

The Happiness Diet

A Nutritional Prescription for
a Sharp Brain, Balanced Mood,
and Lean, Energized Body

TYLER GRAHAM AND DREW RAMSEY, MD



This book is dedicated to America's farmers.

This book is intended as a reference volume only, not as a medical manual. The information given here is designed to help you make informed decisions about your health. It is not intended as a substitute for any treatment that may have been prescribed by your doctor. If you suspect that you have a medical problem, we urge you to seek competent medical help.

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Special Markets Department, Rodale, Inc., 733 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Printed in the United States of America

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Book design by Christina Gaugler

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is on file with the publisher.

ISBN 978-1-60529-327-1

Distributed to the trade by Macmillan

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1 hardcover



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Acknowledgments

First we'd like to thank Rodale for all the support they've given to this project. We especially appreciate Julie Will's and Karen Rinaldi's votes of confidence in us in the middle of a recession. We'd also like to thank Gena Smith and Zachary Greenwald for their many late nights, as well as Colin Dickerman and Pam Krauss for helping us to the finish line. Emily Weber and Yelena Nesbit, we appreciate your wise counsel. Heather Jackson, you are a book publishing sage. Joy Tutela, you are a patient, patient woman. Thank you so much for going above and beyond.

Tyler would like to start by thanking his mother, who made sure that most nights the Graham family sat down together for a home-cooked meal. He'd also like to thank his father for making a wholesome breakfast each morning. A big, warm thanks to those who have long supported Tyler (John and Isabel Joynt, John Graham, Juli, Kris, Dana, Dickie Lee) and to those who will in the future (Carter, Sterling, Colton, Lexi, Brynlee). A special thanks to the special team at *Best Life*. This book would not have been possible without friends like Bone and Karen, Jason Adams, Josh Dean, Colin O'Banion, Jeff Surowka, Jenny, and Joel Weber. Nor would it have been possible without the wisdom of some very special counsel for SRL, such as John Casalena, Gordon Zuckerman, and Rick Hamilton. Thanks to the smart, thoughtful minds of people like Michael Pollan, Gary Taubes, and Marion Nestle whose

writings make our country a better place in which to live and to eat. And a very special thanks to Miss Mieke ten Have.

Drew thanks his parents for taking a leap and returning to the land and his patients, who teach him about the power of food and challenge him to be a better physician daily. He graciously thanks Columbia University's Department of Psychiatry and the New York State Psychiatric Institute, where he has been privileged to train and now to teach. The faculty's tireless pursuit of a better understanding of the brain and better treatments has been a constant inspiration. Special thanks to his colleagues who read early drafts and provided wise counsel, particularly Phil Muskin, Dan Chrzanowski, and David Schab, and also to Marcia Lux, Julian Abrams, and Lars Lund who have continued to make him a better doctor ever since intern year. Bob Wise has served as an invaluable mentor and provided detailed comments and exceptional counsel. MVA would be proud. Additionally, the guidance of Ron Rieder, Pel Sarti, and Ron Puddu has made this book possible. Drew thanks his dear friends for their unwavering support and his wife Lucy for being the ideal partner in life and in parenting: patient, thoughtful, and firm about the need for food and sleep. He thanks Greta for making life's priorities clear.

Introduction

What if you discovered that the best place to begin your personal pursuit of happiness is at the end of your fork? Emerging research from the fields of neuroscience and nutrition shows that by changing what you eat, you can improve your mental and emotional well-being. You can stabilize your moods. You can improve your focus. You can even make your brain grow.

So what do we mean by happiness? There have been many books published in recent years that explore different approaches to attaining happiness—some from motivational speakers, others from experts in the field of positive psychology. At their core these are suggestions for behavioral changes that are meant to improve your psychological well-being and outlook on life. We are coming at this from a very different perspective: Before you start changing your outlook on life to improve your emotional well-being, we want to make sure your eating behavior is the best it can be so that the master mood regulator—the brain—is provided with what it needs to be strong, sharp, healthy . . . and happy.

Increasingly, in our experience, it seems that fewer people truly feel they have control over their diet. "It's just too hard to eat right," we often hear. "Everyone says something different" is another refrain we get a lot. We want to change this state of affairs and settle the confusion about what needs to be eaten for a happy, healthy brain and body. The Happiness Diet provides concrete tools (tasty ones, too) for doing just that.

But as modern Americans, we face some formidable and largely invisible obstacles in seeking happiness. The food we eat each day is undermining our emotional and mental well-being. Many of the nutrients that human brains depend on for healthy functioning have been stripped from our food supply by factory farming and by modern methods of food processing. Compounding these losses, new chemicals have been added that impair our brain functioning. You're probably well aware that our food is responsible for our epidemic levels of obesity and diabetes, but you might be surprised that it's also largely responsible for skyrocketing levels of brain disorders. We all want to be happy, but every day most of us consume what amounts to a series of "Unhappy Meals."

Thanks to the introduction of industrial-scale food processing, Americans have changed their dietary habits more in the past 100 years than all of humanity had in the previous 100,000. The Modern American Diet—we call it the MAD—is characterized first and foremost by simple sugars and refined carbohydrates now found in everything from cereal to pasta. These sugars play tricks on your brain, so you keep craving more and more of them, even though sugar consumption actually contributes to the *shrinkage* of key areas of your brain responsible for everything from memories to mood regulation.

