# SSRIs, Serotonin, and the Truth We're Just Beginning to Understand

By Robert Ferguson

Do you know anyone who takes depression medication? Most people who do are prescribed what's called **SSRIs** (Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors). Yet, many aren't proud to announce it out loud. They often feel embarrassed or even blame themselves and their lifestyle for needing a drug to lift their mood.

If you didn't know it, this is not new. SSRIs have been prescribed as the go-to treatment for depression and anxiety for decades. Unfortunately, **most people believe that taking SSRIs directly stimulates a better mood.** But that's not how they work. The dominant theory is that depression results from low serotonin levels—and that SSRIs correct this so-called "chemical imbalance."

In this article, you'll learn the truth. And much of that truth is this: **scientists still don't fully understand how SSRIs work**—yet their limited understanding often goes unnoticed because most people don't know either.

Even more eye-opening, you'll discover that SSRIs could, in many cases, be avoided altogether if we took steps to **optimize gut health and correct omega-6 to omega-3 imbalances**—two foundational factors that affect mood, inflammation, and emotional well-being.

I'll bring clarity to what this means as you read on.

# What SSRIs Actually Do (and Don't Do)

Contrary to popular belief, **SSRIs do not increase the amount of serotonin your brain produces**. Instead, they **block the reabsorption (or reuptake) of serotonin** after it's been released into the synapse—the small space between nerve cells.

This action leaves **more serotonin available** to bind to receptors on nearby neurons. In theory, this boosts mood by strengthening serotonin signaling.

But that theory has serious problems:

- Serotonin levels increase within hours of taking an SSRI
- Yet mood improvement, if it happens, typically takes 2 to 6 weeks
- Some people with depression have **normal serotonin levels**
- And many don't respond to SSRIs at all

This suggests that SSRIs may be triggering a cascade of **longer-term changes** in brain signaling, inflammation, neuroplasticity, or even immune regulation (Moncrieff et al., 2022).

# The Gut-Brain Connection: Another Layer of Complexity

Here's where things get even more interesting: **about 90–95% of all serotonin is made in your gut**, not your brain (Gershon, 1998).

This serotonin plays critical roles in digestion, immune signaling, and gut motility. While it **cannot cross the blood-brain barrier**, the gut still influences brain function through the **gut-brain axis**—a two-way communication system involving the **vagus nerve**, **immune system**, and **gut microbes** (Cryan et al., 2019).

So, while SSRIs target serotonin in the brain, **gut health likely plays a much bigger role in mood and mental health than most people realize**—something that's been overlooked in traditional treatment models.

## The Turning Point: Discovering Candace Pert

My own understanding changed dramatically in 1998 after reading *Molecules of Emotion* by **Dr. Candace B. Pert**, published in **1997**. And for the record, I got to meet Candace in 2002 when she was touring in Westlake, California. A neuroscientist and pharmacologist, Pert is primarily known for discovering the opiate receptor in the 1970s—a breakthrough that helped launch the field of **psychoneuroimmunology**.

In her book, Pert writes:

"The body and the mind are one. Emotions are the nexus between matter and mind, going back and forth between the two and influencing both."

She showed that **neuropeptides**, the body's "molecules of emotion," are found not only in the brain but throughout the body—especially in the **gut and immune system**. These molecules help transmit emotional signals across the entire system—not just in our head.

Her work helped me see what SSRIs—and conventional medicine—often miss: **that emotional healing is biochemical, cellular, and full-body.** 

# **Client Story: Brett's Transformation Without SSRIs**

Before I share Brett's story, it's important to highlight the groundbreaking work of **Dr. Joseph Hibbeln**, a renowned psychiatrist and researcher who spent over 25 years at the National Institutes of Health. His studies found that individuals with **higher intakes of omega-3 fatty acids, particularly DHA**, experienced profound mental health benefits:

- A 50% reduction in suicidal thoughts
- A 30% increase in perceived happiness

These findings reinforce the critical role that **omega-3s play in emotional regulation**, brain function, and mood stabilization. When we support the brain at the biochemical level, we often see emotional transformation.

This became especially clear to me when working with **Brett**, a client who had been taking an SSRI for years. He came to me looking for a more holistic solution. We tested his **omega-6 to omega-3 ratio** and discovered it was **above 20:1**—a clear indicator of chronic inflammation.

I recommended **BalanceOil+**, a high-quality omega-3 and polyphenol supplement designed to restore balance, reduce inflammation, and support **cell membrane fluidity**—a key factor in **healthy cell signaling**.

After six months of consistent use:

- Brett's omega-6 to omega-3 ratio had improved dramatically
- He reported **better mood**, **greater emotional resilience**, and **no longer needed his SSRI**, under the guidance of his physician

I believe the improvement wasn't just from lowering inflammation, but also from:

- Enhanced neuroplasticity
- Increased **DHA levels** (a key brain-building omega-3 fatty acid)
- Better **cell signaling**, especially in areas of the brain tied to emotion and cognition

## Take the First Step Toward Real Healing

If there's one takeaway from Brett's story, Candace Pert's research, and what the science is revealing it's this:

#### True emotional and mental wellness begins at the cellular level.

That's why I strongly recommend starting with the **BalanceTest**—an easy, at-home **dried blood spot** (DBS) test that measures your **omega-6 to omega-3 ratio**, **cell membrane fluidity**, **DHA and** Eicosapentaenoic Acid (EPA) levels, and Arachidonic Acid (AA). These biomarkers give you a clear window into the **inflammatory state of your body**, which directly impacts brain health, mood, gut function, and more.

#### Why the BalanceTest Matters

Most people have **imbalanced ratios**—often over **20:1**—which creates a pro-inflammatory environment in the body. Optimal health is achieved when your ratio is between **3:1 and 1:1**, like our ancestors.

Once you get your test results, you can take targeted action.

#### Why BalanceOil+ is Different—and Why It Works

BalanceOil+ is not just a fish oil. It's a clinically proven, synergistic formula that combines:

• Two powerful prebiotics that support gut health and the microbiome

- Omega-3 fatty acids (EPA and DHA) from high-quality fish oil for brain, heart, and immune support
- Polyphenols from cold-pressed unripe olives, which:
  - Protect omega-3s from oxidation inside the body
  - Enhance the **absorption and delivery** of omega-3s into cell membranes
  - Reduce inflammation and oxidative stress
  - Improve **cell signaling and membrane fluidity**, which supports Adenosine Triphosphate (ATP) production and mood regulation

This unique combination nourishes the **gut**, **brain**, and **immune system** simultaneously addressing health at the root.

# Next Steps: What to Do Now

- 1. **Order your BalanceTest** It only takes a few drops of blood from your fingertip and can be done from home.
- 2. **Begin taking BalanceOil+ daily** It comes in liquid form, with a pleasant citrus flavor, and is backed by clinical studies showing improvements in inflammation, mood, and cognitive performance.
- 3. **Retest in 120 days** Most people experience a dramatic improvement in their omega-6 to omega-3 ratio, and many report better energy, improved focus, reduced joint pain, and better mood—just like Brett.

# Ready to Begin?

Contact the person who shared this article or send me a message or email me at **robert@dietfreelife.com** to get started. I'll personally guide you through the process and help you track your improvements.

This is test-based nutrition, not guesswork.

Your cells are talking—are you listening?

# References

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