

## **The impact of nutrition on mental health**

As pupils are coming into the assembly hall the following mental health awareness clips will be played from You tube

‘Unity’: Mental Health Awareness Thought Cloud

Not "Just a phase": Mental Health Awareness

Good Morning. The clips you have just seen were mental health awareness clips from thoughtcloud films and the music you will hear on the way out will be living in the moment by Jason Mraz

In this morning's assembly I would like to raise your awareness of the concept of mental health and the impact of food and nutrition on mental health.

Mental health affects everyone, you, your friends, family, teachers, the bus driver, the prime minister. Mental health is just as important as physical health. If it goes wrong it can have long lasting health implications so it is vital that you are aware of your mental health.

In preparation for this assembly I asked a number of pupils to list a word that comes to mind when you hear the words mental health.

You will see a list of these words on the PowerPoint in front of you. I was not really surprised that many of you listed words associated with the negative aspects of mental health such as sick, ill, depression, hospitalisation, crazy, people who are not very healthy in mind. It is common for people in general to think of mental health as ill health.

I think my favourite word among the list of words is the word “human” as it indicates that mental health is indeed relevant to us all. We are all human and we all have mental health. Some people may struggle with mental health disorders but help is available and for those us who don’t struggle at the moment with mental health problems it is likely that at some point in your life time you or a family member may. There is also lots we can do to maintain positive mental health and to build resilience so that we can cope with the stresses that life inevitably throws at us.

The World Health Organisation defines mental health

as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.

Poor mental health is a risk factor for physical ill health such as heart disease, obesity and is also associated with rapid social change, stressful work conditions, gender discrimination, social exclusion, unhealthy lifestyle, risks of violence, and human rights violations.

In terms of statistics:

- About a quarter of the population will experience some kind of mental health problem in the course of a year, with mixed anxiety and depression the most common mental disorder in Britain
- Women are more likely to have been treated for a mental health problem than men
- 1 in 10 children and young people aged 5 - 16 suffer from a diagnosable mental health disorder
- Nearly 80,000 children and young people suffer from severe depression

It is important to remember that health is a process- it is never a static state. It moves backwards and forwards along a continuum and sometimes it is ok not to be ok. It is important that we all do our part to recognise that mental health matters to us all and by doing this we can help to reduce the stigma associated with mental health disorders. I would like to show you the following video clip which emphasise the point that we all need to be open to looking after and talking about our mental health.

Watch the video clip – You tube – What does mental health mean to you ? by Jack.org

I would now like to tell you a little about the impact of nutrition on mental health. Mental health problems are believed to be the result of a combination of factors, including age, genetics and environmental factors. One of the most obvious, yet under-recognised factors in the development of major trends in mental health is the role of nutrition. Optimising nutrition is a safe and viable way to avoid, treat or lessen mental illness. Nutrition matters.

Brain chemicals (neurotransmitters, such as serotonin, dopamine and acetylcholine) influence the way we think, feel and behave. They can be affected by what we've eaten. A sufficient balance of these neurotransmitters is essential for good mental health, as they are influential in feelings of contentment and anxiety, memory function and cognitive function. This becomes apparent when people have neurotransmitter imbalances or deficiencies, which can create many symptoms, ranging from difficulties in sleeping to feeling unmotivated or anxious. Poor nutrition is a significant and modifiable risk factor for the development of a mental health disorder.

Please can you raise your hand if you eaten breakfast this morning? Well done you have taken an important step in looking after not just your physical health but your mental health too. Research has shown that good nutritional intake is linked to academic success. In particular, several studies have shown that providing children with breakfast improves their daily and long-term academic performance and their behaviour. Just like the heart, stomach and liver, the brain is an organ that is acutely sensitive to what we eat and drink. To remain healthy, it needs different amounts of complex carbohydrates, essential fatty acids, amino acids, vitamins and minerals, and water

One of the most important things you can do to promote positive mental health is to eat when you are hungry. Even though we think of hunger as a primarily physical experience in that

our bellies can rumble and we can get stomach ache; it is also important to remember that hunger can make learning and concentration difficult at every age. Hunger takes a toll on our mood, our focus, and our sense of physical well-being. Hunger causes a decrease in heart rate and oxygen levels, making it that much more difficult to perform any kind of physical activity and that is why top athletes know the importance of adequate nutrition to be successful. If you have not eaten breakfast this morning your body is lacking the energy it needs to work productively; it is likely that you will feel more irritable and have difficulty concentrating in lessons. It is also important not to skip meals and to have a substantial meal at lunch time to fuel your minds.

