

# How to Hack Your Hormones for a Better Mood

\*Not all of these suggestions will be right for everyone. Take what works and leave the rest

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Hormones are chemicals produced by different glands across your body. They travel through the bloodstream, acting as messengers and playing a part in many bodily processes.

One of these important functions? Helping regulate your mood.

Certain hormones are known to help promote positive feelings, including happiness and pleasure.

These “happy hormones” include:

**Dopamine.** Also known as the “feel-good” hormone, dopamine is a hormone and neurotransmitter that’s an important part of your brain’s reward system. Dopamine is associated with pleasurable sensations, along with learning, memory, motor system function, and more.

**Serotonin.** This hormone (and neurotransmitter) helps regulate your mood as well as your sleep, appetite, digestion, learning ability, and memory.

**Oxytocin.** Often called the “love hormone,” oxytocin is essential for childbirth, breastfeeding, and strong parent-child bonding. This hormone can also help promote trust, empathy, and bonding in relationships, and oxytocin levels generally increase with physical affection like kissing, cuddling, and sex.

**Endorphins.** Endorphins are your body’s natural pain reliever, which your body produces in response to stress or discomfort. Endorphin levels also tend to increase when you engage in reward-producing activities, such as eating, working out, or having sex.

Here’s a look at how to make the most of these natural mood-boosters.

## Get outside

Looking to boost your endorphins and serotonin levels? Spending time outdoors, in sunlight, is a great way to do this.

According to 2008 research, exposure to sunlight can increase production of both serotonin and endorphins.

Start with at least 10 to 15 minutes outside each day. If you’re tired of the same old sights, try exploring a new neighborhood or park. (Just don’t forget sunscreen!)

## Make time for exercise

Exercise has multiple physical health benefits. It can also have a positive impact on emotional well-being.

If you’ve heard of a “runner’s high,” you might already know about the link between exercise and endorphin release.

But exercise doesn't just work on endorphins. Regular physical activity can also increase your dopamine and serotonin levels, making it a great option to boost your happy hormones.

*Maximize your workout*

*To see even more benefits from exercise:*

*Include a few friends. A small 2009 study looking at 12 men found evidence to suggest group exercise offers more benefits than solo exercise.*

*Get some sun. Move your workout outdoors to maximize your serotonin boost.*

*Time it. Aim for at least 30 minutes of aerobic exercise at a time. Any amount of physical activity has health benefits, but research associates endorphin release with continued exercise rather than short bursts of activity.*

### **Laugh with a friend**

Who hasn't heard the old saying, "Laughter is the best medicine"?

Of course, laughter won't treat ongoing health issues. But it can help relieve feelings of anxiety or stress, and improve a low mood by boosting dopamine and endorphin levels.

According to a small 2017 study looking at 12 young men, social laughter triggered endorphin release. Research from 2011 supports this finding.

An added bonus? Bonding over something hilarious with a loved one might even trigger oxytocin release.

### **Cook (and enjoy) a favorite meal with a loved one**

This tip could — in theory — boost all 4 of your happy hormones.

The enjoyment you get from eating something delicious can trigger the release of dopamine along with endorphins. Sharing the meal with someone you love, and bonding over meal preparation, can boost oxytocin levels.

Certain foods can also have an impact on hormone levels, so note the following when meal planning for a happy hormone boost:

- spicy foods, which may trigger endorphin release
- yogurt, beans, eggs, meats with low-fat content, and almonds, which are just a few foods linked to dopamine release
- foods high in tryptophan, which have been linked to increased serotonin levels
- foods containing probiotics, such as yogurt, kimchi, and sauerkraut, which can influence the release of hormones

### **Try supplements**

There are several supplements that may help increase your happy hormone levels. Here are just a few to consider:

tyrosine (linked to dopamine production)  
green tea and green tea extract (dopamine and serotonin)  
probiotics (may boost serotonin and dopamine production)  
tryptophan (serotonin)

Experts studying the effects of supplements have found varied results. Many studies involved animals only, so more research is needed to help support the benefits of supplements for humans.

Supplements may be helpful, but some aren't recommended for people with certain health conditions. They can also interact with certain medications, so make sure talk to your healthcare provider before you try them.

If you do take any supplements, read all package instructions and stick to the recommended dose, since some can have negative effects at high doses.

### **Listen to music (or make some)**

Music can give more than one of your happy hormones a boost.

Listening to instrumental music, especially music that gives you chills, can increase dopamine production in your brain.

But if you enjoy music, simply listening to any music you enjoy may help put you in a good mood. This positive change in your mood can increase serotonin production.

Musicians may also experience an endorphin release when creating music. According to 2012 research, creating and performing music by dancing, singing, or drumming led to endorphin release.

### **Meditate**

If you're familiar with meditation, you might already know of its many wellness benefits — from improving sleep to reducing stress.

