

Serotonin

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Are You Low in Serotonin?

The serotonin molecule (5-HT), is a neurotransmitter that helps to control brain function and fine-tunes the activity of nerve cells. It's also involved in our working memory (multi-tasking) and social behavior.

Serotonin deficiency is linked to anxiousness, stress, poor sleep, impaired learning and memory, impulsiveness, and pessimism.

How to Increase Serotonin Levels Naturally

Serotonin supplements are linked to increased brain serotonin molecule production, and may also increase brain activity of dopamine, which is regulated by serotonin. This helps to improve your mood, working memory, sleep, and lessen anxiousness.

BEST VITAMINS TO INCREASE SEROTONIN:

1) Vitamin B6

This vitamin is essential for the brain to produce the serotonin molecule and the other major neurotransmitters dopamine and norepinephrine (adrenaline).

2) Methylfolate

Methylfolate (MTHF) is the most active form of the folate B vitamin. All our cells need methyl to maintain their DNA. In clinical trials, supplementation of methyl folate consistently improves mood.

3) Saffron

Saffron is a Middle Eastern spice and has been revered for over 2600 years for its excellent mood enhancing benefits. Modern double-blind clinical trials now consistently report its remarkable mood benefits.

The Best Natural Ways to Increase Serotonin

Do you often have negative thoughts racing through your mind? Do you notice that you are more lethargic, irritable, or sad for no reason? Our brain requires a balance of vital neurotransmitters that help to control our feelings of happiness or positive mood.

You may have heard about dopamine, oxytocin, and endorphins as being contributing factors to feeling happy. Similar to these neurotransmitters, serotonin plays many important roles in the brain's biochemistry and is intimately involved in facilitating sustained and deep sleep, maintaining healthy mood and self-confidence, even supporting a healthy appetite and social engagement.

What is Serotonin?

Our brains produce a naturally soothing neurotransmitter called serotonin, from before birth and all through life. Serotonin is the key hormone that stabilizes our mood, feelings of well-being, and happiness. Additionally, it helps decrease our worries and concerns and is associated with learning and memory.

“People who are clinically depressed often have very low levels of serotonin,” Dr. Daniel Amen, MD. (credit to Dr. Amen for this information with my added notes).

Some studies suggest that women produce 52 percent less serotonin than men. Levels seem to fluctuate with menstrual cycles, which may explain why women are more prone to depression.

Less sunlight may also cause a drop in the neurotransmitter (chemical messengers that help the brain to function) serotonin, which in turn can initiate low mood. While serotonin levels may dip with less exposure to sunlight, many people suffer from low serotonin year-round.

When your serotonin levels are too low you're more likely to become irritable, anxious, and perceive the world as unfriendly. You may feel depressed, pessimistic, and have irregular appetite and sleep.

The good news is serotonin can be increased in the brain (and body) by eating the proper foods and/or supplementing your diet. So how can we help to increase our own serotonin levels?

4 Ways to Increase Serotonin Naturally

Here are 4 of the best strategies to increase your serotonin levels:

1. Break a Sweat – Daily!

Exercise is a serotonin intervention – it boosts serotonin in your brain. Multiple research studies have demonstrated that exercise is at least equally effective at increasing available serotonin as serotonin-enhancing medications are, and in some cases exercise is more effective. Recently, several studies concluded that positive mood in individuals is a strong predictor of physical health.

Consistent daily physical activity one of the best ways to improve your serotonin levels and your overall brain health.

2. Keep Your Gut in Check

Much of the serotonin in your body is produced in your gut, so strategies designed to optimize gut health and the production of serotonin could certainly go a long way toward optimizing your mental health. Make sure you are taking a quality probiotic, properly hydrating, and eating a brain-healthy diet.

3. Eat The Right Food

Foods high in simple carbohydrates, such as pasta, potatoes, bread, pastries, pretzels, and popcorn, typically increase insulin levels and allow more tryptophan (the natural amino acid building block for serotonin) to enter the brain, where the brain cells can convert it to serotonin. The calming effect of serotonin can often be felt in within thirty minutes of eating these foods. This may be one of the reasons simple carbohydrates are so addictive. **They can be used to make you feel happy, but can also cause high blood sugar levels that can contribute to memory problems over time as well as excess body fat. Note: sweet potatoes, wheat free pastas (yes, they do exist) are better choices. For bread, if necessary, use sprouted, non-GMO.**



We recommend complex carbohydrates, such as sweet potatoes, apples, blueberries, carrots, and garbanzo beans, as a healthier way to boost serotonin. Brain serotonin levels can also be raised by eating foods rich in L-tryptophan, such as chicken, eggs, cheese, turkey, beef, salmon and tuna, tempeh, beans, lentils, spinach and other dark green leafy vegetables, pumpkin and chia seeds, and nuts. Many people may unknowingly trigger cognitive inflexibility or mood problems by eating diets that are low in L-tryptophan. **Note: Make sure your meats are grass fed, wild caught and hormone free (and of course antibiotic free). Also, organic produce to reduce toxic exposure.**

Dr. Amen (and many other nutritional experts) states that "certain nutrients can help metabolize and help utilize serotonin most efficiently. Some of these nutrients include magnesium, zinc, folic acid, fish oils, vitamins C and B6."

4. Natural Serotonin Supplements

Serotonin supplements that provide vitamins B6, B12, and folate, as well as concentrates of saffron, can help **support** healthy serotonin levels. A direct way is 5HTP, an amino acid that naturally supports and boosts serotonin. **I have found 100 mg in afternoon (particularly if sugar and/or**

carb cravings begin then) and another 100 mg in evening, can greatly reduce sugar and carb cravings.

Note: If you are taking an SSRI, let your provider know so he or she can determine how to substitute 5HTP or to wean off the SSRI if that is your choice. In any case, consult with whomever prescribed your SSRI.