Although scientific knowledge of our nutritional needs is very new and still developing, human need for specific nutrients has evolved over millions of years. Unfortunately, modern diets have changed dramatically in recent years. While our consumption of fish, eggs, milk and fruit and veg has declined, our intake of meat, sugar and saturated fats has increased dramatically. The link between diet and physical health is well-established – the link between diet and mental health needs to be equally well recognised. Changing Diets, Changing Minds 2005. Sustain, Mental Health Foundation & The Food Commission

Drink 6-8 glasses of water each day. Our brains need lots of water regularly to absorb nutrients and flush out toxins. Dehydration affects mental functioning and leads to poor concentration, headaches and tiredness. By the time we are ‘feeling thirsty’, we are already very dehydrated.

Think about how and when you drink water for best effect – black tea and coffee contain caffeine (a diuretic), so your kidneys flush out the water, vitamins and minerals before they can be absorbed. Alcohol is especially bad as it impairs both kidney and liver function – making us more susceptible to toxins accumulating in our bodies. Drinking water after alcohol helps keep a headache at bay but depletes minerals and vitamins.

Eat oily fish at least once a week. The brain needs ‘oiling’ with essential fatty acids from Omega-3 rich fish like salmon, mackerel, herring, trout, pilchards, sardines. If you don’t eat these 3 times a week – daily fish oil supplements - look for cold-pressed - (or linseed or hemp oil) will boost levels of Omega 3.

Don’t give in to food cravings. Usual culprits = sugar, caffeine, chocolate. Often cravings are the result of prolonged stress – and can make you irritable, tired, depressed and unable to concentrate. A sugar or caffeine hit can lift mood and boost sugar levels temporarily then you crash and you need more! Eat regular meals and include ‘whole’ grains, fruits, nuts and veg.

Beware of food additives, especially flavour enhancers eg MSG (headaches, thirst). Nitrates and nitrites in preserved meats have strong links to health problems – and decreased sex drive. Be a food ‘detective’ and read the labels.
The value of vegetarian or vegan diets. Some evidence suggests a lower risk of dementia and Alzheimer’s but be aware of the need for extra B vitamins. Boost your 5 portions-a-day intake to compensate (1 portion = about a handful)

Eat breakfast every day. It’s easy to skip but it’s the most important meal of the day as it establishes the blood sugar levels and prevents mid-morning cravings.

Regularly eat ‘live’ yoghurt to aid digestion.
Your state of mind is closely connected to the health of your digestive system. Receptors that join with brain chemicals are found in the gut. Lactobacillus acidophilous and bifidobacteria are the ‘friendly’ bacteria in body that we need to digest food.

Eat the recommended minimum ‘5-a-day.’
Phyto-nutrients in fruit and veg are essential for brain functioning – the more colourful your diet, the better... eat a rainbow!

Food intolerances and allergies
Intolerance means unpleasant or uncomfortable feelings after eating a certain type of food and can change over the course of a life-time. Common culprits are wheat, dairy products and yeast.

Allergies are severe and immediate reactions to food that never change over the course of a life-time – eg peanuts (anaphylactic shock when throat and tongue swells), seafood, eggs, etc
AVOCADO DIP
1 ripe avocado
lemon juice
chilli paste
Mash avocado into a paste. Add a good squeeze of lemon juice and chill to taste. Mix well. Serve chilled with oatcakes.

Avocado contains good proteins, serotonin (a chemical which helps control appetite, boost self-esteem and optimism) and good fats, as well as folic acid.

SEED SNACK
sunflower seeds
pumpkin seeds
linseeds
hemp seeds
sesame seeds (optional)
soy sauce
Place all the seeds in a frying pan over a low heat. Heat until the seeds start to go golden and the pumpkin seeds puff up. Do not burn! Remove from heat and allow to cool for a few minutes.
Add a few drops of soy sauce and stir well, coating all seeds.

Seeds contain essential fats - called Omega-3 and Omega-6 - which help keep the brain healthy.
The brain is 60% fat. They also contain Vitamin B6.

SMOKED MACKEREL PATE
1 smoked mackerel fillet
1 tbsp crème fraîche
1 small ripe avocado
1 lemon
salt & pepper
In a bowl mash up avocado, squeeze half the lemon over the mixture to prevent discolouration. Remove skin from mackerel fillet, flake fish into the mixture. Add crème fraîche and season with salt and pepper. Combine mixture to an even consistency.

Mackerel is high in good oily fats (Omega-3) and is a good form of protein. It also contains vital minerals.

FRUIT ‘n NUT
brazil nuts, dried apricots, walnuts, blueberries (if not in season consider using dried unsweetened blueberries or dates)
Blueberries are high in serotonin while walnuts contain minerals and vitamins. The berries and apricots count towards your ‘five-a-day’ of fruit and vegetables.

OATCAKES
(no added sugar or salt)
Oats are good mood carbohydrates. They are also high in zinc. Oats in the form of porridge are also great for you – flavour them with cinnamon or honey.