A small 2002 study links many of meditation's benefits to increased dopamine production during the practice. Research from 2011 also suggests that meditation can spur endorphin release.

Not sure how to start? It's not as hard as you might think. You don't even need to sit still, though it can help when you're first starting out.

Try it

To get started with meditation:

- Choose a quiet, comfortable place to sit.
- Get comfortable, whether that's standing, sitting, or lying down.
- Let all of your thoughts — positive or negative — rise up and pass you by.
- As thoughts come up, try not to judge them, cling to them, or push them away. Simply acknowledge them.

Start out by doing this for 5 minutes and work your way up to longer sessions over time.

### **Plan a romantic evening**

Oxytocin's reputation as the "love hormone" is well-earned.

Simply being attracted to someone can lead to the production of oxytocin. But physical affection, including kissing, cuddling, or having sex, also contributes to oxytocin production.

Just spending time with someone you care about can also help boost oxytocin production. This can help increase closeness and positive relationship feelings, making you feel happy, blissful, or even euphoric.

If you really want to feel those happy hormones, note that dancing and sex both lead to endorphin release, while orgasm triggers dopamine release.

### **Pet your dog**

If you have a dog, giving your furry friend some affection is a great way to boost oxytocin levels for you and your dog.

According to research from 2014, dog owners and their dogs see an increase in oxytocin when they cuddle.

Even if you don't own a dog, you might also experience an oxytocin boost when you see a dog you know and like. If you're a dog lover, this might happen when you get a chance to pet any dog at all.

So, find your favorite canine and give it a good ear scratch or lap cuddle.

### **Get a good night's sleep**

Not getting enough quality sleep can affect your health in multiple ways.

For one, it can contribute to an imbalance of hormones, particularly dopamine, in your body. This can have a negative impact on your mood as well as your physical health.

Setting aside 7 to 9 hours each night for sleep can help restore the balance of hormones in your body, which will likely help you feel better.

If you find it difficult to get a good night's sleep, try:

- going to bed and getting up around the same time every day
- creating a quiet, restful sleeping environment (try reducing light, noise, and screens)
- decreasing caffeine intake, especially in the afternoon and evening

### **Manage stress**

It's normal to experience some stress from time to time. But living with regular stress or dealing with highly stressful life events can cause drops in dopamine and serotonin production. This can negatively affect your health and mood, making it harder to deal with stress.

If you're under a lot of stress, the American Psychological Association recommends:

- taking a brief break from the source of stress
- laughter
- taking 20 minutes for a walk, run, bike ride, or other physical activity
- meditation
- social interaction

Any of these approaches may help relieve your stress while also boosting your levels of serotonin, dopamine, and even endorphins.

### **Get a massage**

If you enjoy massage, here's one more reason to get one: massage can boost all 4 of your happy hormones.

According to 2004 research, both serotonin and dopamine levels increased after massage. Massage is also known to boost endorphins and oxytocin.

You can get these benefits from a massage by a licensed massage therapist, but you can also get a massage from a partner for some extra oxytocin.

## **More on Hormones**

Dopamine is an important chemical messenger in the brain that has many functions.

It's involved in reward, motivation, memory, attention and even regulating body movements.

When dopamine is released in large amounts, it creates feelings of pleasure and reward, which motivates you to repeat a specific behavior.

In contrast, low levels of dopamine are linked to reduced motivation and decreased enthusiasm for things that would excite most people.

Dopamine levels are typically well regulated within the nervous system, but there are some things you can do to naturally increase levels.

Here are the top 10 ways to increase dopamine levels naturally.

### **1. Eat Lots of Protein**

Proteins are made up of smaller building blocks called amino acids.

There are 23 different amino acids, some of which your body can synthesize and others that you must get from food.

One amino acid called tyrosine plays a critical role in the production of dopamine.

Enzymes within your body are capable of turning tyrosine into dopamine, so having adequate tyrosine levels is important for dopamine production.

Tyrosine can also be made from another amino acid called phenylalanine.

Both tyrosine and phenylalanine are naturally found in protein-rich foods like turkey, beef, eggs, dairy, soy and legumes.

Studies show that increasing the amount of tyrosine and phenylalanine in the diet can increase dopamine levels in the brain, which may promote deep thinking and improve memory.

Conversely, when phenylalanine and tyrosine are eliminated from the diet, dopamine levels can become depleted.

While these studies show that extremely high or extremely low intakes of these amino acids can impact dopamine levels, it's unknown whether normal variations in protein intake would have much impact.

Summary

Dopamine is produced from the amino acids tyrosine and phenylalanine, both of which can be obtained from protein-rich foods. Very high intakes of these amino acids may boost dopamine levels.

## 2. Eat Less Saturated Fat

Some animal research has found that saturated fats, such as those found in animal fat, butter, full-fat dairy, palm oil and coconut oil, may disrupt dopamine signaling in the brain when consumed in very large quantities.

