“Feel Good” Chemistry

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Understanding your **brain's "feel-good" chemistry** can be extremely beneficial in supporting one's efforts to navigate towards a healthy state of being.

Your mood, energy, focus, and sense of connection are shaped by a powerful group of neurotransmitters and hormones—your brain's natural chemical messengers. Chemicals like **serotonin, dopamine, endorphins, oxytocin, GABA, and anandamide** all play different roles in helping you feel calm, motivated, bonded, supported, and emotionally balanced.

The good news is that you can ***actively influence*** these through small, intentional daily actions. By learning what boosts each of these "feel-good" chemicals, you gain practical tools to support emotional regulation, reduce stress, and strengthen resilience.

This guide will provide general insight into what each chemical does and provides simple, research-supported strategies to naturally enhance your brain's well-being chemistry.

"FEEL GOOD" Chemicals:

The following are several "feel-good" chemicals, although it is not an exhaustive list. These examples are included to give you a starting point in your effort to identify how everyday actions can impact our mood and behavior as well as influence and support our overall well-being.

Dopamine: Often referred to as the **"Reward Chemical" or "Motivation Molecule"** plays a key role in the brain's reward system as well as the seeking system. It is associated with feelings of pleasure, motivation, and reinforcement.

Activities to consider:

- Move your body through exercise and engaging in enjoyable experiences.
- Exposure to sunlight, especially morning sunlight - first thing in the morning.
- Cold water immersion through brief cold showers or cold-water plunges.
- Establishing objectives and goals for the day, week, month, and longer term.
- Seek novelty and doing routine activities and behaviors differently.
- Pursue creative activities such as music, art, singing, writing, etc.
- Develop healthy sleep hygiene rituals and routines.
- Connect with others in-person as often as you can.
- Choose slow rewards that take longer to experience or achieve vs. fast rewards.

Serotonin: The **“Feel Good”** neurotransmitter that regulates mood, emotions, and sleep. It is often referred to as the "happy chemical" because higher levels are associated with feelings of happiness, contentment, and well-being. The gut produces about 90% to 95% of the body's total serotonin.

Activities to consider:

- Exposure to sunlight, especially morning sunlight - first thing in the morning.
- Move your body aerobically through some form of exercise and movement.
- Consider some form of mindfulness and/or meditation practice.
- Develop a nutritional plan that contributes to a healthy gut-brain connection.
- Connect with others in-person as often as you can.
- Identify opportunities to spend time in nature.
- Implement a gratitude practice that enables you to deliver acts of giving, helping others, expressing appreciation, or recalling positive memories.
- As possible – be open to increasing touch and physical connection w/ others.
- Develop healthy sleep hygiene rituals and routines.
- Seek heat exposure, i.e., sauna, warm bath, or relaxation through massage.

Endorphins: The body’s **“Natural Painkiller”** is produced by the body in response to stress and pain. They are often released during exercise, leading to a phenomenon known as the "runner's high." Endorphins can induce feelings of euphoria and well-being, helping to alleviate stress and improve mood.

Activities to consider:

- Move your body through aerobic exercise, high intensity interval training (HIIT), or strength training.
- Seek heat exposure, i.e., sauna, warm bath, or steam room.
- Try acupuncture as means to increase endorphins.
- Be open to cold exposure by experiencing trying a short cold shower or cold plunge.
- Laugh your way to increasing endorphin levels. I.e., comedy shows, funny movies, etc.
- Listening and/or dancing to music. Create a music playlist or visit a live show.
- Explore attunement-based practices such as Yoga, meditation, or mindfulness.

Epinephrine (adrenaline) and norepinephrine (noradrenaline): The "**Rush" or "Fight or Flight Messenger"** is both a hormone and a neurotransmitter that plays a role in the body's stress response. Epinephrine works mainly *throughout the entire body*—heart, lungs, muscles—to trigger a full "fight-or-flight" response. Norepinephrine works more in the *brain and the nervous system* to increase focus, alertness, and readiness. In moderate amounts, it can improve mood, alertness, and concentration. However, excessive levels can contribute to feelings of anxiety and stress.

Activities to consider:

- Participate in vigorous activities.
- Expose yourself to cold water immersion.
- Expose yourself to heat.
- Consider thrill seeking activities.
- Participate in competitive activities.
- Learn about breathwork techniques. I.e., "Wim Hof-style", short breath technique, etc.
- Listening to energizing, high-tempo music.
- Motivational or emotionally intense music.
- Seek cognitive challenges such as problem-solving under time pressure.
- Visit novel or stimulating environments.

