

The Neurotransmitters of Contentment and How to Help Your Body Make Them

Jan Hanson, M.S., L.Ac.
janhealth@comcast.net
(415)472-3663

(Note – if you are taking an antidepressant, please do not utilize these interventions without the help of a qualified healthcare practitioner. All dosages are per day unless otherwise stated.)

Increase Serotonin by taking Tryptophan or 5-HTP

Serotonin is probably the most important neurotransmitter for contentment. It is also a “neuromodulator” of GABA that increases GABA’s activity. It is made from the amino acid tryptophan, and from the metabolite of tryptophan called 5-hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP).

- 5-HTP 50 – 200 mg. Best on an empty stomach, in the morning if you want the primary effect during the day.
- Tryptophan 500 – 1500 mg. – may make you sleepy, so consider taking at night (can really help if you have insomnia) .
- Nutrient co-factors of iron and vitamin B-6 (in the form called P-5-P) help convert tryptophan and 5-HTP to serotonin.

Promote the availability of GABA

GABA is a very relaxing neurotransmitter, that makes us feel content and relaxed. We cannot build it in a direct way, like we can serotonin, but the following steps can enhance the activity of GABA activity in the brain.

- GABA is made from glutamic acid. To make this reaction happen, vitamin B-6, in the form called pyridoxal-5-phosphate (P-5-P) is required. Take 50 mg. of P-5-P on an empty stomach to enhance GABA production.
- Taurine is an amino acid that binds to the GABA receptor, thereby stimulating that receptor and increasing GABA-like activity. Take 1000 mg. of taurine in the morning on an empty stomach.
- Theonine is an amino acid found in green tea and put into chewing gum and sodas in Japan! It is antagonistic to glutamic acid, which competes with GABA. Therefore, it enhances the relative experience of GABA. Take 100 – 200 mg. of theonine. You can take this any time, either as an ongoing supplement, or for just a period of anxiety.

- Although GABA should not cross the blood-brain barrier, many people report good effects from taking it. You can try 500 – 750 mg. of GABA.

Enhance Dopamine and Neuroepinephrine

If you have tried the inhibitory neurotransmitters serotonin and GABA, and still do not feel contented, you could consider enhancing dopamine and neuroepinephrine. These are stimulating neurotransmitters, so they are more likely to be helpful if you are tired, and do not have a frazzled constitution.

- 500 – 1000 mg of either phenylalanine or tyrosine feeds the pathway that makes both norepinephrine and dopamine.

Nutritional Foundation

These targeted, neurotransmitter interventions should be done on the basis of:

- A healthy, low sugar diet.
- Exercise
- Optimal thyroid (have your doctor check your “TSH”).
- Optimal iron (have your doctor check your “ferritin”).
- A high potency, high B-vitamin multi vitamin, including high B-12 and folic acid.
- Fish oil where the combined dose of EPA and DHA is at least 1000 mg.

Intelligent Testing

It is possible to test for amino acid levels in blood, as well as neurotransmitter levels in urine. In challenging cases, this can be very useful. Consult a knowledgeable integrative health practitioner.

RECAP of Interventions

Here’s a summary of what you can do:

- Try tryptophan or 5-HTP to enhance serotonin.
- Take 50 mg. of P-5-P on an empty Stomach
- Take 1000 mg. of taurine on an empty stomach in the morning
- Take 100 – 200 mg. of theonine.
- Try 500 mg. of GABA.
- Try 500 – 1000 mg. of phenylalanine or tyrosine.