

The big idea: can what you eat change your mind?

Level 1: Elementary

1 Warmer

a. Discuss the following questions in pairs.

- Do you think the food we eat affects our health and how we feel? Why?
- Have you ever eaten something that made you feel different? What was it, and what happened?

2 Key words

a. Match the words below with their definitions. Then find and highlight them in the article to read them in context.

- | | | |
|------------------------|-------|---|
| 1. to affect | _____ | a. looking at or watching something carefully |
| 2. bacteria | _____ | b. the way a person feels, e.g. happy, sad, angry, etc. |
| 3. confusing | _____ | c. ill, often because of the food you have eaten |
| 4. gut | _____ | d. difficult to understand |
| 5. immune system | _____ | e. easily hurt or affected by something |
| 6. mental health | _____ | f. the stomach; the part of the human body where food goes |
| 7. mood | _____ | g. the part of the human body that fights illnesses and diseases |
| 8. paying attention to | _____ | h. a person's psychological and emotional state |
| 9. sensitive | _____ | i. to change or make a difference to something or someone |
| 10. sick | _____ | j. very small living things in the body – some can make us ill, but others can be good for our health |

The big idea: can what you eat change your mind?

Level 1: Elementary

b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity.

1. _____ to your body's needs and level of stress is important.
2. The directions from the app were _____, so I got lost.
3. When I eat too much fatty food, my _____ hurts.
4. The smell of fish made Sasha feel _____.
5. Your _____ can stop you from getting colds and flu.
6. It's important to think about your _____ and not get too stressed.
7. Alicia is quite _____. She gets upset easily.
8. Watching the news on TV can _____ how you feel.
9. Keiran is in a really good _____ today. He's really happy!
10. _____ can grow in many places of the body, such as in the mouth and on the skin.

The big idea: can what you eat change your mind?

Level 1: Elementary

From designer drinks to dodgy leftovers, our brain responds to food in surprising ways

Camilla Nord
6 January, 2025

- 1 Everywhere we look, people talk about healthy foods such as 'superfoods', that are good for our gut. But this can be confusing. For example, a snack can be good for you, but when it has a lot of sugar in it, is it still healthy? Many people believe that food affects not only our body but also our brain. But is that true?
- 2 There is some science behind this idea. Research shows that people with mental health problems often have different bacteria in their gut. The gut and brain are connected to the immune system, so an unhealthy gut may affect the brain. But can eating healthy foods really help our mental health?
- 3 Maybe, but the gut is very sensitive. Many different things can affect it. A person with mental health problems may also have an unhealthy gut because of a bad diet or the medicines they take. Superfoods can help your gut health, but scientists are not sure that they really help mental health.
- 4 The brain is also very important. It doesn't just receive messages from the gut – it also asks questions about them. The most important questions for the brain are 'Does this food give the body energy?' and 'Is this food safe?'
- 5 For example, when you drink something with sugar in it, your brain tastes and feels it. Then your body tells the brain that it has calories in it, and it stops you from feeling thirsty. This teaches you to drink it again in the future. However, people react differently to these messages from the brain. Some people can stick with a healthy diet, but others can't. Some people take up exercise and enjoy it, but others hate exercising and give up.
- 6 Just as the brain learns what is good, it also learns what is bad. When a food makes you sick, your brain remembers, and you usually stop liking it. This is a very strong feeling, and it is hard to change. In fact, it can sometimes cause people to cut out certain foods from their diet.
- 7 So, does food really change your mind? In some ways, yes. Food can affect your mood and level of energy. But it works differently for everyone. There is no simple answer, but one thing is sure: your brain is always paying attention to your gut.

© Guardian News and Media 2025
First published in *The Guardian*, 06/01/2025

The big idea: can what you eat change your mind?

Level 1: Elementary

3 Comprehension check

a. Are these sentences True (T) or False (F) according to the article?

1. Superfoods help a person's mental health. _____
2. The immune system is connected to the brain and the gut. _____
3. When you drink a soft drink, your gut sends messages to the brain about it. _____
4. Our brain forgets the foods that we don't like. _____
5. People who are happy all the time have different bacteria in the gut. _____

4 Key language

a. Find the verbs in the article and match them with a preposition from the box.

up

out

up

with

1. cut _____
2. give _____
3. stick _____
4. take _____

b. Read the definitions and then complete the examples with a phrasal verb.

1. to continue doing something that is difficult
Tom wants to _____ learning the piano because he enjoys it.
2. to start doing a new hobby or activity
Why don't you _____ tennis? You might like it!
3. to stop doing something before you finish it because it's too difficult
Many people _____ before they reach the top of the mountain.
4. to stop eating, drinking or doing something, usually for your health
Emma decided to _____ sugar from her diet.

The big idea: can what you eat change your mind?

Level 1: Elementary

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these questions.

- Think about what you like and don't like to eat and drink. How do you feel when you see, smell or taste these things?
- What do you think 'superfoods' are? Why do people say they are good for you?

6 In your own words

a. Write a short leaflet (about 100 words) for doctor's offices and medical centres to inform patients why people should pay attention to their gut health. Include information:

- about what the gut is and what it does.
- why it is important to take care of your gut health.
- on foods that can help the gut and the immune system stay healthy.

b. Share your leaflets with your class.