

[IMAGE]

Food Flavors As Mood Stabilizers

Could there really be some scientific truth to "comfort foods?" A study presented recently at the National Meeting and Exposition of the American Chemical Society found that new evidence shows a possibility that some food flavors can have mood-enhancing effects on people, as some flavors from natural ingredients bear a striking chemical resemblance to valproic acid, a widely used prescription mood-stabilizing drug.

Lead researcher Karina Martinez-Mayorga said that, "molecules found in chocolate, a variety of berries and foods containing omega-3 fatty acids have shown positive effects on mood. In turn, our studies show that some commonly used flavor components are structurally similar to valproic acid." Valproic acid is used to regulate the mood swings of people suffering from manic depressive disorders and related conditions.

"The large body of evidence that chemicals in chocolate, blueberries, raspberries, strawberries, teas and certain foods could well be mood enhancers encourages the search for other mood modulators in food," said Martinez-Mayorga. Her team's research is fostering an even greater push by the food and beverage industry to understand, as well as the pharmaceutical industry to better understand how these compounds affect, and potentially help maintain, cognitive health, mental alertness and if they can even delay the onset of memory loss.

chocolate - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark The study screened the chemical structures of more than 1,700 food flavor ingredients for similarities to approved anti-depressant drugs, marketed drugs and agents with reported antidepressant activities. The team's next area of study is to actually begin testing the flavor and mood hypothesis experimentally. The team hopes that this further research will result in possible changes in dietary recommendations and new nutritional supplements that might have a positive impact on mood effects.

"It is important to remember that just eating foods that may improve mood is not a substitute for prescribed antidepressant drugs," said Martinez-Mayorga. However, for people that do not require mood stabilizing medication, eating specific foods with these stabilizing properties could be a great way to change your lifestyle and improve your mood without the possible side effects some of these anti-depressant drugs provide.

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