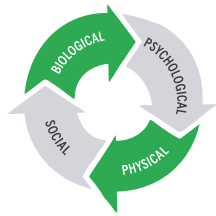


Diet



The main focus of this treatment is on biological and physical factors.



Remember, a sideways thumb just means not enough people have done research yet to show whether this works. More thumbs ups means that more people have done research that shows that this approach does work.

What is it?

There has been some interest in the role of diet and food supplements to help when people are having distressing and unusual experiences. Two food supplements that have been considered are fish oils (unsaturated fatty acids) and vitamin D.

What does it aim to do?

There is a little bit of evidence to suggest that unusual distressing experiences may be linked to changes in the way our nerve cells are built and how they work. The way these cells are built and work is linked to the 'building blocks' (essential fatty acids) that they're made from, and possibly to one particular 'building block' – the essential fatty acid in fish oils.

It is thought that by having a much higher level of these fish oils in the body, nerve cells might work and function better, leading to fewer unusual distressing experiences. It is unclear at the moment how vitamin D might have an impact on unusual and distressing experiences.

Does it work?

There are a few small studies suggesting that fish oils (if you take the right amount) may possibly help to reduce unusual, distressing experiences and make it easier to do things like work and socialise, when taken alongside usual medicines.

It has been suggested that taking fish oil, alongside usual medicines may improve the effect of the medicine, so that lower doses are needed.

One study with fish oils has shown significant drops in mild, unusual distressing experiences, in people at risk of developing psychosis, but a more recent study in Australia has shown that taking 1.4g of fish oils daily alongside good quality psychological and social support, is not better at stopping unusual distressing experiences from getting worse than good support alone. The suggested dose of fish oil can range from 700mg to 4g a day which is a very large dose!

People with unusual distressing experiences appear to have lower levels of vitamin D than the general population, but there is no evidence to date that taking a vitamin D supplement is helpful.

“Eating healthily keeps you happy and fit. I have also found, since changing my diet, that I have more motivation, which has improved my overall lifestyle. I would encourage people to eat healthier.”

Max, 27



But wait – remember, a good diet helps you with your weight, health and wellbeing

There's not a lot of evidence currently for the impact of diet on unusual and distressing experiences, BUT there's absolutely loads of evidence that eating a balanced and healthy diet is really good for your weight, health and wellbeing in general.

Also, if you're taking medicines that have weight-gain as a side-effect (especially Olanzapine but some of the others too), you might put on weight very quickly, within a few weeks.

Eating healthily, right from the start, may prevent you putting on weight while you're taking these medicines. A good diet is one that includes lots of vegetables and fruit, protein (e.g. fish, meat, beans and nuts), fibre and carbohydrates (e.g. rice, pasta, brown bread, potatoes) and not too much fat, sugar or take-aways!

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE)

NICE has not yet examined fish oil or vitamin D for unusual and distressing experiences, but it does recommend that you have a good diet if you're taking some of the medicines we've talked about, so that you're less likely to put on weight.

NICE reviewed 24 randomised trials of either exercise and healthy eating or just exercise in people who experience unusual distressing experiences.

They found that interventions that included exercise and healthy eating together reduced weight gain and improved wellbeing in people with unusual, distressing experiences. Healthy eating alone wasn't looked at, and exercise alone wasn't better than usual care at reducing weight.

So, just like it's better to have medicine and talking therapy together for unusual distressing experiences, it's better to have exercise and healthy eating together for weight and physical health.

How can I get this treatment?

Vitamins are available over the counter in your local pharmacy, but you should seek medical advice from your doctor, pharmacist or care coordinator to make sure you take the right dose, as taking too much of some vitamins is dangerous.

The doses for fish oils can be high so it may be worth checking whether this is likely to be helpful, and whether you can get fish oils on prescription.



✓ Main pro

A healthy diet is a cheap and easy way to help you feel better. You can get advice about healthy eating from your local GP surgery.

If fish oils do help, then they have fewer side-effects than standard medicines and are easier to use than lengthy Talking Therapies.

✗ Main con

There really isn't enough evidence that fish oils or other vitamins work at the moment for unusual distressing experiences, and if you can't get a doctor to prescribe them, then they're expensive. To get the right dose, you have to take either big tablets, or lots of smaller tablets.



“ Many people are seeking to take control of their mental health using self help. One approach is to make changes to what you eat. There have been positive responses from people who have made changes to their diet, confirming the importance of food and nutrition for improving emotional and mental health.

We often run a Healthy Eating group, designed to help people think about the food they're eating. It's a great place to learn something new, meet new people and look after yourself. ”

Jim Newton, Care Coordinator