

Fatty foods really are mood enhancers

July 27 2011, by Deborah Braconnier

A new study published in the August issue of the *Journal of Clinical Investigation* shows just why it is that people tend to turn to fatty foods in order to boost their emotional state and reduce feelings of sadness. Be it chocolate chip cookies, French fries and a chocolate shake or whatever your favorite fatty food may be, researchers say these fatty foods create a biological change in your body to reduce the feelings of sadness.

The researchers, led by psychiatrist Dr. Lukas Van Oudenhove from the University of Leuven, recruited 12 healthy and non-obese participants for this study. The participants were shown images of people with sad expressions while listening to one minute clips of sad classical music selections. The participants were hooked up to fMRI scans to monitor [brain activity](#).

The participants were then hooked up to a feeding tube. Half of the group was fed dodecanoic acid, the fatty acid found in [breast milk](#) and Twinkies while the other half of the participants received a saline liquid.

During the 40 minute testing period, participants were asked at four different times to rate their levels of hunger, fullness and mood. The results showed that those who received the fatty acid through the feeding tube reported feeling about half as sad as those who had received the placebo but there was no difference in hunger or fullness.

The fMRI scans also confirmed these findings. The participants who received the fatty acid solution showed dampened activity in the areas of the brain that are connected to emotions and feelings of sadness.

The researchers explain that emotions affect the hunger signals that the stomach sends to the brain and it plays a direct role in what and how much someone chooses to eat.

Researchers hope this study and their findings will help to bring new insight into health and emotional disorders such as obesity, emotional overeating, eating disorders and depression.

More information: *J Clin Invest.* [doi:10.1172/JCI46380](https://doi.org/10.1172/JCI46380)

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