

Brain Chemicals Linked to Physical & Emotional Health

By Paul Meier, M.D.

Serotonin is the most important chemical in our bodies. You can't eat and digest serotonin, and you can't get it through an injection. God created us so that only the brain can make serotonin, and it floats in the synapses (spaces) between our 40 billion nerve and brain cells. These cells also have reuptake sites that suck the serotonin back up to keep it in proper balance. If you have the right amount of serotonin in your brain cell synapses, you are filled with love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, meekness, energy during the day, great sleep at night, and less physical pain. The most up-to-date medications that help keep serotonin levels in balance are: Effexor-XR, Lexapro (Celexa), Zoloft, Fluoxetine (Prozac), and Paxil-CR.

Another important chemical in the brain is GABA (gamma-amino-butyric-acid), which puts the brakes on our worries and stops bipolar mood swings. Seventy percent of people who inherit bipolar disorders (GABA problems) abuse drugs or alcohol to self-medicate, since alcohol, marijuana, and most illegal drugs go to the GABA receptors. They help in the short run, but often make these individuals suicidal in the long run. GABA medications like Gabapril, Keppra, Depakote-ER, Neurontin, and Topamax, not only bring bipolar individuals back to normal, they also take away the cravings for alcohol drugs, making it much easier to give up those addictions.

Another very important chemical made in the brain is norepinephrine, which gives us joy, energy, motivation, better focus, better concentration, improved sexual enjoyment, and helps to improve ADHD. The best norepinephrine medications are: Wellbutrin-XL, Effexor-XR (at 300 mg./day), Strattera, and Remeron. Also, in regard to increased ability to focus and concentrate, there is a new medication on the market that is classified as a histamine – Provigil.

A fourth vital chemical in the brain is dopamine. Dopamine imbalances cause a person to become more self-righteous, condemning, sensitive to criticism, angry, and controlling. If it is severe enough, the individual may get more paranoid, more grandiose, have delusions, and hear negative "voices" that seem to be right there in the same room but aren't. Some of the best medications that help dopamine imbalance are: Geodon, Abilify, Risperdal, Seroquel, and Zyprexa.

So my goal as a Christian psychiatrist is to be sure every client I see has plenty of serotonin, dopamine, GABA and norepinephrine. We see approximately three thousand clients a week at the Meier Clinics across the country. About 85% of them can keep these chemicals at a normal level without medications by living by scriptural principles. For example, Ephesians 4:26-27 tells us it is fine to get angry without sinning if we get rid of the anger by bedtime. Holding onto the anger gives Satan a foothold in our lives. We know from science that if we hold grudges toward God, others, or ourselves serotonin is released from the brain into the blood stream, causing most of the headaches we get. It also causes depression, which is often called "anger turned inward."

Most people can correct these four vital chemicals by forgiving, confessing faults one to another (James 5:16), and obeying the "one-another" concepts in scripture. But lest we become too simplistic, some people have medical conditions, like hypothyroidism, that leave them depressed no matter what they do spiritually until they take the right dose of thyroid medication to correct the chemical imbalance. About 50% of the American population has inherited a genetic predisposition toward depression, perfectionism, schizophrenia or bipolar disorder. Some of these people can NEVER become totally normal unless they take lifelong corrective medications, which work great. So if you are in the group who has genetic problems that make you depressed, manic, psychotic, or ADHD, no matter what you do spiritually, take the right medications, just like you would take insulin if you were a diabetic.

Another important factor in keeping these four chemicals high is nutrition. I am convinced many people become depressed because of poor diets and insufficient vitamins. The four chemicals I mentioned above are each made from two essential amino acids in our diets: tryptophan and phenylalanine. Some of our psychiatrists and I helped a large group of scientists to create a liquid vitamin containing 180 vitamins, antioxidants, and something unique I have never before found in a vitamin. We added phenylalanine and tryptophan, the necessary ingredients to make the four essential "happy" chemicals in the brain. We don't have any ownership in this new, wonderful discovery, but we endorse it enthusiastically. Liquid vitamins are 98% absorbed by the body as opposed to 10% absorption in pill form. Vitamins give you the precursors to build serotonin, dopamine, GABA, and norepinephrine. The medications I prescribe as a psychiatrist to those who need them actually block the reuptake sites of these chemicals. The medications then help by blocking the drains within the brain that sometimes genetically work overtime to deplete too many of these four main brain chemicals.

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