



Tips for Innovative Meetings and Events (T.I.M.E.)

Topic: The Brainy Side of Food & Beverage

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Welcome

Of course, you need to feed participants at your meeting and event. The food must be

- Appropriate to your group
- Within your budget
- Balanced offering protein, some carbohydrates and some fat

But food and beverage choices should not be focused only on calories, variety, and special dietary needs. The food you serve will affect your attendees' mood and learning ability.

At least 70 neurotransmitters have been identified that regulate things like memory, appetite, mental function, mood, movement, and the wake-sleep cycle.

Also in this issue I offer you creative ideas for food and beverage in your next meeting and event.

Have I whet your appetite for more in this issue of The Brainy Side of F&B? Indulge and enjoy.

Sue

[Sue Tinnish](#)

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You Are What You Eat

What you eat affects the following:

- The level of nerve chemicals in the brain that regulate all mental processes.
- The development and maintenance of brain cell function and structure
- The speed that nerve cells transmit messages from one neuron to the next
- The level of enzymes and their activity, which enhance brain function
- The level of enzymes and their activity, which enhance brain function
- The amount of oxygen that reaches the brain
- The ability of brain cells to transmit electrical messages

Thinking is a biochemical process. Let's explore just a bit of science to understand the link to the brain, thinking, memory, mood and learning. Then we will focus on some creative ideas for F&B.

A Bit Brainy

The smallest functioning unit in the nervous system is the nerve cell or neuron. The neuron "talks" to other nerve cells by relaying electrical messages within the brain and throughout the rest of the body. Nerve cells never touch each other. To relay messages from one cell to the next the sending nerve cell must find a way to jump the gap or space between the two cells. That space is called the synapse. The "spark" that allows messages to jump between cells are neurotransmitters.

Without becoming an expert in neuroscience or neuroanatomy, you can see how important these neurotransmitters are to

Disruption to even one neurotransmitter dramatically alters nerve cell function and instigates a cascading effect on other neurotransmitters.

The brain manufactures most neurotransmitters. But some are directly influenced by what you eat. Many neurotransmitters are composed of either amino acids or choline – both are obtained from food. When you consume too little of either, you will experience changes in mood, appetite and thinking. The most food sensitive neurotransmitters are serotonin, dopamine and norepinephrine.

3 Neurotransmitters You Should Know

Although there are more than 70 different neurotransmitters, the three you need to know are Serotonin, Dopamine and Acetylcholine.

Serotonin – a neurotransmitter that regulates your general mood.

No other neurotransmitter is as strongly linked to your diet as is serotonin. Serotonin creates a calm and relaxed state with a general sense of well being. High levels of

serotonin can cause a person to feel sluggish and drowsy. Low levels of serotonin will cause intense food cravings.

Serotonin rich foods are carbohydrate based e.g., pasta, starchy vegetables, potatoes, cereals, breads.

Carbohydrates enhance the absorption of tryptophan, which is converted into serotonin in the brain. Within about thirty minutes of eating a carbohydrate meal, you will feel more calm and relaxed. The effects will last several hours.

Dopamine and norepinephrine - neurotransmitters that elevate your mood and energy

Dopamine and norepinephrine are responsible for alertness, increased energy with quicker, more accurate reaction times.

It is involved with voluntary movement, emotional arousal.

Dopamine rich foods include all proteins (meat, milk products, fish, beans, nuts, soy products).

Eating protein raises the level of tyrosine, which prompts the brain to manufacture norepinephrine and dopamine.

Acetylcholine - a neurotransmitter that manages your memory

Acetylcholine is made by choline. The more choline you consume, the more it makes its way to your brain, where it is converted into acetylcholine. A lack of choline can cause a lack of memory and concentration.

Choline is a B complex vitamin that is found in cholesterol rich foods, like egg yolks, peanuts, wheat germ, liver, meat, fish, milk, cheese and vegetables (especially broccoli, cabbage and cauliflower).

And don't forget your Vitamins. Vitamins and minerals are needed to convert ordinary amino acids into these powerful neurotransmitters. Certain vitamin deficiencies (e.g. B1, B3, B6, B12, folic acid) may be related to memory difficulties.

Infused with Creativity

You can infuse your food and beverage with freshness and creativity by relying on the expertise of your catering company or the executive chef at your meeting. Here are 5 questions to ask when planning an event:

- What indigenous or local ingredients are available?
- What trends are you seeing?
- What are some of the new and exciting things you have done?
- What have you done recently that you are most proud of?
- What is your favorite ingredient lately?

Also weighing in on this topic is Ellen Harte from Tasty Catering who addresses what to

know when working with a catering company in the next section.

Catering to Success

[Ellen Harte](#), Director of Sales at Tasty Catering, offers these two simple guidelines when working with a catering company:

Know your client. What is the nature of the event?

- Details. It's all in the details.
- What are their sensitivities?
 1. Budget?
 2. On time delivery?
 3. 5 star service?
 4. Gourmet cuisine?
 5. Hot food that is hot, etc.?
- If this is a repeat event, what went well last time?; what could be improved?

