

Antidepressants and Nutrition

When your doctor recommends an antidepressant, s/he believes that a chemical imbalance is partially responsible for the symptoms you reported. This part of treatment is often absolutely necessary in order for you to make some of the changes in your eating that you desire. Here are some important things to know about antidepressant medication that can help you succeed in achieving a healthy eating pattern.

1. **Your antidepressant is not a “happy” pill!** Antidepressants may make some sadness go away, but they also increase awareness of other emotions you may have been unaware of. This may feel new and fearful. If you are not accustomed to these feelings, the temptation to eat more or less food may arise. Your food journal can help you to understand how some of your emotions are expressed with food behavior; rather than stopping the medication, consider this an opportunity to understand your communication patterns and to develop new ones which do not include food (or lack of it).

2. **If your weight changed as a result of your depression, anxiety, or obsessive-compulsive disorder, medication may normalize or change your weight.** For some this may mean weight gain, for others, weight loss. And some medications cause weight gain or loss in some people. Rather than refuse medication for fear of the weight change it may produce, address these issues with your psychiatrist, psychologist, therapist and nutrition therapist.

3. **Your nervous system is largely composed of fatty tissue.** To improve nervous system function, mood, and response to medication, it is important to eat a minimal amount of fat. A teaspoon of some type of fat at each meal plus 3 ounces of fat-containing protein at lunch and dinner is still considered low enough in fat to be healthy, but high enough to provide your brain and nerves with what they need to properly function. The dietary fat best used by the nervous system is found in fish and fish oil supplements; their use will help to maximize the effectiveness of your antidepressant and minimize the dosage you need.

4. **Serotonin and dopamine, two important chemicals crucial to proper brain function, are derived from protein.** It is important to eat a minimum of 7 ounces of protein a day; otherwise, your antidepressant medication may not be as effective as it could be.

5. **A variety of foods is very important, as there are dozens of vitamins and minerals that are needed by the central nervous system.** If your current food habits limit you intake to a few “safe” foods, it is important to let your nutrition therapist know so that she can help you develop a plan to get reacquainted with your “fear” foods.

6. **A craving for sugar may indicate several things:**

- Not eating enough food
- Not eating enough protein
- Emotional stress
- A need for medication or a medication adjustment
- A hormonal change such as happens premenstrually

This craving is not bad, and in fact is crucial to report to your nutrition therapist.

7. **Antidepressants typically require about 6 weeks to achieve effectiveness.** It is important to give them a chance to work and not discontinue them during this time. Nutrition changes that did not work before might work well in combination with antidepressant medication. Be sure to ask your nutrition therapist to help you with challenges that didn't work before.

8. Whenever you feel like the treatment is not working, TALK ABOUT IT! You may be experiencing a side effect that can be addressed, you maybe experiencing unfamiliar feelings that are important to understand. Whatever the feeling, it usually feels better to share it with someone than it does to hold it inside.

Adapted from: After the Diet, Used with permission.