neural tube defects. In my office I've noticed that the only women of child-bearing age who seem to take this are the ones who are actively trying to bear children! That aside, research has found that many people who are depressed have low folic acid levels. In addition, antidepressant medications don't seem to be as effective if your folic acid levels are low. Consider taking a supplement, and make sure you eat lots of leafy greens such as spinach and kale. Other folic acid sources include lentils, asparagus, and peas.

#### 6) Limit Your Alcohol Intake

Though having a drink will give you an initial relaxed happy buzz, alcohol is actually a significant depressant. If you have troubles with your mood, it's best to stay away from it. It also negatively impacts the quality of your sleep, which can make your mood even worse the next day.

If you follow these "rules", you'll find that you not only protect your mood - you'll protect your overall health, too. Now that's my kind of side effect.

#### About Dr. Biali

Audiences and clients have described Dr. Susan Biali, an award-winning medical doctor, media wellness expert, author, speaker, life coach and flamenco dancer, as "passionate", "real", and "powerful". Formerly a sick, depressed Emergency Medicine resident, Dr. Biali took back her own life and health by learning how to balance her life, listen to her body, and create a life truly worth living. For the past four years, Dr. Biali commuted between her professional life in Canada and her passionate life in Los Cabos, Mexico, where she performed as a professional flamenco dancer for celebrities and exclusive audiences. She and her Latin husband, Armando, even taught Pink how to salsa dance! Today, Dr. Biali teaches others how to discover themselves, create vibrant health, and design the life of their dreams. Frequently featured in media across North America, Dr. Biali is a blogger for Psychology Today, is the weekly wellness expert for the national television program The Daily, and is currently developing her own television show

with a team of producers. She has appeared on MSNBC, The Good Life Network, and in Self, Fitness and Hello! magazines, and was even invited to perform flamenco dance on E! Entertainment Television. Her new book, Your Prescription for Life, will be released by New York's Beaufort Books in January 2010. [www.susanbiali.com](http://www.susanbiali.com)