



Holiday Blues, or just Your Brain on Inflammation?

Picture this: It's dessert time after a sumptuous holiday meal and the family is gathered around the table. Your uncle turns to your grandmother and says, "Mom, can you please pass some of that delicious depression?"

"Sure thing, honey," she responds. "Would you like some anxiety to go with it?"

It sounds ridiculous, not least because so few of us are seeing our families in person this year amid the pandemic. No one would consciously provide their loved one with substances that would exacerbate holiday sadness or anxiety and yet, according to scientists, that may be exactly what we're doing every time we drop off another batch of homemade cookies for our neighbors.

Sugar, it turns out, is a key source of inflammation, a condition that has been persuasively linked to all manner of health conditions, including mental ones. A 2019 University of Kansas study found that sugar can set off metabolic, inflammatory and neurobiological processes linked to depression. For those already coping with Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), cookies or sweets may seem like a quick path to an energy boost but in fact they cause a tipping point that sends people over the edge into full-blown depression.

According to Stephen Ilardi, one of the studies' authors and a professor of clinical psychology at the University of Kansas, sugar and candy can function like a drug when they enter our systems. "They have an immediate mood-elevating effect," Ilardi notes, "but in high doses they can also have a paradoxical, pernicious longer-term consequence of elevating inflammation, making mood worse, and reducing well-being."

Chronic inflammation has been linked to diseases ranging from inflammatory bowel disease to rheumatoid arthritis. Its role in depression is only more recently understood. In the short term, inflammation helps the body fight off infection but over time, it wears down receptor sites and interferes with essential functions, leading to a host of health issues. Recent studies discovered that people who have lessened connectivity between brain regions related to motivation and enjoyment of life also have high inflammation markers.

"When you have different imbalances in your body and in your life in terms of vitamin and mineral deficiencies, gut bacteria and stress," says Madeleine Castellanos, a functional medicine psychiatrist in New York, "it can result in too much inflammation, and that can lead to depressive symptoms."

Sugar isn't the only culprit when it comes to inflammation. Processed foods, refined carbohydrates and trans fats can also have a negative impact on our health. It should come as no surprise, therefore that the holidays, in all of their gluttonous glory, are a challenging time for many. Any feelings of loneliness, loss or depression will be further aggravated if we drown our sorrows in a tub of ice cream, overindulge in pie or hit the salty snacks too hard before Christmas dinner.

Yet certain types of food are not the only source of inflammation. Our everyday lives are filled with products that contain heavy metals that influence brain chemistry, synthetic materials that interfere with our hormonal communication system (not to mention our reproductive



capabilities) and pesticides that cause long term damage. With all of these invaders to contend with, our natural toxin elimination system, also known as the liver, becomes overwhelmed and its function is compromised.

While you may not be able to resist that second helping of pumpkin pie this holiday season, one way to support yourself and ward off the seasonal blues is by safely and gently eliminating environmental toxins that increase inflammation. Soluble zeolite is a safe and gentle way to detox without putting the body under undue stress. Vitality Detox Drops contain nanosized increments of soluble zeolite which are small enough to permeate cellular membranes. Their negative charge attracts heavy metals and other toxins to them and the naturally occurring cage-like structure of zeolite ensures that once caught, they can't get away.

Eliminating environmental toxins over time will not completely halt the impacts of consuming sugar or other foods that contribute to inflammation, but it may help with improving your overall mood during the holidays.

If you do want to change your diet to better support mental health, Ilardi recommends a minimally processed diet which mainly consists of plant-based foods and Omega-3 fatty acids. Other potentials for averting holiday depression include practicing mindfulness through yoga, breathing exercises or meditation and managing expectations, especially given the modified celebrations most of us will be experiencing this year. Any beneficial habits you create now can carry you into next year on a high note.

In the meantime, maybe use honey instead of sugar for those cookies you're bringing to your neighbor.

References

["Want to Avoid the Holiday Blues? New Report Suggests Skipping the Sweet Treats"](#) Science Daily, December 12, 2019

["The Link Between Chronic Inflammation and Mental Health"](#), Genesight blog

["4 Foods that Might Make Depression Worse"](#), Katie Hurley, PsyCom 2020