

Hunger Is All In Your Head

All of your hunger signals come from the brain and are under the control of strong messengers called *neurotransmitters*. Some neurotransmitters help you with energy while others help you to relax or sleep. Dopamine and serotonin are the most important neurotransmitters for appetite control. High levels of these messengers satisfy your appetite, while low levels cause you to become hungry or to overeat.

Cravings for caffeine, chocolate, sweets, fried food or salty food indicate low or depleted dopamine levels. Cravings for bread or pasta signal low serotonin levels. Lack of sleep, restricting important nutrients in your diet, environmental toxins, and taking certain medications can also deplete the amount of neurotransmitters in your system.

Lack of willpower is actually a biochemical deficiency of neurotransmitters in the hunger center of the brain. The deficiency occurs especially when you are under a lot of stress.

Dopamine and serotonin also control the emotional center of the brain. This is the center that helps us to cope with conflict, stress and other feelings. When we are low in these neurotransmitters we may feel depressed, lethargic, angry or anxious.

Your levels of dopamine and serotonin are changing all the time. A good example of this flux is experienced by women with P.M.S. As the hormone cycles shift, the neurotransmitter balance also shifts and symptoms of irritability, lethargy, food cravings and anxiety may occur.

Commonly prescribed antidepressant medications, such as Prozac, Paxil, Lexapro, Zoloft, Effexor and Wellbutrin, work by using the dopamine or serotonin already in the brain. These medications do not work very well if you are depleted of neurotransmitters.

1. I. Symptoms of low levels of dopamine can include the following:

1. Depression
2. Fatigue
3. Decreased sex drive
4. Increased appetite: feeling hungry often
5. Cravings for chocolate, caffeine, sweets, fatty foods and salty foods.
6. Chronic allergies, headaches and muscle aches
7. Premenstrual breast tenderness

The amino acid tyrosine is needed for the production of dopamine. L-Tyrosine is found mostly in meat. Almonds, peanuts, bananas, avocados, lima beans, pickled herring, pumpkin seeds and sesame seeds also provide some.

The right amount of serotonin helps you to feel calm and secure.

II. Symptoms of low levels of serotonin can include the following:

1. Anxiety
2. Irritability
3. Anger
4. Restlessness
5. Difficulty knowing when you are full
6. Cravings for bread, bagels and pasta
7. Cravings for alcohol and nicotine
8. Premenstrual syndrome symptoms of mood and appetite changes
9. Psoriasis

The amino acid tryptophan is needed to make serotonin. The food highest in tryptophan is turkey. Foods high in tryptophan include: chicken, beef, brown rice, nuts, fish, eggs, bananas, dried dates, fruit, and vegetables.

Small amounts of carbohydrates are necessary to make serotonin, which helps the body relax and sleep. Having adequate amounts of dopamine and serotonin will enable you to have a normal appetite response. A warm, relaxing bath can cause a rise in serotonin, so we recommend you try this before your evening meal. The rise in serotonin will make you feel more full, causing you to eat less. Prayer or meditation also raises serotonin. Rhythmic music with lots of drums and bass increase dopamine release, while mellow mood music raises serotonin. Dancing to the beat of music helps dopamine to surge. The morning is a great time to put on some music and dance.