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## **BOOK REVIEW**

*The food-mood solution: All-natural ways to banish anxiety, depression, anger, stress, overeating, and alcohol and drug problems—and feel good again, by J. Challem. Published by John Wiley & Sons, Hoboken, NJ, 2007. (273 pages)*

Author Jack Challem begins his book by identifying the problem of behavioral and psychological disorders that are prevalent in modern society. Individuals are experiencing a gradual lack of behavioral control, stemming from psychological disturbances. The author includes compelling statistics to illustrate this point. At least one of every two Americans will suffer from a serious mood or mental health problem within their lifespan. One in three people will suffer from panic disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, phobia, social anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder. In addition to this, one in four people will be influenced by impulsive-control problems leading to explosive outbursts and defiant behavior and one in five will suffer serious depression or bipolar disorder. What is frustrating with these psychosocial problems, according to foreword author Dr. Melvyn R. Werbach is the reality that mental health practitioners undergo training that dichotomizes psychological and physical approaches to treatment. The lack of a multi-pronged approach in the treatment of the psychologically impaired exacerbates the behavioral and social crises we face as a society. In this book, Challem tries to establish a food-mood connection by explaining how nutrition directly influences the mind and behavior and should therefore be of utmost consideration in the treatment of mental health.

As a trained sociologist and expert in the field of nutrition, Challem draws from his knowledge of both fields to describe the food-mood connection that has manifested itself in individual behavior and society at large. He has more than thirty years of experience in writing books on nutrition, and has become particularly fascinated with the relationship between nutrition, health, and behavior. In this book, he explains that modern society has produced individuals who have become nutritionally deficient by eating foods that are poor in nutrition and living under chronic levels of stress. According to Challem, stress both quickly depletes nutritional stores and contributes to poor eating habits. Highly-stressed individuals are more likely to eat highly-processed foods that are lacking in essential nutrients. Poor nutrition further weakens a person's

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ability to cope with stress, which causes further depletion of nutritional stores. Individuals also intensify the deficiency by consuming prescription and over-the-counter drugs that interfere with the absorption or use of nutrients. All these factors lead to nutritional deficiencies that affect one's mood, perceptions, and behavior.

Stress is also responsible for elevating cortisol, a stress hormone that is secreted under chronic levels of stress. This stress hormone is responsible for helping individuals cope with stressful conditions, but it becomes destructive after prolonged periods of time. It reduces brain cell production, shrinks brain size, interferes with memory and thinking ability and causes a host of biological disorders, such as the prediabetic condition of being insulin resistant.

Challem explains that neuronutrients--nutrients essential for brain functioning--are the "building blocks" for neurotransmitters. Although conventional treatment for stress-induced health problems prescribes drugs that alter levels of neurotransmitters, such drugs produce side-effects--many so severe that they worsen the individual's psychological condition. According to Challem, neutralizing the nutritional deficiency is the most prudent and effective approach to treatment. He provides a detailed description of the mood-regulating neurotransmitters and the neuronutrients that produce or regulate them.

*The Food-Mood Solution* includes self-evaluation quizzes that assess stress levels, mood swings, lifestyle habits, and blood sugar patterns. Assessments are used to identify signs of mood and behavioral disorders. Besides being destructive in nature, Challem writes that the nutritionally deficient condition that causes mood and behavior disorders often precedes clinical disease. He writes that they "sow the seeds for physical diseases, such as heart disease and cancer" (p. 21). The clinical detection of a disorder that takes place usually occurs after a person has suffered a prolonged condition of nutritional deficiency. Challem writes that "the first signs of nutritional deficiencies and imbalances are usually altered mood swings" (p. 19). Therefore identifying signs of mood and behavior disorders may serve as risk indicators for clinical diseases.

Challem provides a holistic, four-step approach for improving moods. The first step is taking vitamin supplements, herbs, and hormones. He highly recommends supplementation during treatment and provides a list of twenty mood and behavior problems, such as irritability, depression, and premenstrual syndrome, and a corresponding supplementation protocol for each. The second step is to consume mood-enhancing food. Challem promotes high-protein diets to stabilize blood sugar levels. He provides a list of dietary guidelines, samples of food recipes, and menu plans. The third step of the mood enhancing program is to become physically active. Physical activity improves mood by increasing the production of endorphins, improving the biological use of glucose and

insulin, promoting feelings of self-esteem, speeding up one's metabolic rate, and other benefits. It also reduces levels of cortisol, which, at sustained elevated levels, causes various mood and biological disorders. The last step is to create a buffer zone against stress by changing lifestyle habits. The author provides three important ways to alleviate stress: define personal boundaries, reshuffle priorities, and unclutter or simplify one's life. Without the last step, mood improvement is significantly restricted and the individual continues to live under stressful conditions that threaten mental stability.

The last section of the book provides approximately eighty pages of detailed nutritional and psycho-therapeutic instructions on how to deal with specific mood and behavioral concerns. Challem provides guidance for how to be freed of irritability, anger and aggression; anxiety, panic attacks, and obsessive-compulsive disorder; distractibility, impulsivity, and ADHD-like behavior; overweight and prediabetes; down days, depression, and bipolar disorder; and alcohol and drug abuse.

Given the intolerant, impatient, and aggressive nature of our current society, Jack Challem calls for social change at the grassroots level. He asserts that poor eating habits contribute to the character of the world today. Although the unhealthful, fast food culture began in America, it has spread all over the world, accompanied by deterioration of mind and body. Challem challenges his readers to effect long-lasting, positive social change by controlling our own eating habits, influencing the eating habits of our family members and friends, influencing food markets by reducing the demand for unhealthy food products, and supporting markets and restaurants that provide healthy and nutritious food. He ends with an appendix complete with resources for finding nutritionally-oriented professionals, supplements, healthy food, treatment centers, and sources of additional information.

Jack Challem's book provides a balance between theoretical explanations and practical solutions to mood and behavior problems that afflict millions of people today. His sociological and nutritional perspective is unique in the field of health, and touches needs that are felt by the average individual. He clearly explains the mechanisms of the food-mood connection as well as the effects of stress-filled modern-day lifestyles. He provides easy-to-apply advice and simplifies lifestyle change by dispensing clear and direct instructions and resources. *The Food-Mood Solution* equips those suffering from the mildest to the most severe mood and behavior problems with the tools for a happier and more satisfying life.

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