Oxytocin: Often called the **"Love Hormone"** or **"Bonding Hormone"** or **"Cuddle Chemical"** is released during physical touch, social bonding activities, helping others, expressing gratitude towards self and others, and experiencing personal achievements. It plays a role in promoting trust, empathy, and social connection, contributing to feelings of warmth and closeness.

Activities to consider:

- Interpersonal connection - touch with others - attempt to hold eye contact with others.
- Try giving or receiving some form of massage therapy.
- Warm, safe social contact with family, friends, or partners.
- Extend acts of kindness to others through prosocial behaviors.
- Writing or verbalizing appreciation through gratitude.
- Seek to create bonding rituals through shared meals, celebrations, game nights, or meaningful traditions.
- Practice loving-kindness / compassion meditation.
- Dancing and movement with others.
- Engaging with a pet by playing with, petting, or caring for animals.
- Sensory & Physiological Stimuli such as music, warm scents, and comforting environments.

Anandamide: The **“Bliss Molecule”** is a neurotransmitter that interacts with the endocannabinoid system in the brain. It is often referred to as the "bliss molecule" because of its role in promoting feelings of happiness and euphoria.

Endocannabinoids: The body’s **“Natural Cannabis”** are a group of neurotransmitters that interact with the body's endocannabinoid system, which plays a role in regulating mood, appetite, and pain sensation. They are involved in the modulation of stress responses and can contribute to feelings of relaxation and well-being.

Activities to consider:

- Move your body aerobically through some form of exercise and movement.
- Stress reduction practices such as meditation, Yoga, Tai Chi, breathing exercises, etc.
- Seek enjoyable, rewarding activities that include social connection, laughter, music, etc.
- Explore creative activities such as drawing, painting, building, writing, etc.
- Develop healthy sleep hygiene.
- Explore nutrition & dietary strategies.
- Exposure to sunlight.
- Human–animal interaction by playing with pets.

GABA (Gamma-Aminobutyric Acid): The **“Brake Pedal for the Brain”** is the main inhibitory neurotransmitter in the central nervous system. It helps to calm the brain and reduce anxiety by inhibiting neural activity. Increasing GABA levels through activities such as meditation, yoga, and deep breathing can promote relaxation and a sense of calm.

Activities to consider:

- Move your body aerobically through some form of exercise and movement.
- Stress reduction practices such as meditation, Yoga, Tai Chi, breathing exercises, etc.
- Try to minimize excessive caffeine usage, exposure to chronic stress, sleep deprivation, high sugar diet, and excessive alcohol intake.
- Explore creative activities such as drawing, painting, building, writing, etc.
- Exposure to massage and acupuncture can be beneficial.
- Relaxation practices that include guided imagery, progressive muscle relaxation, etc.
- Calming and relaxing music and sensory experiences.
- Being in nature, sun exposure, and experiencing outdoors.
- Develop healthy sleep hygiene.

Natural Painkillers

Endorphins

Released along with Dopamine and Seratonin
Natural painkillers and Response to Stress
Helps you Stay Alive During Intense Pain
Stronger effect than morphine on your body
20 different types of endorphins exist
Beta-endorphins involved in stress and pain mgt
Typically is released in a short period of time
Relieves pain, reduce stress and improve mood
Released during pleasurable activities
Produced and released in many ways

Pain, Suffering, and Enjoyment

Feel Good

Seratonin

A chemical nerve cells produce to send signals
Impacts every part of your body
Interacts with Emotions to Motor Skills
Helps with eating and digestion
Considered a natural mood stabilizer
Often regulates anxiety and happiness
Impacts Sexual Function
Found primarily in the stomach and intestines
Plays a part in Rest, Sleep, and Wake
Nutrition and Foods Play a Role in Production

Acknowledgement, Achievement, and Celebration

Cuddle Chemical

Oxytocin

A Natural Hormone and Chemical Messenger
Strong Influence During Labor and Bonding
Important Role In behaviors and social interactions
Impacts Sexual Arousal and Attachment with Others
Influences Relaxation, Trust, and Recognition
Has a positive feedback loop
Positive Impact on Social Behaviors
Can Increase Through Touch; Such as Hugging
Released from Sexual Excitement and Orgasm
Aides in the Euphoria When We Fall In Love

Connection, Trust, and Social Engagement

Stress Hormone

Cortisol

Essential Hormone and The Primary Stress Hormone
Released by Adrenal Glands on Top of Kidneys
Affects Almost Every Organ & Tissue
Directs Non-Essential Functions
Commands Attention; Prepares for Action
Impacts Mood, Motivation, & Fear
Adjusts Immune System
Suppresses Digestive System
Impacts Reproductive System
Impacts Growth Process

