

Is your teen moody? The solution may be in your pantry

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

One minute they're happy, the next they're stomping up to their bedroom and slamming the door. Sound familiar? If it does, you're probably the parent of a teenager. There are several reasons your teen may be acting up. It could be their hormones, the stress of college applications or exhaustion from staying up too late to finish homework.

Or maybe it's their diet. "Diet can regulate chemicals in the body in the same way that psychotropic drugs can for depression and anxiety," says Stephani Waldron-Trapp, ND, a faculty clinician at Northwestern Health Sciences University's Bloomington Natural Care Center in Bloomington, Minn. Waldron-Trapp suggests these nutrition tips to help even out your teen's mood:

—The food—chemical connection. Neurotransmitters, such as serotonin and dopamine, are chemicals in the brain that communicate with the rest of the body and regulate emotion. If your teen isn't eating enough, the body cannot manufacture enough of these important chemicals. This can lead to depression and anxiety.

—Eat every meal—and then some. Skipping meals leads to a dramatic drop in blood sugar, while snacking on simple carbohydrates (like cookies and white bread) will cause your blood sugar to sky rocket. Both may cause mood swings and make your teen irritable.

Make sure your teen is eating breakfast, lunch and dinner, along with healthy snacks to maintain level blood sugar throughout the day. "Focus on amino acids, and consume them every two hours throughout the day to keep things stable," says Waldron-Trapp. "Amino acids can be consumed via proteins or supplements."

—Eat fatty foods...really. But not saturated fat, like the fat in butter and other unhealthy foods. Eat monosaturated fat, like the healthy fat found in fish. Healthy fats keep your brain and hormones functioning properly.

"Teenage girls are especially deprived of healthy fats," says Waldron-Trapp. "They tend to eat fat-free foods as a form of weight management. However, hormones such as estrogen need fat to function. If you're having trouble getting your teenager to consume fatty-foods, supplement

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their diet with cod-liver oil or fish oil supplements.”

—Fruits and veggies will make you happy. Fruits and vegetables contain vitamins B6, C and zinc, which are vital to the creation of serotonin in the brain. If you’re having trouble getting your children to eat their fruits and vegetables, try a multivitamin. In addition, tryptophan, the chemical found in chicken and turkey, also has a positive affect on serotonin.

—Feeling blue? Go ahead, eat ice cream. If comfort food makes you feel happier on a bad day, go for it—but eat it in moderation. Foods and smells can often trigger comforting memories and feelings. Just make sure you aren’t reaching for your comfort food daily, because that could be a sign of a deeper problem.

“You could also switch to soy ice cream, rice-based ice cream, or coconut milk ice cream,” suggests Waldron-Trapp. “The calorie intake will probably be comparable to regular ice cream, but there are fewer additives in dairy-free ice cream.”

—Get your teen out of their room. Vitamin D is an essential vitamin that is linked to mood and is a vitamin that many people are lacking. “Ninety percent of my patients are vitamin D deficient,” says Waldron-Trapp. “It’s a common problem in the Northern states.” Exposure to sunlight and supplements will provide more vitamin D for your teen. Waldron-Trapp encourages parents to get their teen’s vitamin D (25OHD3) levels checked at their next annual physical.

All teenagers are bound to act moody every now and then, but concentrating on a healthy diet might make for a smoother transition into adulthood.