This is especially important when working with a committee...everyone involved brings their own personal "agenda" with them. Finding out what the most important sensitivity is is key to a successful catering experience.

Know the Caterer.

- What are their capabilities?

We all have a niche. For example, a high-end social caterer might not be a good choice for a corporate meeting requiring simple and affordable box lunches. Having a cadre of competent caterers to work with is always a good idea.
- Think of the Caterer as your "partner."

Caterers do not always understand the full scope of intricate event planning, - as planners do not always understand the catering business (unless they used to be one!). Invite your caterer to attend a planning session (or two) with your clients. By involving the caterer at an early stage, we are able to fully understand the nature of the event. The Planner and Caterer on the same page is a win-win situation.

A perfect example of this need is to insure that the caterer understands your choices of linens and centerpieces.

Contributed by Ellen Harte, Tasty Catering, www.tastycatering.com.
[Tasty Catering's Website](#). Ellen can be reached at 847-593-2000 or ellen@tastycatering.com or [Ellen Harte](#)

Unique Food Ideas



Food appeals to the eye, to the nose and to the palate. Food offers many ways to enrich your meeting including the following ideas:

- Introduce Color. Food with strong colors -- deep green, purple, blue, red - are usually more nutritious than white or beige colored foods. Some people have organized colored food tables-- blue food stations, orange food stations, etc.
- Action. Buffets, food stations or action stations all promote movement. This is very appealing after sitting for an extended period of time in a meeting. Action stations where the chef prepares the food helps create more of an experience for the participant. And it allows the person to create a customized meal -- more appealing, more personalized and accommodating special dietary needs.
- Themes. Use food as your theme (see Freebies) or use the food to augment your theme. Meals and breaks can enrich the content and messaging of your meeting.
- Culinary Schools as a Venue. I recently held a meeting at the Jill Prescott Culinary School in Chicago (www.jillprescott.com). [Jill Prescott's Culinary School Website](#). The venue allowed us to be creative and enjoy new surroundings. See the photo. For more details on the meeting see the Freebies section. You can also find a cooking school near you through the International Association of Culinary Professionals website at www.iacp.com. [International Association of Culinary Professionals](#)
- Go ethnic, regional or local. Offer buffets that offer a variety of ethnic food. Or do a buffet that focuses on regional cuisine.(Cajun, Southwestern) Or focus on the local specialties.
- Silent Meals. Promoted by Chef Daniel Chong-Jiminez from The Spa at Norwich Inn in Norwich Connecticut. In the spa setting, participants taste, smell and reflect on the dishes in complete silence. "The concept of silent dining has been around for centuries; it stems from the Buddhist practice of mindfulness said Chong-Jiminez in Successful Meetings and Conventions, April 2004 issue.
- Teambuilding. Food always brings people together. Food can be used in a variety ways for teambuilding including:
 1. Recipe Contests
 2. Cook Offs
 3. Competitive Cooking
 4. Collaborative Cooking
 5. Interactive Cooking

Culinary events create an environment that is conducive to teambuilding skills. Culinary team building promotes creativity, communication and cooperation, delegation, and working under time constraints. And different from many teambuilding programs, culinary team building removes the athletic or physical skills often required in other team building programs. Finally teams are able to establish closer relationships based upon new bonds and a common experience.

- Interactive Dining experiences: Meet the chef. Chef's table where you observe the chef cooking. Set up a Chocolate fountain, fondue station. waiters in costume or interacting with guests. Shabu-Shabu, winemaker's dinner. Or consider Cirque Productions' Dinneractive for group events. Throughout the evening, willing participants are invited to join the show. The entire event is presented with Cirque flair. [Cirque's Dinneractive](#)
- Serve Family Style. Pass platters of food for sharing promotes conversation and networking. Another trend is to serve a variety of deserts family style for the finish.
- Encourage Continued Conversation at the Table. You can create table topics for specific tables related to the subject of the meeting or event. Place these topics on stations so people know what will be discussed. Or create a table tent with a few questions (business related) to keep the conversation flowing. I have a sample one I created for a marketing discussion available via email. Or use a secret envelope where everyone pulls out one question that they must answer and share with the entire group. The questions can be personal (not too personal) or business related or a mixture.
- Trade Shows. To increase flow throughout the show floor, place buffet tables throughout the floor. Don't station all the food on one table. Instead create a hot station, cold station, and desert station strategically throughout the floor. But be sure people (including the exhibitors) know where to find the food.
- Sponsors. Solicit sponsors to help you offset the costs of food and beverage. To increase flow throughout the show floor, place buffet tables throughout the floor. Don't station all the food on one table. Instead create a hot station, cold station, and desert station strategically throughout the floor. But be sure people (including the exhibitors) know where to find the food.