Preparation, Attention, and Sustainability

The Rush

Adrenaline

Released Along with Cortisol and Noraadrenaline
Released through Adrenal Glands as well as Other
Increases Heart Rate, Blood Pressure, Air Passages
Enlarges Pupils and Prepares The Body to Respond
Boosts Energy and Redistributes Essential Functions
Prepares for Immediacy of Action
Decreases Sensitivity to Pain
Enhances Sensory Systems
Slows Digestion
Increases Metabolism

Awareness, Focus, and Action

Reward Seeking

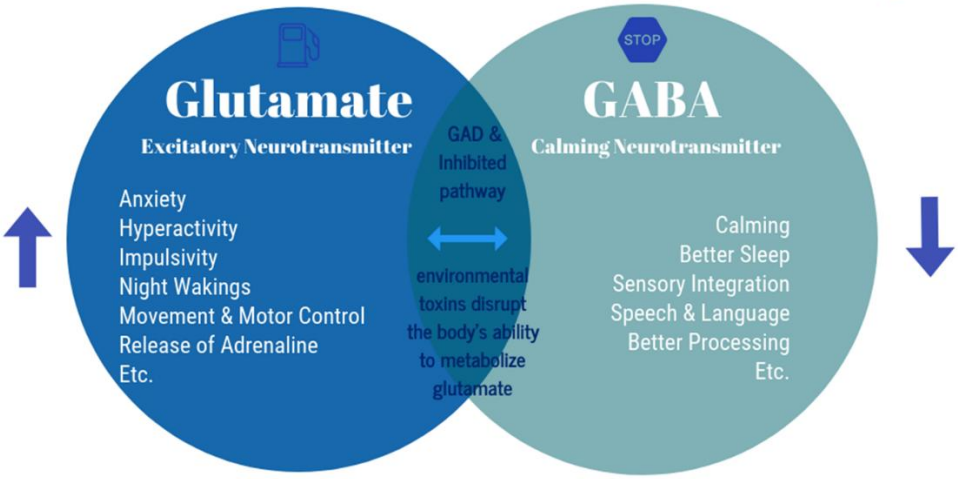
Dopamine

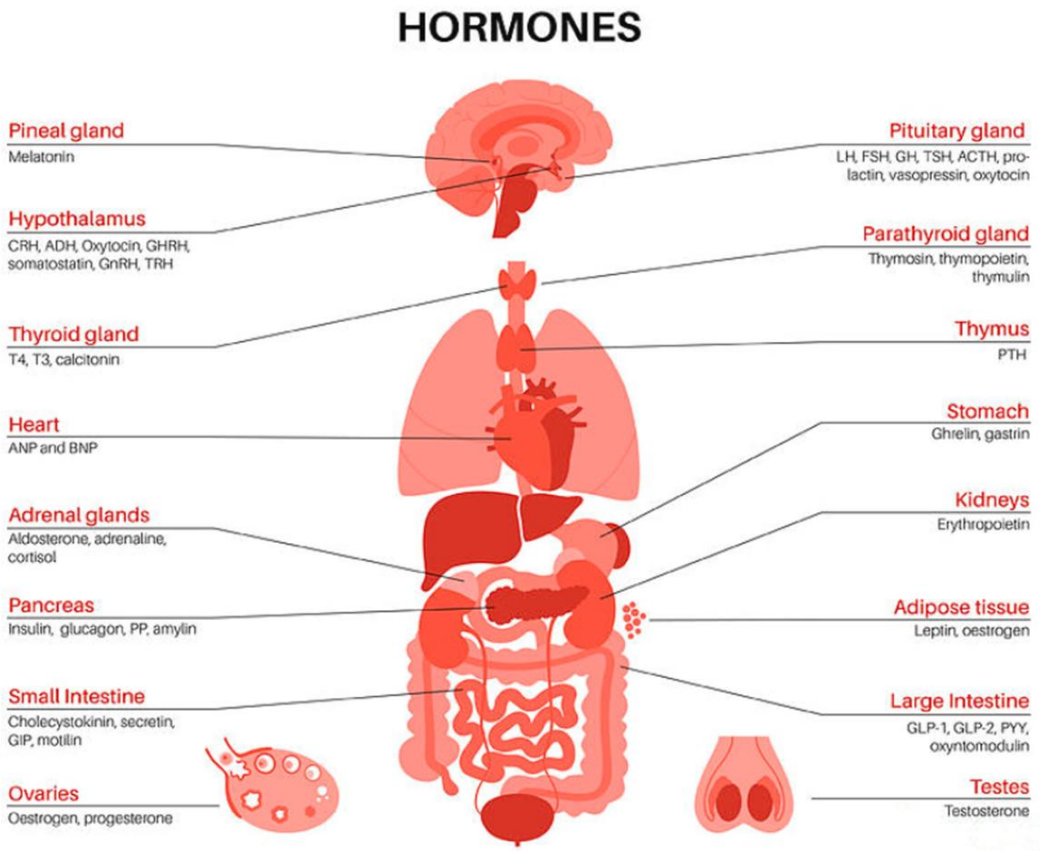
Neurochemical released in the Brain
Dopamine helps nerve cells to send messages
Enables You to feel pleasure and satisfaction
Influences Motivation, Memory, Mood, and Sleep
Plays a Role in Learning and Concentration
Influences Body Movement and Other Functions
Released when Anticipation of a Reward Exists
Overall Health and Wellness Can Impact Release
Impacts Alertness, Focus, and Happiness
Interacts with Other Hormones and Neurochemicals

