Turn your frown upside down! Positive self-talk is a proven mood booster and confidence lifter, both which can make you feel more successful in your career and happier in your life. Negative self-talk and negative energy can bring additional stress into your life and affect your overall health. Stepping out with a more positive mind frame can be a challenge, but by surrounding yourself with positive energy you empower yourself to do your best.

Try this, think of one positive thing about your inner self, it could be your patience, your kindness, or a special talent. Write that thing down on an index card and place it somewhere you will see it daily. A bathroom mirror is a great place to put the card, especially if you often talk down to yourself about your outward image. Constantly reminding yourself of your strengths and talents can promote more positive self-talk and happiness throughout the day. This is also a great thing you can do for a daughter, co-worker, or spouse; let them know how you see and value them.

"you are great at communicating with diverse populations"

Uplifting music can also have a positive effect on your mood. Ever had a song stuck in your head for a few hours, the lyrics constantly running through your mind? If those lyrics had a positive and uplifting message that might not be such a bad idea. When stress gets hold of you, throw on happy music or have a go-to mental soundtrack to get your focus.

Positive energy comes from positive friends! Ideal friendships provide support, pleasure, and wisdom. Great friends inspire you to better yourself and help you identify strengths when you may not be able to recognize them yourself. Pay attention to how your friends make you feel and which ones have a positive impact on your life.

**Quickie food-mood boosters:** Omega-3 fatty acids may raise levels of serotonin can be found in sardines, anchovies, and flax-seeds. Antioxidants, found in brightly colored vegetables can improve reaction time and thinking. Prunes are another great source of antioxidants—try them in your morning oatmeal or granola. Drink more water throughout the day: dehydration can cause low energy levels. B vitamins, especially B6 found in chicken, fish, and dark leafy vegetables, help in the production of serotonin.
**Quinoa-Stuffed Bell Peppers**

Preheat oven to 350°F. Boil 1 1/2 cups water in a saucepan; add quinoa. Reduce heat, cover and simmer for 15 minutes. Keep covered and set aside. Remove pepper tops, stems, and seeds. Bring a large pot of water to a boil. Add peppers and boil for 5 minutes. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in a skillet over medium heat. Add carrots, cook for 3 minutes. Add onion, cook for 5 minutes more. Stir in spinach and beans. Remove from heat and mix in quinoa and chili powder. Fill peppers with quinoa mixture and place in a baking dish. Sprinkle with cheese. Add just enough water to form a very thin layer in the bottom of the dish. Bake for 20 minutes or until tops are lightly browned. Serve immediately.

Per pepper: 237 calories, 6g fat, 2g saturated fat, 35g carbs, 12 g protein, 10 g fiber.

Recipe from shape.com

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**Let's talk Agave**

Agave has become the go-to sweetener for many health enthusiasts; claiming that Agave is lower in the Glycemic Index and therefore is better for your blood glucose levels than traditional sweeteners like honey and table sugar. Although all sweeteners pose increased health risks, NutriCat would like to focus on Agave syrup and decipher through the health claims it’s proponents make.

You may have seen Agave in the supermarket or in some of your favorite healthy snacks. It is usually advertised as diabetic friendly, raw, and 100% natural sweetener. Unfortunately, agave sweetener is yet another highly refined form of fructose. Fructose is metabolized much different than other sugars. When consumed, it goes directly to the liver instead of the blood stream like glucose. This is why fructose has a lower Glycemic index (GI) and may not increase blood glucose levels like other sweeteners. While this may seem positive, high concentrations of fructose can increase triglyceride levels and therefore increase someone’s risk of heart disease. It may also increase the risk of metabolic syndrome and insulin resistance. The above listed reasons are why high-fructose corn syrup (HFCS) has received a nasty rap, and why many health conscious consumers avoid products made with HFCS.

The irony of HFCS, compared to natural agave sweetener, is that Agave is 70-90% fructose while HFCS is only 55% fructose. HFCS was first looked badly upon because it has 5% more fructose by concentration than sucrose (white table sugar). The fact that Agave is almost pure fructose should be equally as alarming, a fact usually hidden by that fact that Agave has a low GI score. The Glycemic Index is not a reliable way of determining the health benefits of a food, it simply measures the blood glucose response on certain foods. By GI standards, foods like carrots and bananas have a high GI response and therefore should be eaten in moderation.

The main problem with high levels of fructose comes with heating or processing the sweetener. Two bad guys are made when fructose is heated above 120°F: hydroxymethylfurfural (HMF) and Advanced Glycogen End Products (AGEs). HMF is a toxic substance thought to promote DNA damage in humans while AGEs may play a role in the development of atherosclerosis, diabetes, aging and kidney failure.

**NutriCat’s bottom line:** If you avoid HFCS because of the amount of fructose, then agave sweetener is much more concentrated in fructose and should equally be avoided. If you use agave syrup because of the low GI effect, than HFCS would have the same Glycemic Index effect and be as equal of a sweetener. However, agave syrup is highly concentrated, meaning a little goes a long way and you would probably use less agave sweetener than sugar. When NutriCat addresses concentrated sweeteners, she recommends no more than 100 calories a day for a 2000 calorie diet no matter the sweetener of choice. If you have elevated triglyceride levels or have an increased risk of heart disease, then you may want to avoid those sweeteners high in fructose.

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**Raw Balls**

sweetened with maple sugar and dried fruit

1/2 cup walnuts (or other nut)
1/2 cup pitted dates (raisins or prunes work)
1/2 cup cocoa or carob powder
1/2 cup maple syrup
1/2 cup nut butter (almond tastes great in these)
1/2 tsp. vanilla extract
1/4 tsp. sea salt
1/2 cup almonds (or other nut you like)
2 cups shredded coconut

Place the walnuts in a food processor or blender until coarsely ground. Add the dates and pulse until well combined with the nuts. Add the cocoa powder, syrup, almond butter, vanilla extract, and salt. Process until the mixture is thick and smooth. Add the almonds, and pulse a few times until just combined.

Form the mixture into golf-size balls with your hands. Roll the balls in the coconut. Place in a sealed container in the freezer until hardened. Yum! Makes 10-12 raw balls; enjoy them straight out of the freezer.

Recipe taken from The Kind Diet by Alicia Silverstone (which NutriCat highly recommends)