

Foods to Boost Your Mood

By Stephanie Jurgenson, HHC, ADP*

Are you usually in a good mood? Or are there too many times when you feel grumpy? On some mornings are you ready to dive into your to-do list, but on other mornings you're burdened by the same demands? Are you generally calm and pleasant to be around, or do you find yourself losing your patience a little too often?

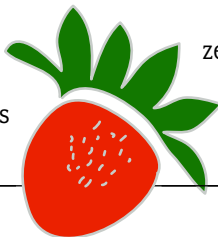
We all have a day now and then when we don't feel our best, and there are entirely justifiable occasions when frustrations get the better of our emotions and even tire us out. But when you don't bounce back, you might blame hormone shifts, sleep interruptions, an annoying person, or even the weather, when it could simply be the need for more color in your life! By that I mean the luscious red, orange, yellow, and green colors you find in fruits and veggies.

Food affects us on many levels. In a 2013 British study, 14,000 adults

answered questions about their diet and their mood; those who consumed less than three servings of fruits and veggies a day tended to feel down in the dumps, whereas those who ate five or more servings daily reported more positive feelings and fewer negative emotions.

Let's start with five common fruits and veggies and see how they can boost your mood:

Strawberries. This zesty fruit is loaded with vitamin C, a known stress reliever.

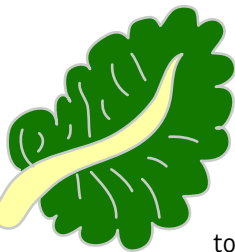


According to Mayo Clinic research, patients who are deficient in vitamin C often feel fatigued or depressed, and experience an improvement in mood after they receive vitamin C.

Carrots. This bright, crispy veggie is especially high in beta-carotene, which is classified as a carotenoid, a pigment that gives many fruits and vegetables their colors. According to a 2012 Harvard study on the effect of carotenoids, participants with higher carotenoid levels in their blood showed more optimism than those with lower levels.



Spinach. Green leafy vegetables such as spinach are some of the best sources of vitamin B9 (folate). B vitamins help convert carbohydrates into glucose, your body's basic fuel. Studies have



shown that those who consume spinach frequently tend to have more stamina. With more stamina, you have more enthusiasm.

Peas. Sometimes referred to as “little powerhouses of nutrition,” peas are a great source of complex carbohydrates, releasing energy more slowly than simple carbohydrates such as white rice, baked goods made with white flour, and fruit juices. Simple

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carbohydrates are metabolized quickly and can result in a blood sugar crash marked by shakiness, a lack of mental clarity, and fatigue. On the other hand, when your energy is sustained by complex carbs, it is natural to feel more capable of dealing with frustration and other challenges.

Bananas. This fruit favorite is high in vitamin B6 which helps the body synthesize its own serotonin, a brain chemical sometimes called “the happiness hormone” because it is critical to the regulation of mood and

sleep. A lack of vitamin B6 is often linked to confusion and depression.

But, do healthy foods directly produce healthy moods? Saying there is a direct *cause and effect* relationship between food and mood is different than saying there is a *correlation*. For example, people who consume five or more servings of fruits and veggies a day might also eat well-balanced meals, exercise regularly, and get a reasonable night's sleep, all of which contribute to a higher level of energy, which in turn improves a person's mood. However there is no need to take anyone's word for it; be your own experiment! In addition to the fruits and veggies you already eat daily, try adding three additional half-cup servings each day for two weeks—easy in a tangy, vitamin-packed smoothie—and keep a record of how you feel.

Celebrate the added value! It would be hard to overstate the multiple benefits of a diet rich in fresh fruit and veggies, so when you add more to your daily diet, don't be surprised if in addition to feeling happier, you notice healthier looking skin and hair, fewer colds, clearer vision, and improved memory, to name just a few.

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This article addresses mood fluctuations. See your doctor if you are experiencing profound or prolonged sadness, stress, pessimism, anxiety, lack of self-esteem, or have other mental or emotional concerns.

Mood Booster Smoothie

Blend in a food processor:

- 2 cups frozen, unsweetened strawberries
- ½ cup banana slices
- ½ cup fresh spinach
- 1 teaspoon. cinnamon (or to taste)
- Juice of 1 lemon (or to taste)
- 1 teaspoon honey
- 1 cup cold milk

Makes 2 one-cup smoothies.

Resources and Suggested Reading

- ◆ *British Journal of Health Psychology*
- ◆ *MayoClinic.org, “Nutrition and Healthy Eating”*
- ◆ *BelmarraHealth.com, “Happiness and Carrots”*
- ◆ *Umm.edu (University of Maryland Medical Center), “Vitamin B9, Folic Acid”*