OUTLOOK ASSOCIATES of New England

637 Massachusetts Avenue, Arlington, MA 02476
781-643-5251
www.outlookassociates.com

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The Impact of Diet on Anger

What we eat affects our physical health. What about our mental health? Research shows that diet does have an effect on emotions, mood, and behavior. Eating patterns and diet should be included as part of understanding an individual's problems with anger.

Improvement in Mood After Weight Loss
Changes in diet can affect mood in the short-term and long-term. Brinkworth, et. al (2009) compared a low-carbohydrate diet with a low-fat diet on measures of mood and cognition in obese and overweight participants. Scales for overall mood disturbance were used: tension-anxiety, anger-hostility, confusion-bewilderment, depression-dejection, vigor-activity, and fatigue-inertia. The results showed significant differences in improvement in mood. Only people on the low-fat diet maintained a positive mood state over one year. In the low-carbohydrate group, despite an initial improvement, scores returned toward baseline levels over time. These findings are consistent with other studies that show improvement in mood after weight loss and after a monitored weight-loss program with social support.

Fear vs Anger Messages
Message framing is a behavior change technique designed to motivate healthy behavior. This concept has implications for improving anger control. A "gain-framed" message presents the benefits of change and a "loss-framed" message presents the costs of not changing. Gerend and Manet (2011) studied how transient emotions influence the effectiveness of each strategy. The goal was for participants to eat more fruits and vegetables. People feeling fear were responsive to a "loss-framed" message about the risks of not eating fruits and vegetables. People feeling anger were responsive to a "gain-framed" message teaching the benefits of eating fruits and vegetables. The decision to use anger management techniques is fundamentally a choice about how to behave. A person feeling fear may respond best to a discussion of how hostile expressions at work can result in losing the job (risks of not changing angry behavior). People feeling anger may respond best to talking about how more assertive behavior can improve relationships at home (benefits of change).

The Role of Trytophan
"The Brain and Anger" article in the last newsletter presented evidence that low serotonin and tryptophan levels increase the risk of aggression. Young (2007) presents a similar conclusion drawn from various studies. Alternative methods should complement medication (e.g., SSRIs) to increase serotonin in the brain. Tryptophan, a chemical precursor to serotonin, has been found to be an effective anti-depressant for people with mild to moderate depression. It has been shown to improve mood, decrease irritability and increase affability. Purified tryptophan used in studies and supplements differs from tryptophan in food. Future research needs to be done to investigate if a true causal relationship exists between food choice and changes in mood and aggression. More research is also required to identify specific foods that provide absorbable tryptophan. Milk, chickpeas and corn may be potential sources.

There are numerous websites, books and articles that present serotonin-rich diet plans. The University of Maryland Medical System presents one such plan. The website states that it is important to get enough iron, riboflavin and vitamin B6 for absorption of tryptophan. Suggested foods to eat are: Cheese, Chicken, Eggs, Fish, Milk, Nuts, Peanut butter, Peanuts, Pumpkin seeds, Sesame seeds and Soy.

Points to Consider
Here are some recommendations for including diet considerations in dealing with anger control problems:

- Consider diet and eating patterns when looking at one's anger expression;

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- Add a food log to an anger log to see the connection between the two;
- Consult a nutritionist for dietary changes that may impact neurotransmitters and mood and behavior;
- When looking at lifestyle and dealing with stress think about one's diet as part of improving one's health.

References:

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Reviewed by Linda Vorvick, MD, Medical Director, MEDEX Northwest Division of Physician Assistant Studies, University of Washington School of Medicine
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(The article was done with the research/writing assistance of Alice Miele, LICSW)

Women's Anger Management Group

I am pleased to announce that beginning in January, 2013, under the auspices of Outlook Associates of New England, a 12 week anger management group for women will be offered. The group will be run by my colleague Mindy Davin, LICSW. Mindy has a strong background in running groups and extensive clinical experience including working in the public school system as well as community mental health agencies. If you wish to contact Mindy about the group, she can be reached at 617-755-6505 or mdavin@comcast.net.

FROM THE FILES:

Antagonistic People Have Thicker Carotid Wills, Increased Risk for Cardiovascular Disease

Antagonistic people, particularly those who are competitive and aggressive, could be increasing their risk of heart attack or stroke.

Studying more than 5,000 people in Sardinia, Italy, US scientists found that those who scored high for antagonistic traits on a standard personality test had greater thickening of the carotid arteries on ultrasound tests compared with people who were more agreeable.

Participants' ages ranged from 14 to 94 years (average age 42), and 58% were female. They answered a standard personality questionnaire, which included 6 components of agreeableness: trust, straightforwardness, altruism, compliance, modesty and tender-mindedness.

Those who scored in the bottom 20% of agreeableness and were therefore the most antagonistic had about a 40% increased risk for Intima-media Thickness (IMT) of the carotid artery– an independent risk factor for cardiovascular events.

The study was published by Dr. Angelina Sutin and colleagues in the online edition of *Hypertension*, on August 16, 2010.

Women Calm Down After an Apology, Men Get More Worked Up

Women's blood pressure returns to normal more swiftly when they receive an apology after an insult, whereas men recover more slowly according to research presented at the Society of Behavioral Medicine 31st Annual Meeting.

Prior studies showed that forgiveness can influence physiologic reactivity and recovery when people revisit a memory of a past transgression. The aim of this study was investigate physiologic effects after a live incident.

Investigators recruited 29 men and 50 women who were tested for levels of forgiveness. Participants were asked to perform a serial subtraction task. They were exposed to repeated interruptions by the researcher criticizing their ability to perform the task.

Those who scored high in forgiveness displayed faster recovery of diastolic blood pressure and mean arterial blood pressure after the apology. However, the beneficial effects of an apology appeared to be dependent on gender.

Medscape News, April 18, 2010