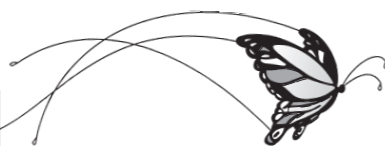


# Food and Mood



## Greetings...

I recently returned from a Trade Show and my first visit to Shanghai and Suzhou in Mainland China. I consider myself a fairly broad-spectrum person but I was unprepared for the sights, sounds and smells of this intriguing, stimulating and very different culture. Shanghai has 15 million and Suzhou 3 million inhabitants, and the sheer number of people alone is extraordinary to those of us used to space, distant horizons and clean air.

I was fortunate to spend some time with a lovely lady I met as a Nutressence client through the internet. She is a native of Shanghai and introduced me to the local cuisine and eating styles. There were always a wide variety of fresh vegetables, some of which I did not recognise, with rice and tofu dishes standard plus several meat dishes. Desserts consisted of fresh fruits and the occasional sweet bun but never the large, syrupy concoctions we see so often in the West. Seasonality and regional specialities played a major role in each meal and tea was the universal beverage.

The Chinese people I dined with were all hearty eaters and the meals were relaxed, full of conversation and a tribute to the "Slow Food Movement" which advocates a leisurely approach to nutrition. It was not unusual to have ten dishes on the table at one time yet, in the presence of so much food, it was rare to see a person who was overweight. This set me thinking about our

(continued overleaf)

The events of September 11, 2001 have changed the world. We have been reminded of how fragile life is and of the value of family, friends and co-workers. This is a good time for each of us to focus upon things that bind us all together rather than those that separate us. My subject is nutrition, which pales in comparison to some of the things currently occupying our collective thoughts, but even diet has a positive role to play. When was the last time someone else's stress or bad feelings impacted your day, or a stranger offered you a friendly smile which gave you a little lift? I have been thinking about the connection between food and emotional health and found some recent research about mental calmness and clarity, plus nutrients that specifically help you feel less stressed.

Many people experience a mid-morning or afternoon slump, which can be a result of poor attention to basic caloric intake rather than workload or negative events outside their control. Skipping meals when you are too busy or stressed is a seductive trap, especially if it makes you feel virtuous for placing work or body image above your basic needs. However, your body, especially the emotional brain, needs calories to function efficiently. The catch phrase now is "working smarter, not harder" and this is where sensible nutrition is the smart way to go.

You may not be aware that your brain uses up to 20% of the energy you generate and to operate at optimum efficiency, it needs to be well hydrated and have constant blood nutrient and blood sugar levels. Sensible fuelling means eating complex carbohydrate and protein along with sensible amounts of fat and oil, the goal being to reach and hold nutrient and energy levels. A bowl of sugar laden cereal, a sweet muffin, a cup of coffee or a can of the new energy drinks can give your blood sugar and brain a quick boost but it quickly fades and the cycle repeats itself. Some smart foods include water, a variety of vegetables, fruits, nuts and seeds, non-sugar muesli with milk, wholegrain sandwich with cheese or meats, a baked potato, a boiled egg, baked beans, bagel with cream cheese and sliced tomato or an omelette. The list goes on and on but all these items are readily available and can be eaten at any meal to improve your mood and staying power.

Scientific studies have shown diets high in selenium, chromium and fat can improve mood, whereas diets low in these nutrients may lead to hostility, anxiety and other negative emotions. Several studies indicate people eating a high selenium diet were clear headed and less confused, more composed and less anxious and more confident and less unsure. They also had significant decrease in overall mood disturbances. This should be a wake up call to all residents of selenium deficient New Zealand.

I will save the discussion of fats and oils for another time but please remember, you should have a small amount of fats or oils with each meal to properly absorb and utilise the fat soluble vitamins and antioxidants in the food. Chromium can enhance mood by helping maintain steady blood sugar levels through insulin metabolism. Most western diets are chromium deficient but it is often found in food supplements, including Nutressence.

Quality of life depends upon so many variables but there is nothing more basic to our well being than good diet. It is one of the few essentials in life over which we have some real control, yet so many follow the marketing and advertising and ignore the wealth of information and sound advice on how you can eat your way to a happier attitude and a better future.

