

# Reclaim Optimal Health

*\*These are recommendations from my personal experience. I am not a doctor, please consult your physician.*

## **The Relationship between Amino Acids and Mood by Maral Salerno**

What are amino acids?

Amino acids are organic compounds that form proteins, they are the building blocks of life so we can break down food, grow, repair body tissue, and make neurotransmitters. When we eat protein (i.e. grass fed organic meat), they are then digested and broken down into amino acids, and are then raw materials we can use in our bodies.

What are neurotransmitters?

Chemicals in the body that transmit these signals across a synapse from one neuron or brain cell to another. We often hear the term brain chemicals which is synonymous with neurotransmitters. Neurotransmitters are made from some of these precursor amino acids. We also have co-factors, which are nutrients that are used to help make the neurotransmitters. Co-factors like zinc, B6, folate, magnesium, etc... and we need all these co-factors and precursors to make these neurotransmitters that make us feel great, stop the cravings, calm us down, and make us feel happy.

The targeted use of individual amino acid supplements can help balance brain chemistry to alleviate anxiety, fear, worry, panic attacks, and feeling stressed or overwhelmed. They can also be helpful in addressing other problems that contribute to or exacerbate anxiety, such as sugar cravings and addictions. In addition, they can help with depression and insomnia, which often co-occur with anxiety. When you balance your brain chemistry, not only will you alleviate symptoms of anxiety, you'll also have a great mood, eliminate cravings, sleep well, and have good energy and mental focus.

## **What to Do Before You Begin Using Amino Acids**

Before even begin to use amino acids for postpartum depression a few steps are highly recommended to be put in place.

### *Reduce Inflammation*

Inflammation is a stressor or trigger that can be created in the body through many avenues. Reducing our "inflammation bucket" is essential to any health rebuilding program and moving into a mental/emotional state that is uplifting.

1. A real whole foods diet is essential. Shopping the perimeter of the grocery store and purchasing organic foods that are not packaged or processed will benefit your gut and in turn improve your overall health. The gut is connected to every system of the body and there is actually a gut-brain axis that is essential in neurotransmitter function.
2. Consuming stock and bone broth daily. The full range amino acid profiles in both of these foods is fantastic for rebuilding the gut and producing neurotransmitters.
3. Remove Sugar. Blood sugar imbalance is the #1 reason for poor neurotransmitter production and function. Sugar depletes nutrients in the body and we tend to fill up on sugar first rather than nutrient dense foods. Furthermore, all amino acids help to balance blood sugar, but looking at all forms of sugar you are consuming is essential to reclaiming your mood. It's not just the obvious candy bars, cane sugar, sodas, and junk food, but it is also maple syrup, honey, too much fruit or grain consumption that can negatively affect blood sugar levels. Aiming for 35grams of sugar or less a day. This includes fruit.
4. Remove Caffeine. This may sound daunting, but it is totally doable with amino acid support. Caffeine elevates cortisol which is our stress chemical and in turn increases our "inflammation bucket".
5. Alcohol/Tobacco. I think this is obvious for Mama's, especially pregnant or postpartum, but it doesn't hurt to list it here.
6. Removal of wheat/gluten. More and more research is pointing out that everyone receives an inflammation load by consuming wheat/gluten. There is a range of sensitivity from low to strong, all the way to severe Celiacs disease. Based on scientific research, whatever the range of sensitivity, wheat creates inflammation in EVERYONE.
7. Optimizing digestion by consuming probiotics, enzymes, and fermented foods.
8. Exercise 20 minutes a day. Under exercising is just as bad for us as over exercising. Find exercise that is nourishing for you. Research has shown that people who exercise 20 minutes a day have 500 more beneficial bacteria in the gut.
9. Light Therapy every morning for 10-20 minutes either outside or in front of a light therapy device has been found to reduce postpartum depression by 75 percent.
10. Testing for Pathogenic Infections and the overall health of the gut.
11. Testing for Minerals & Heavy Metals to find out how to feed the body what it needs and detox from anything that is holding it back from rebuilding.

