



# Pathfinder News

Summer 2022

## Food and mood

How does food affect your mental wellbeing and what can you do to make the right choices for you? Try our tips.

It's common knowledge that our diet impacts our physical wellbeing. But there is less awareness about how our diet affects our mental wellbeing.

Knowing what to eat and not eat is difficult and can be confusing, but it's worth knowing that certain diets and foods can contribute to a decline in our mental wellbeing. Even the way we consume food can impact how we feel mentally. So how does food affect our mental health and mood? Here are some examples:

- Humans have brain chemicals, such as dopamine, serotonin and acetylcholine, which influence the way we feel, think and therefore behave. These brain chemicals are impacted by what we eat.
- What we eat affects blood sugar levels, and blood sugar has been linked to changes in our mood and energy levels.
- The amount of vitamins, minerals and fatty acids we consume also impacts our mental health. Low levels of certain vitamins and minerals can contribute to mental health issues, for example, there is some evidence that a low level of folate (or vitamin B9) can increase the risk of feeling depressed.

Our reactions to food also impact our mood. We can have adverse reactions to artificial



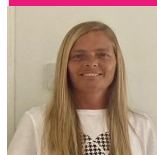
chemicals, be sensitive to certain foods or have hidden allergies.

## Tips and advice on healthy eating

Now that we know that what we eat influences our mental wellbeing, let's explore what we should eat, as well as what foods stuffs we might steer clear of.

It's advisable to eat foods that are rich in protein, such as legumes (think lentils, green beans, chickpeas, fresh peas), eggs, cheese, fish, meat, soya, nuts and seeds. Proteins keep us feeling full for longer. They also contain amino acids, the chemicals in our brain that are used to regulate our thoughts and emotions.

**Peer power: CAPITAL peer supporter, Lorretta, shares her story**



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**Gardening for wellbeing: why gardening is good on so many levels**



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Eat foods which contain the right fats. Avoid saturated fats and try to eat unsaturated fats, monounsaturated fats and polyunsaturated fats. Our brain requires fatty acids, such as Omega-3, to function correctly, so it is important to eat foods which contain them. Foods that contain healthy fatty acids include poultry, fish, vegetable oils, nuts and seeds.

Include slow energy release foods in your diet, as they keep us fuelled for longer, helping us feel more energetic. Foods that release energy slowly include potatoes, oats, wholegrain foods (rice, pasta, quinoa) and pulses (peas, lentils).

Eat five portions of fruit or vegetables a day. As an important source of vitamins and minerals, they have been shown to have a positive impact on our mental wellbeing.

Think about quantity. Don't eat too much, as it can leave us feeling bloated and sick, which can in turn have an adverse impact on our mood. Conversely, avoid eating too little as it can make us physically and mentally tired and add to irritability and low mood.

### Avoid unhealthy foods

Avoid foods and drinks which can cause your blood sugar levels to rise and drop quickly, such as sweets, sugary drinks and alcohol.

Ultra-processed food, such as breakfast cereals, crisps, pre-packaged meals and reconstituted meat, tend to be higher in calories, containing more salt, fat and added sugar. Therefore, they should be avoided or only eaten occasionally.

Food and drink that are high in calories and low in nutritional value should also be avoided, such as sweets, chocolate and crisps. Whilst nice as an occasional treat, regular consumption can lead to weight gain and sluggishness.

Eating regularly is crucial to keep a good and level balance of blood sugar. When our blood sugar level drops, we often feel tired, irritable and down. If you are worried that eating regularly might lead to weight gain, try smaller meals and portions, making healthy choices. But don't skip meals. Skipping meals can leave us in a bad mood and feeling drained of energy.

### Drink lots of water

When we are dehydrated, our concentration suffers and our mood can be affected. Drink six to eight glasses of water a day. Drinks like squash, coffee and tea count towards this. But drinks other

than water often contain substances, like sugar and caffeine, that also affect mood.

### Keep a food diary

A food diary is a great way to keep track of the food you are consuming. You can count calories, keep track of mealtimes, meal content and record how different foods make you feel.

