Dietary Advice May Boost Benefits of Treatment for Bipolar Disorder

How well people with bipolar disorder react to treatment may be affected by their weight and the quality of their diet.

October 18, 2018 By Alicia Green

Finding effective treatment for bipolar disorder (BD) can be challenging, as the mental health condition is characterized by two opposite sets of symptoms (manic highs and depressive lows). But new research presented at the European College of Neuropsychopharmacology Conference suggests that those with BD who maintain a healthy diet and weight may respond better to treatment, reports AlphaGalileo.

For the study, researchers randomly assigned a total of 133 participants to take a mix of nutraceuticals (compounds derived from foods such as vitamins or minerals that treat or prevent diseases or disorders), including the anti-inflammatory amino acid n-acetylcysteine (NAC), NAC alone or a placebo in addition to their regular BD medication for 16 weeks.

At baseline, scientists measured individuals' body mass index (BMI), depression and how each person functioned in everyday life. Investigators tracked any improvements made during the inquiry.

In addition, participants also completed a questionnaire about their eating habits that allowed researchers to measure the quality of their diets. (Good diets consisted of large amounts of fruits and vegetables; poor-quality eating plans included foods high in saturated fats and refined carbohydrates as well as excessive alcohol consumption.)

Next, scientists categorized the diets as either anti-inflammatory or pro-inflammatory based on foods that affect inflammation.

"We found that people who had a better-quality diet, a diet with anti-inflammatory properties or a lower BMI showed better response to add-on nutraceutical treatment than did those who reported a low-quality diet, or a diet including foods that promote inflammation, or who were overweight," said Melanie Ashton, a PhD candidate at Deakin University in Australia and the study's lead researcher.

If these findings are repeated and confirmed in a larger study, this will be "good news for people

with bipolar disorder, as there is a great need for better treatments for the depressive phase of bipolar disorder," Ashton added.

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