### **How to self-treat using Amino Acids**

Maybe you have tried a real whole foods diet change, then tried meds but there were side effects, or intuitively you knew that you weren't getting at the underlying contributors of the issue. This is where amino acids come in.

Amino acids are a wonderful SHORT TERM SOLUTION to support the body and help it move into better function. Here is a list of tips I recommend you keep in mind when working with amino acids.

- ✓ Begin with 1 amino acid at a time to allow you to increase or decrease as needed.
- ✓ How do you do an amino acid trial? Take the Amino Acid Questionnaire and rate your symptoms on a scale of 1-10. Focus on the highest score areas first. Generally, within 5

minutes of taking an amino acid you will likely experience a visible difference if it's going to work. However, for some people it can take a few days. If you don't notice an improved noticeable difference within 4 days, take yourself off that amino acid. If the amino acid does have a positive affect, then you want to notice how much your mood has improved. If it has improved but you still need more support, then consider incrementally increasing your dosage. Make sure to give your body time to respond to the different dosages before you add more.

- ✓ Only take what you need, a little can go a long way for some people. Start low and go slow.
- ✓ Amino acids need to be taken away from protein. At least 30 minutes before a meal or 60 minutes after a meal.
- ✓ In the event of a negative affect from amino acids, 1000mg of Vitamin C has been recommended for neutralizing any negative effects of amino acids and will wash it out of your system.
- ✓ If you have candida or any pathogenic infection, as well as an underactive thyroid (hypothyroid), amino acids won't work as well.
- ✓ Quality is paramount with taking amino acid supplementation.

### **Low GABA (Gamma Aminobutyric Acid)**

Gamma Aminobutyric Acid is an amino acid and a neurotransmitter. When you have good levels of GABA you're going to feel relaxed and calm. You're not going to feel overwhelmed by the small things and you're not going to go to sugary foods or wine to relax.

Worry and anxiety can be a result of low GABA and also low serotonin, so you may check off anxiety in both sections of the Amino Acid Questionnaire. Low GABA tends to result in more physical anxiety/tension, while low serotonin tends to result in more anxiety in the head, ruminating thoughts etc.

The brand Source Naturals makes a very high quality Serene Science GABA Calm Mind sublingual. Take 125mg as a starting point in the morning, mid-morning, and the mid-afternoon. You can also take it in the evening if you see you need it. High doses like 500-1000mg seems too much, but everyone is different. Start low and go slow. You will likely have to break up the tablet because each tablet/capsule is 750mg.

You can raise GABA by practicing yoga. Taking 500mg L-tyrosine and or L-theanine 500mg also helps to raise GABA.

GABA-tone from APEX it does have co-factors (to get off SSRI's, & some people get nightmares with Valerian), Lithium.

### **Low Serotonin**

The amino acid Tryptophan & 5 HTP can be used for increasing serotonin. Starting dose: Tryptophan 500mg & 50mg 5 HTP (can raise cortisol so be careful with poor sleepers). 1-3 mid-afternoon, and 1-3 at bed time. Begin with a trial run of Tryptophan by itself first. Both

Tryptophan and 5-HTP are sold by Lidtke. If sleep issues do not resolve use a little prolonged release melatonin. If on an SSRI, work with your doctor when using Tryptophan. If Tryptophan doesn't work for obsessiveness, then add inositol.

Serotonin levels can also be improved by taking Omega 3's, getting sunshine (without sun glasses), and/or using a full spectrum lamp (beneficial for adrenal health as well) especially if you are stuck indoors most of the time.

### **Low Catecholamines**

- Depression and apathy
- Easily bored
- Lack of energy
- Lack of focus
- Lack of drive and low motivation
- Attention deficit disorder
- Procrastination and indecisiveness
- Craving carbs, alcohol, caffeine, or drugs for energy

Tyrosine raises catecholamine (which is produced in the brain and the adrenals). Start with 500mg first thing in the morning as soon as you awake (keep right by your bed), mid-morning, and mid-afternoon if sleep is not a problem. Helps get you off coffee.