There are lots of apps for this.

### Be kind to yourself

Don't be too hard on yourself. The widespread availability of processed and sugary foods and budget can make healthy eating hard. And remember the importance of enjoying your food. Eat diversely and have an occasional treat. Eating too strictly will lead to you getting fed up with your diet.

### Exercise

Exercise has been found to have a positive impact on our mental health and if you exercise **and** make healthy food choices, the two combined can really improve your mood.

**“Eat diversely and have an occasional treat. Eating too strictly will lead to you getting fed up with your diet”**

# Feeling the pinch

Michelle reflects on the stigma she feels about living on benefits – and the additional pressure and stress created by the rising cost of living.

Michelle has been suffering with her mental health since she was 16. She has bouts of depression on and off – and is currently on benefits, due to long-term mental and physical health issues.

“My husband left in May 2008, just two years after my first hospitalisation due to mental health problems, and I couldn’t afford to take him to court. So we sold our house and I moved into rented accommodation in Cowfold. I worked part-time as a teaching assistant and business manager in schools, so that I could take my daughters to school. I muddled along and just about managed financially.

“But in 2015, I had to give up my job due to my mental health and I had to apply for benefits for the first time. They took three months to come through and I had to rely on food banks during that time. I had to adjust to this new ‘lifestyle’, which meant focusing on making ends meet for essentials with no treats, for example, going to the cinema. Life has continued like this and I haven’t worked since.

“It’s a terrible thing to have to give up your job and live on benefits. I’ve worked since I was 16 (I’m now 54) and I was good at my job. When I had to give up work, it felt like I had the carpet whipped out from beneath me.

“You feel useless, you don’t feel like a human being. You experience lots of negativity, because there is so much stigma attached

to being on benefits. It has a big impact on my mental health – not feeling like a productive member of society, feeling like the dregs – and that is difficult.

“I’m really worried about rising prices right now. My big concern is electricity. I’ve had a letter saying my electricity will go up by £648 a year, which is an enormous amount for me. I’ve had my heating turned off since the end of February and I’m worried how things will work out come the winter.

“Food is another big concern. I have a set amount I can spend each week and in the last few months, I’ve spent more than I have allocated, because food is so expensive. I’ve cut back as far as I can. I try to eat healthily, particularly because I struggle with physical issues, but I often find myself living off the cheapest and least healthy things. Frozen vegetables are much cheaper than fresh and so a lot of my food is frozen. In a month, I’m finding I only have enough money for food for three out of the four weeks. So I’ll have to start using food banks again for one week out of four.

“I have had an increase in benefits to help with the rising cost of living. It is £35, but that won’t see me through one week in petrol, as I live in a semi-rural area.

“I usually feel better coming up to summer. But this year, I feel worse because of my worry about coping financially. The stress of this is huge. I feel like a minority, but also feel like I shouldn’t complain.”

Michelle volunteers for [Mind in Brighton & Hove](#) as a peer supporter. See organisations and resources for help with the cost of living: [bit.ly/costofliving-help](http://bit.ly/costofliving-help)







Stonepillow, Richmond Fellowship and West Sussex Mind staff (pictured) had a ball at the first ever Chichester Pride in May and promoted their new LGBTQI+ Allies



West Sussex Mind's Tracy Ashcroft with the fabulous Cherry Liquor at Chichester Pride.

## Gardening helps alleviate stress and boosts wellbeing

**Over seven million people have taken up gardening since the pandemic and are finding significant benefits for their mental health.**

Two-thirds of UK adults (63 per cent) say that spending time gardening or in nature helps their mental health, according to a new survey from national Mind. Respondents were asked how they felt gardening benefitted their wellbeing and the top three responses were:

- 63 per cent said it made them feel calmer or less stressed
- 43 per cent said they enjoyed taking in the colours, sounds, sights and smells
- 40 per cent said that exercising outside boosted their wellbeing.

