

However this wasn't the experience Tracy was hoping for. "The only intervention was that I was checked every 15 minutes," she explains. She didn't feel the benefit of this particular approach. After 10 days, she left and was lucky enough to be able to stay with her mother, where, with rest and nourishment, her health gradually stabilised.

It was during this period that Tracy happened on the book 'The Feelgood Factor' by Patrick Holford. "I had always asked the doctors if there was a blood test or something that could find out what was going on with me, because I felt there was something wrong with my bio-chemistry, but they all said 'no'."

Holford's book was her first introduction to the concept of nutrient therapy, leading her to consult Dublin-based nutritionist Helen Corrigan.

"Helen explained to me about the importance of diet, exercise, mindfulness, meditation, social contact –

she was the first person to talk to me about the whole-person approach," says Tracy.

Going on to do retreats with the Hippocrates Institute that combined the holistic approach with group therapy, Tracy dealt with her past issues and traumas while developing new life skills for recovery.

Tracy stopped taking anti-depressants on Christmas Day 2011. Although she felt great at first, by March she was slipping back into anxiety and depression.

"The anti-depressants



Relationship break-ups would precipitate a 'meltdown'

were creating the brain chemicals that I needed to stay well, but when I came off them, there was nothing to replace them," she explains.

This was when a friend recommended that she see Dr Edmond O'Flaherty. "Meeting Dr O'Flaherty changed my life," says Tracy.

"He sent me to St Vincent's Hospital for a blood test and started me on a course of nutrients, including zinc, B6, PFP, Vitamin D, fish oil and L-Methionine. I had been taking B vitamins, but this test identified exactly which imbalances needed to be corrected. Dr O'Flaherty also put me on an anti-depressant for a while, which I now no longer need.

"I take eight nutrient tablets a day now, am doing a course I love and getting good grades. I have loads of energy and feel positive and optimistic about my future.

"I have dealt with my past issues in therapy and now that my brain biochemistry is balanced correctly, I have never felt better in my life!"

Mental illness epidemic – a modern malady?

THE rapid growth of industrialised food production in the 20th Century was initially seen as the answer to food poverty and malnutrition.

The development of food additives and preservatives facilitated long-term storage and transport of food, making it cheaper and more widely available.

What was not foreseen was the loss of essential nutrients naturally present in fresh, unprocessed foods. Vital nutrients for brain and nervous system functioning, such as Omega 3 fatty acids, the B vitamins and trace elements such as Magnesium and Zinc are systematically stripped away by modern industrial food production processes.

This has led to inevitable and predictable

consequences for mental health in the general population. For instance, the decline in the age of onset of depression in recent decades has been linked to young people's sugar-laden, nutritionally impoverished diet of fast food, fizzy drinks, crisps and chocolate bars.

Dr Edmond O'Flaherty sees nutrient therapy as a complement to, rather than a replacement for, standard drug treatment. "What I see in cases of depression in Ireland is high copper and low zinc – I have seen

hundreds of such cases", says Dr O'Flaherty.

"Drugs can have very unpleasant side effects for many people. Using nutrient therapy allows people to decrease their medication and in some instances come off medication altogether."

The nutritional approach is not a quick fix, as it can take a number of weeks. But at a time of increasing stress levels and unprecedented cuts in the mental healthcare budget, it may represent a safe, low-cost and effective intervention to augment drug-based approaches to mental health treatment.

Dr O'Flaherty can be contacted on 01-2881425



DIET: Chocolate, crisps and fizzy drinks have been linked to depression

Origins of the approach

NUTRIENT therapy, also called orthomolecular therapy, was initiated by Dr Abram Hoffer and Dr Humphry Ormond in the Canadian University of Saskatchewan in the 1950s.

It corrects individual biochemistry using natural substances such as vitamins, minerals, amino acids, fatty acids and trace elements.

Hoffer and Ormond discovered that schizophrenia could be successfully treated with high doses of niacin (Vitamin B3) and nicotinamide.

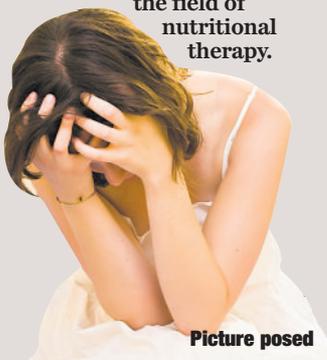
Celebrated biochemist Prof Linus Pauling (the only person to be awarded two unshared Nobel prizes) also championed the nutritional approach to treating mental illness.

It appeared that a natural, low-cost and effective treatment for a wide range of mental health problems had

been discovered.

But as nutrients cannot be patented, they were of no interest to pharmaceutical companies and research funds were instead directed to developing manufactured drugs that could be licensed and sold.

This soon led to the development of quick-acting tranquillisers, steroids and other synthetic drugs which overshadowed the equally momentous but less lucrative discoveries in the field of nutritional therapy.



Picture posed

Nutritional intervention with different groups

AN extensive body of literature on non-drug approaches to mental illness has been developed over several decades. The neurotransmitters in the brain that determine our mood and mental functioning must be produced every day.

The only raw materials for this are the nutrients in the food we eat. Good nutrition therefore makes an important contribution to the development, management and prevention of specific mental health problems such as depression, schizophrenia, attention deficit disorder and Alzheimer's disease.

To illustrate, in prisons, the addition of vitamins, minerals and essential fatty acids to inmates' diets resulted in a significant reduction in antisocial behaviour and violence.

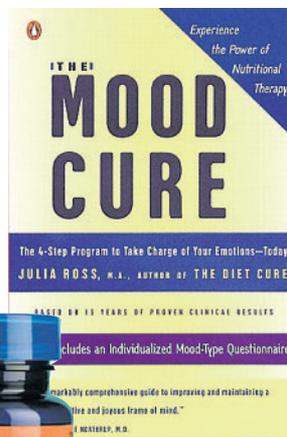
A good-quality breakfast is associated with better mental health in adolescents. Taking Omega-3 supplements not only reduces the risk of progression to psychotic disorder in vulnerable adults, it also reduces ADHD symptoms in children and cognitive decline in older people.

Many mentally ill people are deficient in vitamin B6 and zinc due to a condition called pyroluria. They require doses far higher than those found in the normal population to correct this. In addition, removing the synthetic food colouring tartrazine from children's diets has been shown to decrease irritability, restlessness and sleep disturbance for some.

A disturbing fact is that lack of adequate food intake can, in itself, precipitate psychological problems. The Minnesota Starvation Experiment in 1945 illustrated that depression, hysteria and emotional distress could be induced in healthy people by prolonged semi-starvation.

These symptoms are similar to those experienced by people with eating disorders, suggesting they may be the result rather than the cause of disordered eating. Alcohol and drug addiction can also

lead to malnutrition, due to the poor diet of many addicts. The good news is that correcting nutritional imbalances in recovering addicts can dramatically reduce cravings and assist rehabilitation. In her book 'The Mood Cure' (inset), psychologist Julia Ross details her successful nutritional interventions with recovering addicts in the US.



VITAMINS: Minerals and fatty acids saw a reduction in anti-social behaviour of inmates



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