### **Low Endorphins**

- Heightened sensitivity to emotional pain
- Heightened sensitivity to physical pain
- Crying or tearing up easily
- Eating to soothe your mood, or comfort eating
- Really, really *loving* certain foods, behaviors, drugs, or alcohol
- Craving a reward or numbing treat

Lidtke also makes EndorphiGen which contains D-Phenylalanine (DPA) for comfort eating, feel good endorphins, or for those who say "it's a treat, I deserve it". D-Phenylalanine raises your endorphins and takes away those feelings. This is just another tool to make health rebuilding easier so you don't have to use will power, because really, there is an underlying biochemical issue. Additionally, exercising and giving to others raises our endorphin levels.

### **Low Blood Sugar**

- Crave sugar, starch or alcohol any time during the day
- Irritable, shaky, headachey – especially if too long between meals (can look like anxiety or a panic attack)
- Intense cravings for sweets
- Lightheaded if meals are missed
- Eating relieves fatigue

- Agitated, easily upset, nervous

Glutamine helps to keep blood sugar stable. Good for the digestive system and very healing for the gut. Can be calming or excitatory.

How will we feel if we have good stable blood sugar:

1. grounded
2. stable
3. we won't feel irritable, agitated, or nervous
4. we won't have these intense cravings for something sweet

Glutamine 500mg a few times a day, morning, mid-morning, mid-afternoon, and evening. Sometimes we need to watch glutamine because it can turn in glutamic acid and be excitatory. You can open it directly onto your tongue to take cravings away. Take into consideration that blood sugar issues often involve compromised adrenals.

There are some precautions to be aware of when taking supplemental amino acids. These are reprinted from *The Mood Cure* (2004) from Julia Ross. Consult a knowledgeable practitioner before taking *any* supplemental amino acids if any of the following statements apply to you:

- React to supplements, foods or medications with unusual or uncomfortable symptoms
- Have a serious physical illness, particularly cancer
- Have severe liver or kidney problems
- Have an ulcer (amino acids are slightly acidic)
- Have schizophrenia or other mental illness
- Pregnant or nursing
- Taking any medications for mood problems, particularly MAO inhibitors, or more than one SSRI

Also, please be aware of the following precautions in regard to specific amino acids and consult with a knowledgeable practitioner if in doubt:

- Overactive thyroid/Grave's disease: tyrosine, DLPA
- Phenylketonuria (PKU): tyrosine, DLPA
- Melanoma: tyrosine, DLPA
- High Blood pressure: tyrosine, DLPA
- Migraine headaches: tyrosine, DLPA
- Low blood pressure: GABA, taurine
- Asthma: tryptophan, melatonin
- Severe depression: melatonin
- Bipolar disorder: tyrosine, DLPA, glutamine
- Cancer: there is a question around glutamine (some research shows it's beneficial some research suggests avoiding it – check with your oncologist if you are currently undergoing treatment)

## Amino Acids and SSRIs

If you're currently taking a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI) or monoamine oxidase inhibitor (MAOI), don't take either 5-HTP or tryptophan unless you're working with a knowledgeable practitioner. Taking 5-HTP or tryptophan with either of these classes of antidepressants may cause serotonin syndrome, an adverse reaction characterized by agitation, confusion, rapid heart rate, and blood pressure fluctuations. If you experience these symptoms, stop taking 5-HTP or tryptophan immediately. When I have clients who are taking a single SSRI who might also benefit from tryptophan or 5-HTP, I have them take the amino acid six hours apart from their medication—after obtaining approval from their doctor and with their doctor monitoring for adverse reactions. Please do the same.

To work with me or for more support schedule your FREE 45-Minute Consultation at [www.reclaimoptimalhealth.com/schedule-now/](http://www.reclaimoptimalhealth.com/schedule-now/)