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Your Health

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Chocolate

Chocolate appears to give us all an instant lift to our spirits and act as an antidepressant. The so-called 'chocolate high' is due to a chemical in cocoa called phenylethylamine, which occurs naturally in the brain, and is allegedly released at times of emotional arousal. Chocolate also contains stimulants theobromine and caffeine, which increase alertness.

Swing low

Food can affect people's moods profoundly. The link between food and mood is complex: nutritional deficiencies, adverse or allergic reactions and the level of glucose (sugar levels) in the bloodstream can all have an effect on a person's mental state.

Glucose and mood swings

Irregular eating patterns are a common cause for mood swings. If you go for long periods without eating, the brain compensates for reduced levels of blood glucose by using 'ketone bodies' for fuel, substances derived from the breakdown of fat. This reaction can cause a feeling of exhaustion and sleeplessness, and is one of the reasons why fasting has become associated with the practice of meditation.

Vitamin B

A Vitamin B deficiency can cause a change in mood. Vegetarians and vegans are prone to Vitamin B12 deficiency, while alcoholics are prone to both thiamine and B12 deficiency. Because B12 is found mainly in animal products, vegetarians and vegans may need to boost their intake of this vitamin by eating foods that have been fortified with B12 such as soya-milk, yeast extract and breakfast cereals, or by taking a regular supplement. Some women find that Vitamin B6 helps to relieve the symptoms of premenstrual syndrome (PMS). It is involved in the breakdown of hormone oestrogen in the liver and may have an indirect effect over mood, a lack of it leading to anxiety and nervous tension. Supplements may help women who suffer with the irritability and tearfulness that can be part of PMS. Good sources of B6 include brewer's yeast, yeast extract, wholegrain, oat flakes, liver and bananas.

Banana Mood Booster

Bananas give you lots of energy and lift your mood. This delicious smoothie is a great start to any day.

You will need:
 100g/350g oat flakes
 2 sliced bananas
 200ml/7oz of semi-skimmed milk
 6 sliced strawberries

Blend all the ingredients together and place the strawberries on top.

Tip: Bananas taste great cooked on a barbecue. Slice the skins a little and add some honey or dark chocolate.

Win!

A full body MOT with Diagnostic Healthcare

Would you like to find out about potential health problems before they become a problem? VD has teamed up with Diagnostic Healthcare, Altrincham's newly opened advanced diagnostic screening clinic, to offer one reader the chance to win a full body MOT, worth over £300.

Diagnostic Healthcare's health check MOT is a comprehensive check-up that screens for major diseases and risk factors. Highly skilled specialists will check the health of your heart and lungs, and undertake a detailed blood analysis to test for conditions such as anaemia, diabetes and raised cholesterol. In addition, they will check your vision and hearing and give you a detailed profile of your body composition, including your body fat percentage. Consultants will also analyse your diet and lifestyle and provide you with a bespoke lifestyle plan.

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Send your answer to competitions@yourthebest.com, with "Diagnostic" in the subject line or write to our new address, including your name, telephone number and full address. Entries must be received by May 29 2008.

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