Freebies: [Debunking Food and Sleepiness](#)

Freebies: [Turkey and Tryptophan Debunked](#)

Turkey has the bum rap of being accused of making one tired. Turkey does contain tryptophan, an amino acid which is a natural sedative. But tryptophan doesn't act on the brain unless it is taken on an empty stomach with no protein present. So turkey alone won't make your meeting participants feel tired.

Overeating, like our tendency in America during the Thanksgiving holiday feast –

especially when combined with alcohol - will result in a lazy, lethargic feeling. But it is not due to the turkey but rather the combination of drinking alcohol and overeating a carbohydrate-rich meal and the turkey.

More on that Sleepy Feeling....

After a big meal, most of your body's oxygen is being used by your stomach and digestive system as it digests the food you have eaten. This means that your brain is being denied much of the oxygen it needs to function effectively and stay mentally alert. This is why you tend to feel sleepy after a big meal.

More Freebies: For fabulous food quotes and some great ideas on how to incorporate a food theme into your meeting, email me - stinnish@ameritech.net or click here [Sue Tinnish](#)

Future T.I.M.E.

Thank you to my great host from the [Minneapolis Chapter of Meeting Professionals International](#), [Jessica Hughes](#). I experienced a warm welcome and warm weather in Minneapolis earlier this month.

The [South Florida Chapter of Meeting Professionals International](#) rolled out the red carpet for me. Special thanks to [Elsa Duarte](#), [Lynn Morris](#) and [Kathi Beale](#) for their hospitality. And no one minded that the Chicago Bulls upset the Miami Heat in Basketball - or at least they didn't mention it to me!

Two dates to add to your calendar. I will be speaking at

[Affordable Meetings, Chicago, April 6-7, 2005](#)

And I am involved in organizing [AmaZing Meetings - Discover the Magic](#) for the International Association of Conference Centers. If you want to hold AmaZing Meetings, you will want to attend this one day event on [Thursday, May 26, 2005 at the Doral Eaglewood Conference Resort & Spa](#). Email me so I can insure we send you an invitation![Sue Tinnish](#)

Finally, I only grow through word of mouth of my subscribers. I would really appreciate it if you would forward T.I.M.E. onto your colleagues, associates, and clients. Just press the forward button at the end of the newsletter.

T.I.M.E. Gone By

If you are interested in past issues, please e-mail us with the month and topic and we will send you a copy of that newsletter. Here's what is included in past issues [Back Issue Request](#):

May 2000: **Teambuilding** & (Freebie) New York Times Reprint On Teambuilding

June 2000: **Green Meetings** & (Freebie) Resource List Of Exercises

July 2000: **Values** & (Freebie) Meeting Analysis

August 2000: **Minimum/Minimal Meetings** & (Freebie) Web Winners

October 2000: **Evaluations** & (Freebie) Sample Evaluation Questions

November 2000: [Politics](#)
December 2000: [Toys](#) & (Freebie) Brainstorming Ideas

January 2001: [Sales, Award Presentations](#) & (Freebie) Sales Tips
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January 2002: [Teambuilding Options](#) & (Freebie)
February 2002: [Promotional Products](#) & (Freebie) Case Study
March 2002: [Multicultural Communication](#) & (Freebie) Multicultural Meeting Tips
April 2002: [Outdoor Learning](#) & (Freebie) Justification Checklist
May 2002: [Budgets, June, June, and ROK](#) & (Freebie) Budgeting Beyond Excel
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March 2003: [Problem Solving](#) & (Freebie) Techniques Illustrated
April 2003: [Marketing: Pre- and Post- Event](#) & (Freebie) Blogs
May 2003: [Entertainment](#) & (Freebie) Storytelling
June 2003: [Balance in Meetings and child caret](#) & (Freebie) Child Care at Meetings Tips
July 2003: [Mobile Events](#) & (Freebie) Sponsorship
August 2003: [Last Minute Ideas](#) & (Freebie) Audience Participation
September 2003: [Training Meetings](#) & (Freebie) Kirkpatrick Challenge
October 2003: [Unique Venues](#) & (Freebie) Experiential Checklist
November 2003: [Data, Information and Number Crunching](#) & (Freebie) European Privacy
December 2003: [Deja View](#)

January 2004: [Branding](#) & (Freebie) Identity vs. Brand
February 2004: [Audio Visuals](#) & (Freebie) Speaker Guidelines
March 2004: [Networking](#) & (Freebie) Networking Ideas
April 2004: [Strategic Budgeting](#) & (Freebie) Budgeting Ideas
May 2004: [Sensory Meetings](#) & (Freebie) Music's Impact
June 2004: [Board Meetings](#) & (Freebie) Litmus Test
July 2004: [Leadership](#) & (Freebie) Best Meeting Leadership Behaviors
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September 2004: [Time Management & Meetings](#) & (Freebie) More Timely Tips
October 2004: [The Travel Experience & Stress](#) & (Freebie) International Travel Tips
November 2004: [Voting Techniques](#) & (Freebie) Political Pitfalls
December 2004: [Deja View II](#)

January 2005: [New Year's Resolutions](#) & (Freebie) Best Business Books

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