



are vital for nerve impulses, a better memory and concentration. Essential fatty acids like Omega 3, contained in oily fish, maintain cell membranes in the brain and nervous system. But beware, contrary to popular belief, tinned tuna is not a good source of omega-3 essential fatty acids as the canning process reduces the tuna's fat content.



According to some research, eating any of the following grains will help you feel more focused and relaxed: bread, pasta, potatoes, rice, corn, barley, kasha, and oatmeal. Fruits and leafy green vegetables are vitamin rich and important for a well balanced diet, however they are "mood-food neutral".

Snack foods to help you concentrate better and ward off tension in the middle of the day include popcorn, pretzels, baked potato (hold the butter and sour cream), and rice cakes.

So there you have it – confused – so am I, I think I'll just grab another coffee...but whoops maybe not - Caffeine apparently increases mental alertness and concentration and can improve performance. However, too much caffeine (and this will be a different amount for each person) has been found associated with: anxiety, cravings, depression, emotional instability, insomnia, mood swings, nervousness and premenstrual syndrome (PMS). - Did you know that Caffeine dependency can be acquired with as little as two or three cups a day!

Something else often associated with dependency is Chocolate. Apparently the romantic associations we have with chocolate may be due to the effects on the brain of a naturally occurring substance called phenylethylamine PEA. PEA can enhance endorphin levels, increase libido and act a natural antidepressant. Sugar can also increase levels of the body's natural endorphins and chocolate bars often contain appreciable amounts of sugar. These mood-altering effects may explain why it's easy to become 'hooked'.



Anyway, you can avoid the highs and lows of mood and energy associated with fluctuating blood sugar levels by choosing foods that are digested slowly. These foods have a low Glycaemic Index and include wholegrain rye bread, oats and basmati rice. High GI foods, which are best avoided, include French baguettes, water melons and instant white rice.

So what about the booze?

Alcohol undoubtedly affects the central nervous system of the body more than any other bodily function. Because alcohol is a depressant, it inhibits the control mechanisms of the brain, which results in unrestrained activities in various parts of the brain. An extremely high dose of alcohol can depress the central nervous system to a point where breathing may stop completely, resulting in death.

However, for several years, researchers have reported that moderate consumption of red wine will reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease. At least one supplier has been attempting to produce white wine with the same properties. Also, in other recent investigations, although recognising that excessive consumption increases the risks of mental illnesses, the benefit of moderate consumption of wine has been shown to reduce those risks.

The BBC reported a couple of years ago that according to scientists in Spain, drinking wine, especially red, stops people from developing colds. Experts at five universities had found that people who drank more than two glasses of red wine a day had 44% fewer colds than teetotallers. Scientific evidence is at best confusing, and whilst studies continue, there is growing evidence that the health benefits of red wine are related to its non-alcoholic components.

Scientists divided

So it's still up to you to decide what works for you. Scientists continue to put out competing theories. In one study, our hunger for fatty, sugary treats was explained because the substances in them trigger the brain to release endorphins, morphine-like chemicals that send pleasure signals throughout the body, including the mouth. In one study, people were given a drug that disarmed their endorphins, then fed goodies from chocolate bars to cookies. Without the endorphin reward, the report concluded, "the normally irresistible morsels gave the volunteers no more joy than a stick of celery."

Not to be out-done, other researchers have shown that this humble salad veg stimulates the gland in the brain that controls sex hormones. But I think I'll save that article for another day.

However, according to The Times "There is little evidence to suggest that the English are great consumers of alcohol compared with other Europeans...Yet the prospect of the English being legally able to purchase alcohol after 11pm is being presented by some as the end of civilisation." Some concerns have apparently been expressed that a section of the country appears to think that curry is best eaten after beer and not with it. So the debate continues - this one is going to roll and roll.

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The debate in the UK during August has been all about the licensing laws being changed to allow later drinking in the pubs and clubs. According to one argument, Britons and alcohol are about as wise a blend as whisky and vodka. We have, apparently, long had a disproportionate fondness for drink, while never learning to handle it. For that reason the liberalisation of the licensing laws due to take effect in November is, in the words of the Council of Circuit Judges, a move "close to lunacy".