Please can you raise your hand if you had a drink this morning? Well done. Keeping well hydrated is essential for positive mental health. If we become dehydrated it can affect our mood. Recent research found that even mild dehydration a 1.5% loss in normal water volume in the body can have a negative effect on our mood. The government advise drinking 6-8 glasses of water a day, which is about 1.5 – 2 litres.

Caffeine, found in tea, coffee, cola drinks and chocolate, is probably the most widely used behaviour-modifying drug in the world. We often choose to drink it if we are feeling tired and irritable, because it can give us a boost and help us to concentrate.

Having a cup of coffee or tea also has a lot of positive psychological associations. We meet a friend for 'coffee and a chat' or give ourselves a break by sitting down with a cup of tea, and these things are very important.

But too much caffeine (which is a different amount for each of us) can cause symptoms, such as anxiety, nervousness and depression. Unfortunately, energy drinks, which are marketed to appeal to teenagers, have a high caffeine content. Energy drinks can cause a number of unwanted side effects for teenagers. The caffeine in energy drinks can lead to jitters, nervousness, upset stomach, headaches, difficulty concentrating, and frequent urination. Any caffeinated drink can cause these side effects. The difference with energy drinks is that some contain excessive amounts of caffeine. An energy drink such as red bull contains about 80 mg of caffeine. Caffeine also disrupts sleep which can have a major impact on mood.

Although some fat is often considered unhealthy, it is vital for proper brain functioning. Omega 3 and Omega 6 oils perform vital functions in the structuring of the brain cells and have positive effects on mental health. Oily fish is an excellent source of omega oils. Too much consumption of fats such as saturated and trans fatty acids present in foods such as processed cakes, biscuits and crisps can directly affect the structure and substance of the brain cells and have a negative affect on mental health.

Protein is needed for growth and repair of brain cells. A deficiency in certain protein foods may leave someone feeling, depressed, apathetic, unmotivated and unable to relax. Tryptophan is found in eggs, lean meat and beans and it is important in producing serotonin. Stable and

sufficient levels of serotonin are associated with good mood, wellbeing and regular sleep patterns.

Fluctuations in blood sugar levels are also associated with changes in mood and energy, and are affected by what we eat. The brain runs on the fuel of glucose which is derived from carbohydrates. Slow releasing carbohydrates in food like whole –grains cereals such as pasta and rice and vegetables are better at fuelling the brain. Refined sugary foods such as white bread, sweets, and sugary snacks will give you an initial fantastic sugar rush but will be shortly followed by a sugar low which can have a negative impact on mood. Chocolate is a classic example of this: it contains substances that boost levels of noradrenaline, which subsequently boost our feelings of wellbeing and enthusiasm for life. However this feelings can be short lived as the sugar and caffeine rush wears off.

As a society we are constantly bombarded with healthy eating messages which can be confusing. The key word in nutrition for health is balance. If you eat a balanced diet and have treats in moderation then you are doing your best to have a healthy lifestyle. In summary here are some top tips for eating for good mental health.

- Eat mindfully - Eating with the attention necessary for noticing and enjoying your food and its effects on your body
- Eat breakfast everyday
- Eat regularly and avoid skipping meals
- Stay well hydrated
- Aim to eat five portions of fruit and vegetables a day
- Have caffeine in moderation – avoid over consumption of energy drinks
- Eat complex carbohydrates such as pasta, rice and bread
- Have processed foods in moderation – avoid overconsumption of foods high in sugar and saturated fats
- Consume omega 3 oils

As exam week approaches I would encourage you to eat mindfully and fuel your brain to achieve and to succeed and to enable you to partake in your exams with a positive mental attitude.

Please bow your head for the prayer

Dear Lord,

Give us the wisdom and strength to eat mindfully and to care for our minds and our bodies.

Sometimes we can feel overwhelmed with the stresses of life – help us to reach out and ask for support when needed.

Amen

