

Fruit and vegetable consumption could be as good for your mental as your physical health

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Credit: Anna Langova/Public Domain

(Medical Xpress)—Fruit and vegetable consumption could be as good for your mental as your physical health, new research suggests.

The research, conducted by the University of Warwick's Medical School using [data](#) from the Health Survey for England, and published by *BMJ*

Open focused on mental wellbeing and found that high and low mental wellbeing were consistently associated with an individual's fruit and vegetable consumption.

33.5% of respondents with high mental wellbeing ate five or more portions of fruit and vegetables a day, compared with only 6.8% who ate less than one portion. Commenting on the findings Dr Saverio Stranges, the research paper's lead author, said: "The data suggest that higher an individual's fruit and [vegetable intake](#) the lower the chance of their having low mental wellbeing".

31.4% of those with high mental wellbeing ate three-four portions and 28.4% ate one-two.

Other health-related behaviours were found to be associated with mental wellbeing, but along with smoking only fruit and vegetable consumption was consistently associated in both men and women. Alcohol intake and obesity were not associated with high mental wellbeing.

Commenting on the findings Dr Saverio Stranges, the research paper's lead author, said: "Along with smoking, fruit and [vegetable consumption](#) was the health-related behaviour most consistently associated with both low and high mental wellbeing. These novel findings suggest that fruit and vegetable intake may play a potential role as a driver, not just of physical, but also of mental wellbeing in the general population".

Low mental wellbeing is strongly linked to mental illness and mental health problems, but high mental wellbeing is more than the absence of symptoms or illness; it is a state in which people feel good and function well. Optimism, happiness, self-esteem, resilience and good relationships with others are all part of this state. Mental wellbeing is important not just to protect people from [mental illness](#) but because it protects people against common and serious physical diseases.

Discussing the implications of the research, co-author Professor Sarah Stewart-Brown says that: "Mental illness is hugely costly to both the individual and society, and mental wellbeing underpins many physical diseases, unhealthy lifestyles and social inequalities in health. It has become very important that we begin to research the factors that enable people to maintain a sense of wellbeing.

"Our findings add to the mounting evidence that fruit and vegetable intake could be one such factor and mean that people are likely to be able to enhance their mental wellbeing at the same time as preventing heart disease and cancer".

Mental wellbeing was assessed using the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS), in which the top 15% of participants categorised as having High mental wellbeing, the bottom 15% Low and the middle 16-84% as Middle.

The research involved 14,000 participants in England aged 16 or over, with 56% of those being female and 44% male, as part of the Health Survey for England – which saw detailed information collected on mental and [physical health](#), health related behaviours, demographics and socio-economic characteristics.

More information: The paper, "Major health-related behaviours and mental well-being in the general population: the Health Survey for England", is available here:

bmjopen.bmj.com/content/4/9/e005878.abstract

Provided by University of Warwick

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