## NUTRITION NOTES

### Dehydration in The Air

Flying internationally has become more stressful than usual. Air travel is dehydrating as you breathe the dry recycled air and your normal access to water is disrupted. Couple this with longer waiting times in Customs and more extensive security screens and your body could be stressed even more. Before you leave home, make sure you have a large bottle of water handy and maintain your fluid balance. Ref Spring01/1

### Work-outs and Trace Minerals

Strenuous exercise can increase the losses of important trace minerals such as chromium, necessary for carbohydrate and fat utilization and proper insulin function. In fact, one study found athletes on a six-mile run doubled their chromium losses compared to a rest day. Good food sources of chromium include mushrooms, prunes, nuts, whole grains, asparagus and brewers yeast and for the serious athlete, supplementation with a bio-available source is a good idea. Ref Spring01/2

### Hot and Humid

Ever wonder what your body is losing while you are busy "glowing" at the gym or jogging on the beach? Sweat is mainly water with some sodium chloride (table salt), some potassium chloride and a little calcium and magnesium. Before you reach for the sugar charged electrolyte replacement drink after your next aerobics class, consider drinking a 250ml glass of orange or tomato juice. This replaces all the calcium, magnesium or potassium lost in 3 litres of sweat; doesn't have all the sugar and tastes good too. By the way, you would have to work extremely hard during a 60-minute class to lose 3 litres. Ref Spring01/3

### Serving Size Query

When reading nutrition articles the food guide pyramid is often referred to and the base of that pyramid is the bread, cereal and pasta group. I was recently asked if the 6 to 11 servings a day recommended was excessive. Perhaps, but the questioner did not know a serving size corresponded to one slice of bread, 1 oz or 30 grams of cereal or half a cup of cooked pasta or rice. Remember, it is a guide only but I find it is pretty easy to come up with 6 servings in a normal three-meal day. Ref Spring01/4

### Tea or Coffee... Boring!

Going out for a coffee with friends on the weekend is a treat as you can choose from an extensive menu of lattes, moccachinos, espressos etc. There is no reason why the workplace tea room choices can't be interesting and not caffeine dependent. Before you zoom out and buy an espresso machine and have everyone in the office caffeine addicted, try stocking the staff kitchen with a range of herbal teas from calming chamomile to stimulating Red Zinger. Inka or Ecco are great coffee substitutes while Japanese and Chinese tea offer interesting, healthy alternatives. Ref Spring01/5

### Bulking up Breakfast

Increasing the fibre content in your family's diet is very easy and can have far reaching health benefits in the prevention of cardiovascular disease, diabetes and obesity. Switch from white to whole grain bread and double your fibre intake. To your morning cereal bowl add a dash of All-Bran that has more than 6 times the fibre of breakfast cereals like Rice Krispies or Cornflakes. Include half a cup of raspberries on top and you have added another 3.5grams of fibre. Ref Spring01/6

### Don't "B" Stressed

Feeling stressed and reaching for the bottle of B-Vitamins? Consider increasing your dietary intake of foods rich in B-Vitamins. Also, friendly intestinal microbes manufacture many B-vitamins, so it makes good sense to pay more attention to your diet and gastrointestinal health. Foods rich in the B's include beans, peas, whole grains, green leafy vegetables, fish, liver, eggs, dairy foods, pork, broccoli, wheat germ, oatmeal and poultry. Ref Spring01/7

### Greetings cont.

Western approach with very large portions and not much variety. Perhaps we should tempt our taste buds with great variety to appease hunger instead of great portions of one or two items like pizza or fish and chips? There may well be more ways of feeling "full" than through the stomach.

I like the idea that food variety could be a link to viewing overeating from a different perspective. The stimulation of interacting with others while eating instead of "alone" in front of the television or in the car deserves some thought as well. A recent study at Harvard University of over 3,000 women with type two diabetes found over 90% were overweight, inactive and smoked. If a few changes in eating style could help reduce even one of these factors, the benefits could be great. Imagine the additional benefit that could come if we added a bit of exercise like walking for 30 minutes every day. Perhaps it is time to foster a spirit of adventurous eating and focusing on the possibilities instead of the restrictions.

  
Dr. Kathrine Davis

