

# Hearts and minds: fruit and veg boost well-being

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Consuming more fruit and vegetables can improve your mental well-being, according to a new study, 'Lettuce be happy.'

Researchers at the universities of Leeds and York analysed data from more than 40,000 people in the UK, and found that changes in [fruit](#) and [vegetable](#) consumption are correlated with changes in mental well-being.

A key feature of this work is that the study was able to follow the same individuals over time.

The study also controlled for alternative factors that may affect mental well-being, such as age, education, income, [marital status](#), employment status, lifestyle and health, as well as consumption of other foods such as bread or dairy products.

## Boosting mental well-being

The research showed a positive association between the quantity of fruit and vegetables consumed and people's self-reported mental well-

being.

Specifically, the findings indicate that eating just one extra portion of fruits and vegetables a day could have an equivalent effect on mental well-being as around 8 extra days of walking a month (for at least 10 minutes at a time).

Dr. Neel Ocean from the University of Leeds authored the study with Dr. Peter Howley, also from Leeds University Business School, and Dr. Jonathan Ensor from the University of York.

Commenting on the study, Dr. Ocean said: "It's well-established that eating fruit and vegetables can benefit physical health.

"Recently, newer studies have suggested that it may also benefit psychological well-being. Our research builds on previous work in Australia and New Zealand by verifying this relationship using a much bigger UK sample.

"While further work is needed to demonstrate cause and effect, the results are clear: people who do eat more fruit and vegetables report a higher level of mental well-being and life satisfaction than those who eat less."

Dr. Howley said: "There appears to be accumulating evidence for the psychological benefits of fruits and vegetables.

"Despite this, the data show that the vast majority of people in the UK still consume less than their five-a-day.

"Encouraging better dietary habits may not just be beneficial to [physical health](#) in the long run but may also improve mental well-being in the shorter term."

## IKnowFood: Food system resilience

Dr. Ensor added: "This work is part of a broader

project between our universities known as "[IKnowFood](#)".

As well as investigating consumer behaviour and wellbeing, IKnowFood is exploring how farmers in the UK, and businesses across the global food supply chain, can become more resilient in the face of growing uncertainty in markets, regulation and the natural environment."

**More information:** Neel Ocean et al, Lettuce be happy: A longitudinal UK study on the relationship between fruit and vegetable consumption and well-being, *Social Science & Medicine* (2019). [DOI: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2018.12.017](#)

Provided by University of Leeds

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