

# Eating and Learning

## 1 - Introduction

Learning is easier if your brain is working properly. Your brain is part of your physical body and works by chemical reactions. The wrong diet can make you tired, confused or aggressive.

The brain is only about 2% of our body weight but uses 20% of the energy available to the whole body, so any loss of energy affects the brain most. We make energy from food. Your brain needs the right nutrients, carried in the blood stream when you digest food. What you eat affects how you feel and how you think.

The problem may be too much of the wrong food, like additives and sugar, or not enough of the right kind. In several experiments, school-age children changed the kinds of fats they ate and improved their reading and spelling ability. When laboratory rats were fed on a diet of too much sugar, they became nervous and aggressive. When it was withdrawn their teeth started to chatter.

The chemicals that most upset the brain are often addictive, and a high sugar intake is one of the most common. The World Health Organisation recommends that we should take no more than 10% of our calories as sugar, but some breakfast cereals are 40% sugar and doughnuts contain even more. The consumption of high-sugar drinks in the UK rose by 64% between 1983 and 1997. It is usually processed, refined or convenience foods that do the damage, and fresh food that repairs it. Too much sugar reduces your ability to deal with alcohol.

The body needs zinc to help process sugar. Nearly half the UK's children now have a zinc deficiency, because their diet doesn't include enough. Refined flour loses 78% of the zinc content and refining sugar loses 98%.