

MIND & MOOD matters

By Kelly Rose

The brain is a vital, fascinating organ and has immense requirements to keep it functioning and healthy. Mental health often alters when the brain lacks the adequate support it needs and memory and mood may be affected.

Certain circumstances may also leave the brain with additional needs, so what can be done to support your mental health?

BLOOD FLOW

The brain is a blood thirsty organ and over 20% of blood leaving the heart goes straight to the brain. Blood supplied to the brain carries vital oxygen, glucose and other important nutrients and so supporting circulation can be key to getting these nutrients to the brain. Compounds such as arginine pyroglutamate, ginkgo and periwinkle may aid healthy circulation.

MEMORY

Acetylcholine is a brain chemical that is linked to many brain processes, including memory. There are many nutrients that are used in the manufacture and release of acetylcholine including choline, phosphatidyl serine, DMAE and vitamin B1. There is evidence to show that memory issues may be related to high levels of inflammation. Taking a natural approach to reducing inflammation is wise. The omega 3 fatty acids found in oily fish are linked with regulating inflammation and low levels of omega 3 have been shown to lead to an impaired ability to think effectively.

PROTECTION

Protecting the brain is essential for preserving its healthy functioning, and antioxidant nutrients not only offer protection but also play a role in keeping inflammation in check.

A good variety of antioxidant rich fruits and vegetables are important. Some of the most beneficial antioxidants for protection of brain tissue include the fat-soluble antioxidants such as vitamin E, CoQ10 and alpha lipoic acid. Extra vitamin C may also be beneficial as it can support the regeneration of vitamin E. Zinc helps our body to produce antioxidant enzymes, such as superoxide dismutase (SOD), and a low level of zinc has been linked to memory loss. Supplemental zinc may contribute to good memory retention.

STRESS AND ANXIETY

Psychological stress is often down to how each individual perceives an event or consequence. The way in which a person responds or reacts can be a result of alterations in brain chemicals or co-factors.

Supplying what is needed to balance the brain and body can be essential for stress relief. Vitamin C, magnesium and B vitamins are all readily used during stressful times. Vitamin B5 in particular is required for the production of anti-stress hormones.

The herb rhodiola is an adaptogenic herb, which offers support during times of stress and may help to relieve symptoms such as fatigue and mild anxiety. As stress may often be associated with anxiety, nutrients such as magnesium and theanine may be of use in reducing or controlling anxiety.

Herbs may also be of use and passionflower has been shown to be as effective as some anti-anxiety medication. More recent research has shown that magnolia may be of use and scientists have found it contains specific compounds that aid in the reduction of anxiety.

MOOD

Mood pattern alteration may be down to several factors including imbalanced neurotransmitter levels. The neurotransmitter serotonin may be altered in low mood and supporting this pathway may be beneficial. The amino acid tryptophan is the precursor to serotonin and low levels have been shown to affect mood. Supplementing with tryptophan may raise the levels of serotonin. Tryptophan is first converted to 5HTP then to serotonin and supplements of 5HTP may also be effective. The herb St John's Wort also demonstrates an action on serotonin levels and has been found to assist in mild to moderate clinical depression.

An area that is gaining a lot of attention recently is that of the link between mood and inflammation. It has been found that levels of inflammatory markers are high in cases of low mood. Curcumin, from the spice turmeric, has long been known to have an effect on inflammation and recent studies show it may be of use for mood patterns.

The omega 3 fatty acids, EPA and DHA, are incorporated into brain tissue and are known to influence mood. Several studies have backed up their use in cases of low mood.



SLEEP

Sleep issues may occur when stressed or with low mood. Whatever the cause, sleep deprivation can be debilitating. Natural support for restoring healthy sleep patterns includes 5HTP. Once 5HTP is converted to serotonin it can then be converted to melatonin during the hours of darkness. Herbal support includes valerian, which may reduce the amount of time it takes to get to sleep, as well as improving sleep quality and reducing the number of awakenings. Hops have also been found to have qualities that assist with sleep and a combination of valerian and hops may be effective.

Whatever the problem, rest assured there are natural ways to offer support for your mind.