

Sadness analysed

Why stress makes some people more vulnerable to depression

ONE REASON WHY social stress makes some people more vulnerable to depression than others could be due to deficiency of serotonin, a crucial brain chemical linked to the feeling of well-being and happiness, a study suggests.

“Our results are very exciting because they establish that low serotonin could be a contributing factor to the development of depression in response to psycho-social stress in a genetically defined animal model of serotonin deficiency,” said senior author Marc Caron from Duke University’s School of Medicine in the US.

Following exposure to stress, the serotonin-deficient mice also did not respond to a standard anti-depressant fluoxetine (Prozac), which works by boosting serotonin transmission between neighbouring neurons. The new results may help explain why some people with depression seem unresponsive to treatment with selective serotonin re-uptake inhibitors (SSRIs), the most common anti-depressant drugs on the market today.

In the new study, researchers used a transgenic



mouse strain called Tph2KI that has only 20-40 per cent of normal levels of serotonin in its brain. These mice harbour an extremely rare mutation that was first identified in a small group of people with major depression.

The researchers tested the responses of these mice to a

type of psycho-social stress: social defeat stress.

The team stressed out mice by housing them each with an aggressive stranger mouse briefly every day for 7-10 days. Later, the scientists examined whether the test mice would avoid interacting with an unfamiliar mouse - a

depression-like behaviour.

A week of social stress was not sufficient for normal mice to show signs of depression, but the serotonin-deficient mice did.

The study appeared in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. IANS



Pressure control

Coconut oil, daily exercise can beat high BP

A COMBINATION OF daily coconut oil intake and exercise results in reduction in blood pressure and bringing it to a normal level, says a research.

The reduction in blood pressure might be explained by the improvement of the reduced baroreflex sensitivity and by the reduction in oxidative stress in the serum, heart and aorta - key factors regulating blood pressure, the researchers said.

“The possibility of using coconut oil as an adjuvant to treat hypertension adds to the long list of benefits associated with its consumption,” said co-author Valdir de Andrade Braga from Federal University of Paraiba in Brazil.

Their experiments were performed in

spontaneously hypertensive rats. They found that both coconut oil and exercise training were able to reduce weight gain compared to rats that were given saline and were not exposed to the exercise training protocol during the five weeks of study.

“Our next step is to start some clinical trials in order to verify whether we can reproduce those findings in hypertensive human patients,” Braga said.

“This is an important finding as coconut oil is currently being considered a popular ‘superfood’ and it is being consumed by athletes and the general population who seek a healthy lifestyle,” he added. The study was published in the journal *Applied Physiology, Nutrition, and Metabolism*. IANS

ALIGN YOUR LIFE

Detox Your Office

HOW OFTEN IN our lives do we end up buying unwanted things or hoarding things because they make us feel good? We tend to surround ourselves with clutter to make us feel safe. We focus on improving health and following detox diets in the hope of losing a few pounds. But do we ever detox our environment, where we live and work? Have you ever thought about what makes your surroundings toxic?

If you look around in your office and see piles of papers everywhere, scattered files, tonnes of post-its to remind you of tasks - you are surrounded by clutter. This clutter hampers the energy movement in your office and affects your mood and thinking. We develop coughs and colds when there is congestion of energy in our body. Similarly if there is lack of movement of energy in your office, it will lead to congestion of energy, which will eventually hamper your health and mental wellbeing. The practice of Feng Shui focuses on enhancing movement of energy and allowing it to flow freely. When this energy is not able to flow, it creates congestion leading to toxic environment. How can you identify that your environment is toxic?

Sometimes symptoms or signs are obvious and sometimes they are subtle. If you are feeling tired and drained lately, experiencing frequent headaches, having mood swings and feeling de-motivated; having problems with money flow, feeling stagnated or having frequent fights with colleagues - you are experiencing imbalance in your surroundings. This can happen at work or at home. The idea is to recognise and identify the symptoms and act on them as soon as possible. By following the simple steps listed below, you can start to detox your office environment:

- Go through your laptop and delete all unwanted documents and emails. If you wish to retain something, then archive it. That way you are creating more space on your laptop for new and exciting work to appear.
 - Clear out your desk completely once a month. Shred all unwanted papers, file the important papers and find a suitable place for them.
 - Place a family picture or a photograph of your favourite destination on your desktop. This means that every time you glance up from the computer or are having a bad day, it will help you to remain calm.
 - Place a small plant on your desktop. Plants are live energy and are helpful in harmonising the harsh energy that is generated from all the electronics.
 - Place a small water fountain in a corner by a window or on your desk. The sound of water will calm you mentally and will help you to move energy in your office.
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