

BE WELL

To Be Hangry or Not To Be Hangry: *That is the Question*

By Debbie DeAngelo
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Hangry. All of us use the term flippantly but is it a real thing? To anyone who has lashed out at a friend while awaiting a table at a restaurant, it's a no-brainer.

Yes, hanger is a legitimate malady. A hybrid of the words hunger and angry, hangry is defined as the irritability that results from needing to eat. Although being cranky is immediately associated with hanger; negativity, aggression and impulsivity may crash the party too. When you eat, your digestive tract breaks down the food, which in turn raises your blood sugar. This allows you to function physically and mentally. If too much time elapses between meals or the

meals you eat are insufficient or imbalanced, then your blood sugar may become erratic or drop.

Low blood sugar (hypoglycemia) is associated with a spectrum of symptoms besides being hangry. Other indicators include a headache, feeling mentally foggy, anxiety, dizziness, lack of energy, shakiness, and weakness. The good news is that it's reversible once you eat. Occasionally feeling hangry because you skipped or delayed a meal isn't a problem. It happens to all of us from time to time. If you experience it regularly, then you need to pay close attention to your bodily cues as well as the quality and quantity of your meals.

Because we live in a society that will study pretty much anything, there is indeed research on hanger. One small European study asked participants to track their emotions, specifically hunger, irritability and pleasure, at five time points throughout the day via a smartphone app. The results indicated that greater levels of hunger were associated with greater feelings of anger and irritability and fewer feelings of pleasure. If you live with someone who becomes habitually hangry, then it may not come as a shock to you that it can take its toll on relationships too. In a 2014 study, scientists measured blood sugar levels in 107 married couples over a three-week period while simultaneously having them complete tasks that assessed aggressive behavior. As expected, the lower their blood sugar, the greater the aggression towards their partner.

Prevention is Key

Since hunger is the root cause of being hangry, it's completely manageable. Avoiding this unpleasant occurrence is founded in recognizing that it's happening and addressing dietary and behavioral strategies to mitigate it. The following ingredients comprise a reliable recipe for tackling hanger.

Timing is everything. It *almost* goes without saying that if your mood tanks when your stomach is empty, then you should shun skipping meals. Less obvious perhaps is that you need to pay close attention to the time intervals between meals. When too many hours elapse, your blood sugar declines. This signals you that it's time to eat. If you are unable to adjust your mealtimes, then add a nutritious snack designed to tie you over until you can eat a substantial meal. A good snacking rule of thumb is to team protein and fiber. Examples of this prime pairing are a hard-boiled egg with a pear, an apple and almonds, or hummus with whole grain crackers.

Balance your plate. This is where nipping hanger in the bud begins. Cultivating steady blood sugars originates with balanced meals. We are constantly bombarded by so much conflicting nutrition advice, much of which comes from those who do not possess a health or nutrition background, that most people are confused about how to eat. If you frequently or chronically feel

hypoglycemic, then make sure you're eating lean protein, healthy fat, and fiber at every meal. The body operates optimally on this combination of nutrients. Additionally, if you're an "undereater," then you may need to step up the caloric content of your meals.

Press pause. Being hangry can go beyond snapping at people. Low blood sugar can cloud your judgment and result in poor decision-making. If you can, delay important interactions and decisions at times when you are feeling shaky and cognitively compromised. Adhering to the acronym H.A.L.T., may help. This refers to checking in with yourself periodically throughout the day to identify whether you're hungry, angry, lonely or tired. Since these triggers can result in undesirable reactions, it's beneficial to recognize them and intervene. When it comes to hanger, it's better to make time to eat than to regret the consequences of your actions.

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