

Adding folic acid to bread could help in the fight against depression

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A unique study by researchers at the University of York and Hull York Medical School has confirmed a link between depression and low levels of folate, a vitamin which comes from vegetables.

In research published in the July edition of the *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, the York team led by Dr Simon Gilbody, concluded that there was a link between depression and low folate levels, following a review of 11 previous studies involving 15,315 participants.

Last month, the Food Standards Agency recommended to UK Health Ministers the introduction of mandatory fortification of either bread or flour with folic acid to prevent neural tube defects, which can result in miscarriage, neonatal death or lifelong disability. The York study suggests that the measure may also help in the fight against depression.

Dr Gilbody said: “Our study is unique in that for the first time all the relevant evidence in this controversial area has been brought together. Although the research does not prove that low folate causes depression, we can now be sure that the two are linked. Interestingly, there is also some trial evidence that suggests folic acid supplements can benefit people with depression. We recommend that large trials should be carried out to further test this suggestion.”

Recent research from the same team published in the *American Journal of Epidemiology* has also proved that people with depression commonly have a gene that means that they process folate less efficiently. Folate is

linked to the production of some of the ‘feel good’ chemicals in the brain, such as serotonin. The identification of this gene provides a plausible explanation as to why folic acid supplements may help people with depression.

Source: University of York

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