The survey was conducted by Censuswide among a nationally representative sample of 1,000 UK adults. The data was then



extrapolated based on nationally representative statistics and the UK population.

The survey found that since the pandemic, over seven million people say that their mental health has benefitted from taking up gardening and another seven million say that their mental health has been boosted by connecting with people outdoors, for example, speaking to their neighbours over the fence. But it's not just those with gardens who are seeing the benefits. Forty-three per cent of people said that looking after house plants or growing plants or food in window boxes was also good for their wellbeing.

“This research provides evidence that gardening, in particular, plays a key role in bringing together a host of things that are good for our mental health,” said Mind CEO, Paul Farmer. “Taking in the sights and colours of the outdoors, nurturing and growing plants and finding space to connect with others can make a world of difference to how we feel.”

# The power of peer support

We spoke to Lorretta, a peer supporter at CAPITAL Project Trust, about why peer support is such a powerful thing and what it brings to her and those she supports.

**How would you describe your role?**

As CAPITAL peer supporters, we use our training, lived experience and our own mental health journey to support people who have been hospitalised because of their mental health. We provide support, empathy and encouragement to help people move forward on their journey.

As a peer, I'm on the same level as the people I support on the ward. I'm independent of NHS staff and, because of my own experience, I know where they have been and the kinds of things they may be struggling with, and so I can support them in the way that they need.

Talking to a peer is very different to talking to a clinical professional. People tend to open up more to us, because we have a personal connection with their predicament. Over time, you build a rapport with people. They start to open up and you build trust.

I typically support someone from when they come into hospital to when they are ready to leave and go back out into the community. Some people may stay in hospital for a few days; others for a whole year. I talk to people. We do colouring, artwork and knitting. I brush their hair. I paint their nails if they ask for that. And as we do something together, we talk and build trust.

I work in two wards at Langley Green Hospital in Crawley twice a week and have been supporting people for the last year and nine months.

**What brought you to CAPITAL Project Trust and to becoming a peer?**

I've been grappling with my mental health



from a young age. I left school with no qualifications and I was bullied at school. I struggled with an eating disorder, self-image and depression, and I had addiction issues. After getting married and living and working in Bognor for a few years, I moved back to my home town of Crawley and that's when things started spiralling for me. I began self-harming and was hospitalised, because I was considered a risk to myself, and I spent the next four years in different hospitals. I had a good few years after my second son was born, but then ended up in Langley Green Hospital when I started spiralling again.

While I was there, I met a peer from CAPITAL. She explained what CAPITAL was, and she asked me if I wanted to become a member. I did CAPITAL's members training and joined this amazing community. I felt like I had a family for the first time – a family that didn't judge or comment on what I did and really believed in me.

There was an opportunity to train as a peer supporter. So I did the 12-week course, combined with 90 hours of home learning. It's a Level 4 course and the equivalent of



completing the first year at University. It's the first thing I have ever passed in my whole life and I felt incredibly proud. I had to complete a practical assessment at the hospital, before I was able to practise on the ward, but I passed that and began my work as a peer supporter.

In terms of my own health and wellbeing, being a peer supporter gives me everything. It gives me self-belief, purpose and a reason to put a smile on my face every day. I know that if I can walk into the hospital and help just one person, then I have done a good job. To be able to see the progress people make gives me the self-belief and empowerment I need to know that I can move forward with my own mental health. Being a peer means everything to me.

### Why is peer support important in mental health?

The understanding and empathy that peer supporters have with a person who is struggling with their mental health can't be underestimated. Professionals have in-depth education and training to help them care for people with mental health needs and prescribe and administer medication if appropriate. But peers can give clients answers that a clinical member of staff wouldn't be able to give.

Clinicians develop through their education and training, but not necessarily through lived experience of mental health like peers do. CAPITAL's stands for "Clients and Professionals in Training and Learning". We have a culture of continuous learning for peers with lots of opportunities for training and self-development. And we work with medical professionals to help them understand about mental health from a more personal perspective – and to hopefully increase their understanding and empathy for people who are struggling.