So far, these studies have only been conducted in rats, but the results are intriguing.

One study found that rats that consumed 50% of their calories from saturated fat had reduced dopamine signaling in the reward areas of their brain, compared to animals receiving the same amount of calories from unsaturated fat.

Interestingly, these changes occurred even without differences in weight, body fat, hormones or blood sugar levels.

Some researchers hypothesize that diets high in saturated fat may increase inflammation in the body, leading to changes in the dopamine system, but more research is needed.

Several observational studies have found a link between high saturated fat intake and poor memory and cognitive functioning in humans, but it's unknown whether these effects are related to dopamine levels.

### Summary

Animal studies have found that diets high in saturated fat can reduce dopamine signaling in the brain, leading to a blunted reward response. However, it's not clear whether the same is true in humans. More research is needed.

## 3. Consume Probiotics

In recent years, scientists have discovered that the gut and brain are closely linked.

In fact, the gut is sometimes called the "second brain," as it contains a large number of nerve cells that produce many neurotransmitter signaling molecules, including dopamine.

It's now clear that certain species of bacteria that live in your gut are also capable of producing dopamine, which may impact mood and behavior.

Research in this area is limited. However, several studies show that when consumed in large enough quantities, certain strains of bacteria can reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression in both animals and humans.

Despite the clear link between mood, probiotics and gut health, it's not yet well understood.

It's likely that dopamine production plays a role in how probiotics improve mood, but more research is needed to determine how significant the effect is.

### Summary

Probiotic supplements have been linked to improved mood in humans and animals, but more research is needed to determine the exact role dopamine plays.

#### 4. Eat Velvet Beans

Velvet beans, also known as *Mucuna pruriens*, naturally contain high levels of L-dopa, the precursor molecule to dopamine.

Studies show that eating these beans may help raise dopamine levels naturally, especially in people with Parkinson's disease, a movement disorder caused by low dopamine levels.

One small study in those with Parkinson's disease found that consuming 250 grams of cooked velvet beans significantly raised dopamine levels and reduced Parkinson's symptoms one to two hours after the meal.

Similarly, several studies on *Mucuna pruriens* supplements found that they may be even more effective and longer lasting than traditional Parkinson's medications, as well as have fewer side effects.

Keep in mind that velvet beans are toxic in high amounts. Make sure to follow dosage recommendations on the product label.

Even though these foods are natural sources of L-dopa, it's important to consult with your doctor before making changes to your diet or supplement routine.

#### Summary

Velvet beans are natural sources of L-dopa, a precursor molecule to dopamine. Studies show that they may be as effective as Parkinson's medications at boosting dopamine levels.

#### 5. Exercise Often

Exercise is recommended for boosting endorphin levels and improving mood.

Improvements in mood can be seen after as little as 10 minutes of aerobic activity but tend to be highest after at least 20 minutes.

While these effects are probably not entirely due to changes in dopamine levels, animal research suggests that exercise can boost dopamine levels in the brain.

In rats, treadmill running increases the release of dopamine and upregulates the number of dopamine receptors in the reward areas of the brains.

However, these results have not been consistently replicated in humans.

In one study, a 30-minute session of moderate-intensity treadmill running did not produce an increase in dopamine levels in adults.

However, one three-month study found that performing one hour of yoga six days per week significantly increased dopamine levels.

Frequent aerobic exercise also benefits people with Parkinson's disease, a condition in which low dopamine levels disrupts the brain's ability to control body movements.

Several studies have shown that regular intense exercise several times per week significantly improves motor control in people with Parkinson's, suggesting that there may be a beneficial effect on the dopamine system.

More research is needed to determine the intensity, type and duration of exercise that is most effective at boosting dopamine in humans, but the current research is very promising.

#### Summary

Exercise can improve mood and may boost dopamine levels when performed regularly. More research is needed to determine specific recommendations for increasing dopamine levels.

### 6. Get Enough Sleep

When dopamine is released in the brain, it creates feelings of alertness and wakefulness.

Animal studies show that dopamine is released in large amounts in the morning when it's time to wake up and that levels naturally fall in the evening when it's time to go to sleep.

However, lack of sleep appears to disrupt these natural rhythms.

When people are forced to stay awake through the night, the availability of dopamine receptors in the brain is dramatically reduced by the next morning.

Since dopamine promotes wakefulness, reducing the sensitivity of the receptors should make it easier to fall asleep, especially after a night of insomnia.

However, having less dopamine typically comes with other unpleasant consequences like reduced concentration and poor coordination.

Getting regular, high-quality sleep may help keep your dopamine levels balanced and help you feel more alert and high-functioning during the day.

The National Sleep Foundation recommends 7–9 hours of sleep every night for optimal health for adults, along with proper sleep hygiene.

