

# BRAIN FOOD

This milk is clever,  
these eggs are  
intelligent  
and these  
fish are  
geniuses

much as 400 per cent.  
But the advantages of omega-3s don't just apply to children. Scientists found that countries where people eat the most fish have the lowest rates of depression. Now some psychiatrists are using omega-3s to treat mental health problems.

One is Professor Basant Puri, head of the Lipid Neuroscience Group at Imperial College London. He says: 'When people are depressed the layer of complex fat molecules called phospholipids in the brain is thin, so the neurons and neurotransmitters that pass electrical signals around the grey matter find it difficult to keep up a lively messaging service. The omega-3 fatty acid EPA has been shown to prevent the breakdown of phospholipids.'

Omega-3s can also help the elderly. Ten patients with Alzheimer's were given a supplement containing EPA and evening primrose oil for six months. Their condition improved, while those on a dummy pill continued to deteriorate.

'There seems to be a link between low omega-3 levels and a higher risk of some forms of cognitive decline,' explains Dr Alex Richardson, of Oxford University.

Experts recommend that we have 0.45g of omega-3 a day. 'You should get as much of this as you can from your diet,' suggests Dr Richardson.

Barbara Lantin

## MOOD and FOOD

**The Food and Mood Project** — backed by the mental health charity Mind — suggests food to beat the blues. **Avoid low-fat diets** Cutting down on all types of fat is linked with an increase in symptoms of depression. **Tuck into turkey** Turkey and chicken are good sources of tryptophan, an essential amino acid which is converted into the feel-good hormone serotonin. **Watch your caffeine intake** Caffeine increases mental alertness and concentration. But too much caffeine has been linked with mood swings, nervousness and PMS.

● For more information visit [www.foodandmood.org](http://www.foodandmood.org)



pregnancy tend to have brainier and better-behaved children. Even those kids who miss out may be able to catch up later.

Senior educational psychologist Dr Madeleine Portwood carried out a trial in which schoolchildren in Durham were given omega-3 supplements.

The reading age of pupils with learning and behavioural problems shot up by an average of nine and a half

If you prefer to take a supplement, look for one with high levels of EPA. You can't get the amounts you need from cod liver oil supplements without risking an overdose of vitamin A. Dr Richardson uses MorEPA capsules in her research (£18.99 plus £2.50 p&p for two months' supply from Healthy and Essential, tel 0870 053 6000). Prof Puri favours VegEPA capsules, which contain EPA and evening primrose oil (£11.95 plus £2 p&p for two weeks' supply from Igenus on 0845 130 0424).

months compared with those who took a dummy capsule. And their spelling age rose by an average of six and a half months.

'Up to 40 per cent of the children showed dramatic improvements,' says Dr Portwood. 'In some cases we saw reading-age gains of four years and attention gains of as

Nine 250ml glasses of St Ivel Advance whole milk = three Intelligent Eating eggs = one portion of oily fish

**G**ranny always swore that eating fish made you brainy. At the time it might have seemed like an old wives' tale. But there is mounting evidence that suggests she really was right.

The biggest mystery is how she, and generations before her, knew. The fact is that omega-3 fatty acids, which are found in oily fish, can do great things for the mind.

Omega-3s are essential for healthy cell membranes. We can't make them ourselves, so they have to come from our food and drink. And the benefits of a diet high in omega-3s appear to start in the womb.

Research carried out for the Bristol-based Children of the Nineties project showed that women who eat oily fish regularly during

### Where to get your omega-3s

Omega-3s are found in some vegetable oils but those that come from vegetable sources may not be as effective as those from animal sources.

Manufacturers are now adding omega-3s to food. Two 250ml glasses of St Ivel Advance whole milk will give you the recommended daily allowance, while two 250ml glasses of Marks & Spencer Omega-3 milk contains less at 16 per cent.

Three eggs or hens fed an omega-3-rich diet, such as Columbus eggs and Intelligent Eating healthy eggs, provide about 2g, and five such eggs supply the recommended weekly dose of approx 3.15g.

However, according to the Food Standards Agency, oily fish including sardines, pilchards, trout, mackerel and salmon, is still the best source. Just one 140g serving gives you about 2g, which is around two-thirds of the omega-3 you need for a week.

