What Are the Best and Worst Foods for Bipolar?

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Bipolar Diet: Foods to Avoid and Foods to Eat

Bipolar disorder is known for its major shifts in mood, energy, thoughts, and behavior that change from mania at the extreme to depression lows.

Research shows unhealthy diets can trigger bipolar mania and lead to additional health risks. To help manage mania mood shifts, it is important to follow a healthy diet, including eating more fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and lean meats, and by avoiding trigger foods.

The Connection Between Bipolar Disorder and Diet

Your brain and your body need a healthy diet to function. A healthy diet will also help to decrease the severity and frequency of manic episodes.

One report from the journal, *World Psychiatry* finds up to 68 percent of people with bipolar are overweight, due to depression responses (overeating) and as a side effect of their medications.

A 2013 study from the Mayo Clinic finds that at least ten percent of people with bipolar disorder also have a binge eating disorder, which is higher for people with bipolar than others in the general population. This study also found people with bipolar are also more likely to be overweight, and suffer from additional health problems, such as anxiety, high blood pressure and diabetes.

Research from *The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* finds poor diet in people with bipolar may contribute to a worsening disease course and minimize beneficial effects of treatments. This is consistent with findings from the *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, showing eating certain trigger foods leads to worse treatment responses.

Foods to Avoid Eating With Bipolar

A healthy diet for bipolar doesn't just consistent of healthy foods to eat. It also includes foods you should not eat. The following diet triggers are ones people with bipolar should avoid, as these may worsen your symptoms:

Caffeine

Caffeine is a stimulant so that it can worsen symptoms of mania. While you should always keep your caffeine intake low, it is especially important to avoid caffeine during a manic episode.

Avoid soda, coffee, and energy drinks as much as possible. Try herbal teas or water instead; herbal teas give you natural energy and water keeps you hydrated without sugar and empty calories.

Sugar

Consuming too much-refined sugar causes major mania. Refined sugars include white and brown table sugars have gone through a refining process to remove beneficial nutrients and impurities.

Refined sugars also increase your insulin levels. And when you crash, your brain chemistry and other body processes respond quickly and intensely, which means more extreme mood shifts.

Alcohol

Alcohol and bipolar do not mix, as liquor worsens mania and may interact with bipolar medications, especially those containing lithium. And alcohol is a leading trigger in depressive episodes in people with bipolar.

Studies have shown people with bipolar are more likely to develop a drug or alcohol addiction. One report from *The Lancet Psychiatry* finds people with bipolar have a higher chance of dying prematurely if they abuse alcohol or other substances.

Grapefruit

Grapefruit can affect the way some drugs metabolize by increasing their concentrations to toxic levels. Many drugs, including those for treating bipolar, anxiety, depression and psychosis, are among those grapefruit effects.

Grapefruit contains organic compounds that block enzymes that would normally break down medications. If medications don’t break down, drug concentrations enter the bloodstream at levels higher than expected.

This means that you would experience stronger or intolerable side effects. It could also mean that your medications are stronger than they should be, and that might be dangerous.

Therefore, you talk to your doctor or pharmacist about whether grapefruit or grapefruit juice consumption might interact with the medications you are taking to treat bipolar. Better yet, avoid grapefruit altogether.

Salt

If you are on lithium treatments, talk to your doctor about how you can manage salt intake, so you stay at healthy levels. Salt is important to regulate lithium, but too much or not enough can have adverse effects.

What Foods to Eat With Bipolar

There have been numerous studies on proper nutrition and moods showing making healthy diet choices offer positive mental health benefits.

Making a few changes to your diet can help you to control drastic shifts in mood. Although foods won’t cure mania, they can certainly help you feel better, minimize symptoms and make it easier to cope.

Omega-3s

Omega-3 fatty acids play an important role in brain health. They can help manage function in the nerve cells of the brain.

Research has long looked for a connection between omega-3s and mental health, but results, to date, have been mixed, this according to a review of multiple studies from researchers at University of Turin, Italy. The researchers did find evidence that omega-3 supplements help to stabilize mood and improve depression, but there doesn’t appear to be an effect on mania.

But omega-3s offer many benefits, so they might be worth adding to your diet.

Good food sources of omega-3s are:

- Fatty fish, such as salmon, mackerel, tuna, halibut and trout
- Flax seeds and flax oil
- Eggs
- Soybeans
- Walnuts
- Wild rice

Magnesium

Magnesium-rich foods have been shown to affect, much like lithium, on the most commonly prescribed medication for bipolar. Super-mineral magnesium is a mood stabilizer so upping your magnesium intake can reduce your need for bipolar medicines.

Vitamins

Vitamin deficiencies are common in people with bipolar, especially vitamins C, B, and D. Low levels of these vitamins are all associated with mood disorders and depression.

Is There a Specific Diet for Bipolar Disorder?

There is no doctor or research recommended diet for bipolar disorder. However, researchers have looked a high fat, and low carbohydrate diet called the ketogenic diet that might help with bipolar.

The diet works by mimicking the same response your body would have if you were fasting, by triggering the brain to use fat for fuel.

The fat for fuel response is believed to work in the same way lithium and other mood stabilizers work by lowering sodium levels in the brain. However, researchers do not have enough evidence to confirm this idea because there have only been a handful of studies showing any benefit from ketogenic diets for bipolar patients.

One 2013 study reported in the journal, *Neurocase* followed two women with type II bipolar who followed the ketogenic diet, one for two years and the other for three years. What they found was that both women had greater mood improvement on the diet than they had with any medications, and of course, they experienced no side effects from the diet.

More extensive studies need to be done to confirm how and if the ketogenic diet can help manage bipolar moods.

The Bottom Line...

Certain foods may help to calm your mood, where others might trigger depressive and manic moods. Proper diet and a healthy lifestyle can help to improve symptoms, but you should still talk to your doctor before making any drastic changes to your treatment plan.