The second largest source of calories in the MAD are added fats—refined vegetable and seed oils that have high amounts of omega-6 fats as well as trans fats, which have been linked to an increased risk of depression. A third critical aspect of the MAD most detrimental to our brain functions is the factory farming of cows, pigs, chickens, and even fish. Not only are these creatures pumped full of antibiotics and hormones to promote their growth, but they feed on an unnatural diet of grain, which leaves their flesh deficient in many of the very fats and nutrients our brains have required from animals since the dawn of humankind. Strange as it seems, with the MAD you can expand your waistline and starve your brain at the same time, which is exactly what growing numbers of Americans are doing.

Study after study in the medical research journals confirm that people who are most dependent on MAD-style eating habits have increased levels of depression, anxiety, mood swings, hyperactivity, and a wide variety of other mental and emotional problems. Our belief, backed up by ample research, is that the best way to prevent the MAD assault on our health and happiness is to go back to eating the wholesome foods that nurtured the development of our brains over tens of thousands of years of evolution.

Let's take a closer look at the cheeseburger on the cover of the book. To many nutritionists, this is a snapshot of everything that is wrong with the American diet: It's fatty, full of cholesterol, and high in calories. In the Happiness Diet, though, our burger is an important source for much of what you and your brain need for healthy growth and high functioning. The reason is that this is not your typical fast-food burger. The cheese and meat both came from grass-fed cows, ensuring you will get a good supply of brain-healthy omega-3s and other nutrients not found in factory-farmed animals. The lettuce and tomatoes were organically grown, so they offer the maximum number of valuable nutrients such as folate and lycopene without the risks of pesticides. The bun is made of whole grains, so it includes magnesium, zinc, B vitamins, and fiber instead of the empty calories in your typical bun.



So, aside from the occasional burger, what can you expect from the Happiness Diet?

In Part 1, we define what we mean by happiness. We believe that you can't work toward this desirable state of mind if your brain's machinery isn't well oiled and firing on all cylinders. We go on a short tour of the nutrients needed for a healthy brain to work and why food choice plays such an important role in either optimizing or diminishing its functions. Our next stop is a look at how our food has changed—how a few wrong turns down the nutrition highway wrecked our health and happiness.

This brief history lesson is key to understanding how so many unhappy meals have come into our food supply.

We next walk you through the hall of shame: the most common culprits that are collectively destroying our mood. The sugar, fats, toxins, and pesticides in the MAD make up a modern chemistry lab concoction that is lacking the key ingredients for a healthy brain. We go into all the details of how sugar assaults the brain so effectively that it's our number one mood buster. We explain why processed foods full of additives and preservatives are also bad for your brain. We'll see how researchers are showing a clearer link between obesity and depression, and why some are so convinced of the dietary component to Alzheimer's disease that they have nicknamed it "type 3" diabetes.

Once we move beyond what we're doing wrong with our MAD choices, we share the Essential Elements that will later form the core of the Happiness Diet. These are the best foods from which to get these vitamins, minerals, and other phytonutrients: healthier sugars (yes, there is such a thing), meat, fats, milk, eggs, and a huge array of plants. We've studied hundreds of books and medical journals, so we're as up-to-date as possible in the fast-changing world of nutrition science. Our research leads us to some surprising recommendations for health foods and mood boosters, including beef, bacon, and eggs, and explains what you need to do to best keep your brain well-fed.

In Part 2, we share what science knows about what we call "focus foods." In "Food for Thought," we suggest you amp up the intake of these specific nutrients and foods to enhance brain function, cognition, and sharpness. The chapter that follows, "Food for Energy," shows you what to eat to maximize energy levels, so you're soon fully recharged. With "Food for Good Mood," you'll find out about the best choices for taming tension and anxiety while stabilizing and boosting mood.

After we've covered what to eat, we'll show you where to shop and how to stock your kitchen. Our two-week menu plan, which includes

some of our own personal favorite recipes, should assure you that you don't need to be a culinary expert to prepare and enjoy delicious brain-healthy meals. Eating the right foods to best enhance brain function should be part of everyone's goal at every meal. Feel free to mix and match the menus; they're all good for you and for your state of mind.

Don't get us wrong: We don't believe in magic bullets. We do believe in good science and the cumulative effects of eating the broad array of these "happy" foods each and every day. The whole is definitely greater than the sum of its parts when it comes to any diet, including ours. No one food is going to be the superstar of this plan, but there are superfoods (those rich in the Essential Elements of Happiness), and we're going to give you a slew of the best ones to choose from for optimal mental health.

We can take control of what we eat, but it's not going to always be easy. You didn't get to a place of making the wrong food choices without a lot of pushing from the food industry and marketers from Madison Avenue. That is why throughout the book we provide some needed background on how we came to be eating in a way that's so destructive for our collective mental health. Peppered throughout, you will find this information in sidebars and in the margins. We've included a running list of 100 good reasons to avoid processed food (just look at number 23 and the ingredients list for this Oscar Meyer Lunchable and you'll never pack it in your kids' lunch again). We also provide brief history lessons on how so many unhappy meals have come into our food supply. Knowing this background acts as just another layer of motivation—and protection—as you change your course and get on a happier, smoother path.

If you need any further incentive, consider this: Another bonus that comes from following this diet is serious weight loss. It's almost impossible *not* to lose weight once you step off the MAD merry-go-round of sugar crashes and cravings. And you'll discover some pretty controversial, maybe even shocking, information about mood and obesity, too.

We hope that through this book, you will grasp just how important food is to your short-term mental and emotional state and your long-term moods and mental functions. We want you to feel that you are able to change not only your body but your brain as well.

Stick with us, and you'll feel great. Period.

Eat this way for life and you'll find that you're engaging with the world in a way that spreads this happiness to others.

Why not try it?