

### Brain Chemistry and Your Happiness Karen Williams, MC, LIMHP

Our brains are pretty amazing. The more research we do, the more amazing they seem. We need our brains to help us through even the easiest of days, but quite often our school, work and home lives are pretty stressful. So how can we make sure that our brains are working optimally? There are many things we can do to make sure our brains are getting the nutrition (chemicals) needed for optimal functioning.

Serotonin, which many of us have heard of in recent years, helps our mood stability. Sunshine, mindfulness activities like meditation and even getting outside, even for brief moments of time, can increase our serotonin levels.

Dopamine, a neurotransmitter, is considered a “reward” chemical and gets actively released when we eat something delicious, accomplish a task or goal, and get recuperative sleep.

Endorphins activate when we exercise, listen to music that we really enjoy, or laugh. Yes! Laughing increases endorphins and makes us feel better.

Oxytocin is produced when we are enjoying time with family, friends, or other loved ones. Even petting a dog or cat can produce oxytocin. We can also increase our oxytocin levels by helping others - volunteer work, holding a door for someone, or other kindnesses throughout our day.

Simple, day-to-day interactions of kindness with others and your own self-care activities can help our brains do their jobs even better - to take care of us, no matter how stressful our day.