Anticipate, Seek, and Find Change & Novelty

The Importance of the Glutamate & GABA Relationship

How These Neurotransmitters Work Together



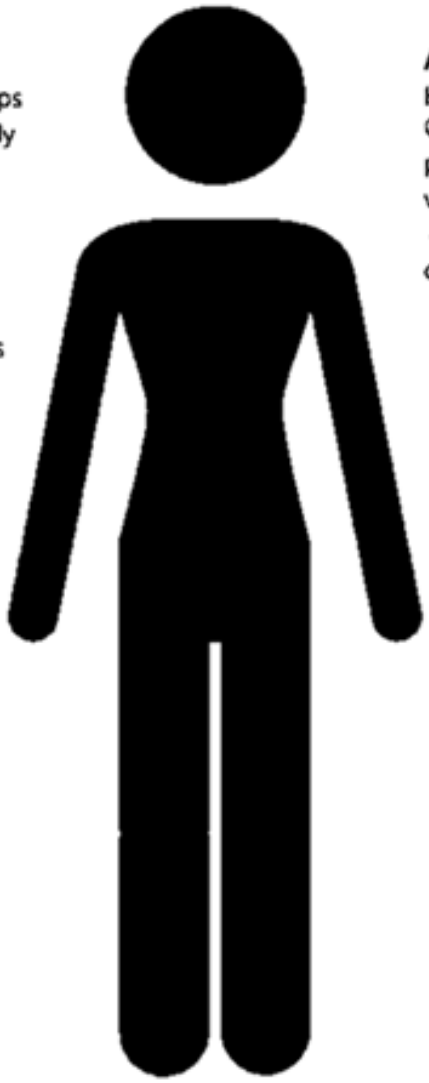


Prolactin
Pituitary gland
A hormone that enables the production of breast milk after birth.

FSH
Pituitary gland
Promotes the growth and development of ovarian follicles during the follicular phase of the menstrual cycle.

LH
Pituitary gland
Stimulates the release of an egg from the ovaries during the menstrual cycle.

Melatonin
Pineal gland
Essential for good sleep. It helps the body relax and lowers body temperature.



Active Vit D (calcitriol)
Kidneys
Calcitriol is a steroid hormone produced when the kidneys convert vitamin D. It regulates the body's calcium and phosphorus levels crucial to bone health.

Thyroid Hormones
Thyroid gland
Responsible for regulating the body's metabolism. It regulates how the body uses energy, produces heat and consumes oxygen.

Cortisol
Adrenal gland
Prepares the 'fight or flight' response by stimulating rapid heart rate and breathing and can also influence mood.

SHBG
Liver
Binds to oestrogen and testosterone to carry these hormones through the blood. SHBG controls how much testosterone the body tissues can use.

Adrenaline
Adrenal gland
Also prepares the body's stress response by elevating the heart rate and stimulating glucose secretion.

Insulin
Pancreas
Helps to regulate blood sugar, and store excess glucose for energy.

Testosterone
Ovaries and adrenal gland
Affects red blood cell production, menstruation, tissue and bone mass, sex drive, and fertility.

Serotonin
Gut
Improves mood as well as digestion. Precursor to melatonin.

Oestrogen
Ovaries
Oestrogen affects the urinary tract, cardiovascular system, bones, muscles, breasts, skin, hair, mucous membranes, the brain, fertility, and reproduction.

Progesterone
Ovaries
It is a steroid hormone released by the corpus luteum after ovulation has occurred. It prepares the body for a possible pregnancy and helps the body support a pregnancy.