

MOOD FOOD

Research on the connection between a person's mood and the food he or she eats has revealed what many people have long believed, that eating a certain food can influence a person's mood—at least temporarily. Research by a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), has focused on how certain foods alter one's mood by influencing the level of certain brain chemicals called **neurotransmitters**. While many other factors influence the level of these chemicals, such as **hormones**, heredity, **drugs**, and alcohol, three neurotransmitters - dopamine, norepinephrine, and **serotonin** - have been studied in relation to food, and show that neurotransmitters are produced in the brain from certain foods.

How does **diet** play a role? The foods that increase the production of serotonin in the brain are high in **carbohydrates**. Many kinds of foods carbohydrates, such as candy, cereal, and pasta, can produce a temporary increase in brain serotonin—and a subsequent calming or anxiety-reducing effect. This explains why people may feel drowsy in the afternoon after eating a large meal of pasta, since a rise in serotonin in the brain can also lead to drowsiness. Carbohydrates affect brain serotonin because they increase the amount of tryptophan in the brain. Tryptophan is the amino-acid precursor of serotonin.

The food-mood response is short term. Eating tuna at lunch may increase alertness and concentration for two to three hours after eating, just as having pasta with tomato sauce will produce a calming response for two to three hours.

Circadian rhythms also affect eating and performance. These rhythms influence when individuals are more active, and when they are more likely to be sleepy. Research indicates there are different eating patterns for individuals with different rhythms. These eating patterns can enhance **energy** levels and performance. For example, "morning people" are usually at their best and most focused during the early hours of the day. Although breakfast is important, what foods these people eat becomes more important at lunch and throughout the afternoon. The energy level of a morning person begins to drop during the afternoon, and evening is their least alert and productive time. Thus, what they choose to eat at lunch and for snacks can make a difference in how they feel later in the day.

Someday, there may be menus that offer foods for their intended mood effects. Such a menu might have selections such as "Smart Soup," "Happy Hamburger," "Serene Salad," or "Sleepy Spaghetti." **Bon Appétit**

Chef Michael's Kitchen



Papaya Soup

Ingredients

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 tablespoon grated root ginger
- Salt and pepper
- 675 gr papaya, peeled, seeded and cubes
- 4 mint leaves
- 1.1 litre water

Instructions

- Heat the olive oil in a large saucepan, add the onion in a pan and sauté until soft and transparent
- Add the ginger and cook, stirring, for a further two minutes
- Add the papaya cubes, mint, salt, pepper and water, mix well and bring to the boil. Cover and continue boiling for 20 minutes
- Stir the soup to break up any large pieces of papaya
- Serve hot or cold, corn, broccoli, fennel, snow peas, heart of palms.



Chef Michael with Hans Peter Betz from the InterContinental Hotel at a recent event.