Peer support is also really important, because it gives people hope for their own recovery. They see us helping others through our work and that gives them hope for the future. We help them to understand that a journey is never-ending and that you move forward one step at a time. I am still on my journey, but now I believe that I can have a happy life. If you have a mental health condition, you can still have the life you want.

See [www.capitalproject.org/peer-support-workers](http://www.capitalproject.org/peer-support-workers) for more information about CAPITAL's peer support work.

Find out how the Pathfinder West Sussex alliance is supporting people with their mental health across the county



Check out our new video on YouTube – [bit.ly/pathfinder-video](http://bit.ly/pathfinder-video)

If you haven't already, please check out our Pathfinder video.

It really showcases how our joined up working supports people's mental health and can improve people's lives across West Sussex. See YouTube link at [bit.ly/pathfinder-video](http://bit.ly/pathfinder-video).

Hear from people who've used the Pathfinder service and staff members about our long-term mental health support across the NHS and the community.

# How United Response supports people

John Barnard, senior service manager at [United Response](#), gives an overview of the different aspects of the charity's mental health support.

United Response has been offering mental health support since 1997. Five years ago, we became part of Pathfinder, an alliance of ten organisations of third sector mental health providers and secondary care services in West Sussex, which ensures that people with mental health needs can find the right support.



Left to right: United Response's John Barnard with mental health support workers, Steve Cook and Jan Pranskus.

HOUSE 48 is our mental health resource centre in Bognor Regis. It offers a single point of contact to support people with their mental health or to signpost them quickly to where they can get help. We are also able to refer people to Pathfinder clinicians for more complex cases.

At United Response, we offer support with stress, anxiety, sleep patterns, self-harm, suicidal thoughts, general wellbeing, panic attacks and low mood/depression. We also

run self-care sessions, which provide tools and techniques to help people manage the emotions that are having a negative impact on their lives. We receive on average 70 referrals for support each quarter and we actively support approximately 150 people at any one time.

We offer group support too - from walking, emotional management and creative art, to a twice monthly drop-ins at the local community church café, where we inform people about the support available in the local area. Our support is short-term and is usually completed in around 12 sessions.

## Supported housing

We support 15 people in United Response-managed properties. This support is for people with severe and enduring mental health issues, who all generally have poor housing history. The support we provide gives people the skills to manage their tenancies and to eventually move on into their own home.

We also offer floating housing support for people who could be at risk of losing their home, and we support people to maintain tenancies or find more suitable accommodation. People who come into our housing service could be with us from six months to five years, depending on the housing stock available and their place on the housing register. This service is provided by two full-time and one part-time support worker and these are challenging roles that require good mediation skills.

## Community support workers

Finally we have seven community support workers across West Sussex, who are placed in the NHS trust assessment and treatment service, and support patients with complex mental health issues. Their work ranges from supporting people to apply for benefits to helping them engage in social activities and manage their mental wellbeing.

## Crisis numbers

Samaritans – 24/7, call 116123

Calm – open daily 5pm to midnight, call 0800 585 858

Sussex Mental Healthline – 24/7, call 0800 0309 500

Papyrus – open daily 9am to midnight, call 0800 068 4141



## What is Pathfinder West Sussex?

Pathfinder West Sussex is an alliance of organisations working together to enable people with mental health support needs, and their carers, to improve their mental health and wellbeing.

We provide a pathway of mental health recovery support so people can move freely between services to get well and stay well.

Services are provided in ten areas: Adur, Bognor, Chancetonbury, Chichester, Crawley, Horsham, Littlehampton, Midhurst, Mid Sussex and Worthing.

The four lead providers of Pathfinder services are West Sussex Mind, United Response, Sussex Oakleaf and Richmond Fellowship. The other organisations that make up the alliance with them are CAPITAL Project Trust, Mind in Brighton and Hove, Rethink, Stonepillow, Southdown and NHS Sussex Partnership Foundation Trust (SPFT).

See [www.pathfinderwestsussex.org.uk](http://www.pathfinderwestsussex.org.uk)

