HOW FOOD BENEFITS MOOD

Eating the right foods can improve mental health, research suggests.

A survey of 200 people found 88% reported that changing their diet improved their mental health significantly.

Twenty six per cent said they had seen large improvements in mood swings, 26% in panic attacks and anxiety and 24% in depression.

The findings of the survey by the Food and Mood Project, which is backed by the mental health charity Mind, will be presented to a conference in London on Wednesday.

Food 'stressors'
Sugar
Caffeine
Alcohol
Chocolate
Wheat-containing foods
Additives
Dairy
Saturated fats

People said cutting down on food "stressors" and increasing the amount of "supporters" they eat had a beneficial effect on their mood.

Stressors highlighted included sugar (80%), caffeine (79%), alcohol (55%) and chocolate (53%).

Supporters included water (80%), vegetables (78%), fruit (72%) and oil-rich fish (52%).

Eating regularly and not skipping breakfast were also highlighted as ways to boost mental health.

Discovering 'triggers'

Over a third of people said they were "very certain" that the improvements they had seen to their mental health were directly linked to the changes they had made to their diet.

Food 'supporters'
Water
Vegetables
Fruit
Oil rich fish
Nuts and seeds
Wholegrain food
Fibre
Protein
Organic food

The survey findings are backed by previous research by Mind which has found a link between food and mood.

One person who completed the survey said: "There is a definite link with food and mood, but I do lapse and when I do I feel noticeably different. Once you find out your triggers you can feel so much better."

Amanda Geary, who wrote a report based on the survey's findings, told BBC News Online: "This survey shows that for these people, there were quite strong findings in terms of the association between the dietary changes they made and the benefits they were reporting.

"A lot of these changes are very simple things that people can do and are fairly safe, and concur with healthy eating advice."

She said the survey was purely subjective, but a third of respondents were "very confident" the dietary changes had affected their mental health.

Ms Geary added: "I hope that these findings will add strength to a growing body of evidence to encourage health care providers and individuals to learn from the powerful testimonies in this report that the health of the body can directly influence the health of the mind."

Healthy eating

Richard Brook, chief executive of Mind, said: "At a simple level we all know certain foods are good for us or can affect our mood.

"However, linking real information and evidence with effective ways of using it can be a really efficient tool in managing your mental health.

"In the last 12 months I have personally heard many accounts of how people are managing their own recovery partly by using some of the concepts behind the food and mood approach."

Dr Wendy Doyle, spokeswoman for the British Dietetic Association, said oily fish and fruit and vegetables were known to be beneficial.

"They are good for general health - and you must have enough fluid to prevent dehydration."

She said people would feel better if they were eating healthily and taking regular physical exercise.

Dr Doyle added: "People may feel bad after eating chocolate because they enjoyed eating it, but felt guilty afterwards."