Sleep hygiene can be improved by sleeping and waking at the same time each day, reducing noise in your bedroom, avoiding caffeine in the evening and only using your bed for sleeping.

#### Summary

Lack of sleep can reduce dopamine sensitivity in the brain, resulting in excessive feelings of sleepiness. Getting a good night's rest may help regulate your body's natural dopamine rhythms.

### 7. Listen to Music

Listening to music can be a fun way to stimulate dopamine release in the brain.

Several brain imaging studies have found that listening to music increases activity in the reward and pleasure areas of the brain, which are rich with dopamine receptors.



A small study investigating the effects of music on dopamine found a 9% increase in brain dopamine levels when people listened to instrumental songs that gave them chills.

Since music can boost dopamine levels, listening to music has even been shown to help people with Parkinson's disease improve their fine motor control.

To date, all studies on music and dopamine have used instrumental tunes so that they can be sure the increases in dopamine are due to the melodic music — not specific lyrics.

More research is needed to see if songs with lyrics have the same, or potentially greater, effects.

#### Summary

Listening to your favorite instrumental music may boost your dopamine levels. More research is needed to determine the effects of music with lyrics.

### 8. Meditate

Meditation is the practice of clearing your mind, focusing inward and letting your thoughts float by without judgment or attachment.

It can be done while standing, sitting or even walking, and regular practice is associated with improved mental and physical health.

New research has found that these benefits may be due to increased dopamine levels in the brain.

One study including eight experienced meditation teachers found a 64% increase in dopamine production after meditating for one hour, compared to when resting quietly.

It's thought that these changes may help meditators maintain a positive mood and stay motivated to remain in the meditative state for a longer period of time.

However, it's unclear whether these dopamine-boosting effects only happen in experienced meditators, or if they occur in people who are new to meditation as well.

#### Summary

Meditation increases dopamine levels in the brains of experienced meditators, but it's unclear whether these effects would also occur in those who are new to meditation.

### 9. Get Enough Sunlight

Seasonal affective disorder (SAD) is a condition in which people feel sad or depressed during the winter season when they are not exposed to enough sunlight.

It's well known that periods of low sunshine exposure can lead to reduced levels of mood-boosting neurotransmitters, including dopamine, and that sunlight exposure can increase them.

One study in 68 healthy adults found that those who received the most sunlight exposure in the previous 30 days had the highest density of dopamine receptors in the reward and movement regions of their brains.

While sun exposure may boost dopamine levels and improve mood, it's important to adhere to safety guidelines, as getting too much sun can be harmful and possibly addicting.

One study in compulsive tanners who visited tanning beds at least two times per week for one year found that tanning sessions led to significant boosts in dopamine levels and a desire to repeat the behavior.

Additionally, too much sun exposure can cause skin damage and increase the risk of skin cancer, so moderation is important.

It's generally recommended to limit sun exposure during peak hours when ultraviolet radiation is the strongest, typically between 10 am and 2 pm, and to apply sunscreen whenever the UV index is above 3.

#### Summary

Sunlight exposure can boost dopamine levels, but it's important to be mindful of sun exposure guidelines to avoid skin damage.

#### 10. Consider Supplements

Your body requires several vitamins and minerals to create dopamine. These include iron, niacin, folate and vitamin B6.

If your body is deficient in one or more of these nutrients, you may have trouble making enough dopamine to meet your body's needs.

Blood work can determine if you are deficient in any of these nutrients. If so, you can supplement as needed to bring your levels back up.

In addition to proper nutrition, several other supplements have been linked to increased dopamine levels, but thus far, research is limited to animal studies.

These supplements include magnesium, vitamin D, curcumin, oregano extract and green tea. However, more research is needed in humans.

#### Summary

Having adequate levels of iron, niacin, folate and vitamin B6 is important for dopamine production. Preliminary animal studies suggest that some supplements may also help boost dopamine levels, but more human research is needed.

#### The Bottom Line

Dopamine is an important brain chemical that influences your mood and feelings of reward and motivation. It helps regulate body movements as well.

Levels are generally well regulated by the body, but there are a few diet and lifestyle changes you can make to boost your levels naturally.

A balanced diet that contains adequate protein, vitamins and minerals, probiotics and a moderate amount of saturated fat can help your body produce the dopamine it needs.

For people with dopamine deficiency diseases, such as Parkinson's, eating natural food sources of L-dopa like fava beans or Mucuna pruriens may help restore dopamine levels.

Lifestyle choices are also important. Getting enough sleep, exercising, listening to music, meditating and spending time in the sun can all boost dopamine levels.

Overall, a balanced diet and lifestyle can go a long way in increasing your body's natural production of dopamine and helping your brain function at its best.

Here is the link for this article: <https://www.healthline.com/health/happy-hormone?c=1300928905449>