

# The Telegraph

## How comfort foods beat the blues

Comfort foods such as sausages and mash, ice cream and chips really do make you feel better and less lonely, according to psychologists.

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It works by reminding people of their childhood actually fight feelings of isolation by making people feel like they belong.

Psychologists at the University of Buffalo in the US wanted to find out if food could have a similar effect on people as watching their favourite television show or looking at photographs and mementos of friends and family.

In one experiment, researchers tried to make some participants feel lonely by having them write for six minutes about a fight with someone close to them. Others were given an emotionally neutral writing assignment.

Then, some people in each group wrote about the experience of eating a comfort food and others wrote about eating a new food. Finally, the researchers used a questionnaire to measure loneliness.

Writing about a fight with a close person made people feel lonely. But people who were generally secure in their relationships – something that was assessed before the experiment – were able to rescue themselves from loneliness by writing about a comfort food.

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[Bangers and mash top for comfort](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/foodanddrink/foodanddrinknews/5596937/Bangers-and-mash-most-popular-comfort-food-as-Britons-eat-more-during-credit-crunch.html)

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[Comfort food returns in credit crunch](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/financialcrisis/3254337/Financial-crisis-Comfort-food-back-in-fashion-as-diners-call-for-custard-and-sticky-puddings.html)

[\(<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/financialcrisis/3254337/Financial-crisis-Comfort-food-back-in-fashion-as-diners-call-for-custard-and-sticky-puddings.html>\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/financialcrisis/3254337/Financial-crisis-Comfort-food-back-in-fashion-as-diners-call-for-custard-and-sticky-puddings.html)

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Study co-author Jordan Troisi said: "What we found is that people have the capacity to create a comfort food for themselves by having it be something that's consistently associated with their close others."

When writing about comfort food, many people remembered an experience of eating with family and friends.

In another experiment, eating a comfort soup in the laboratory made people think more about relationships.

Writing in the journal *Psychological Science*, Mr Troisi said: "Everyone experiences stress in their daily lives, often associated with their connections to others.

"It seems comfort food is a sort of ready-made easy resource for remedying a sense of loneliness. It seems like it almost doesn't take very much to regain those feelings and feel like we're connected with others."

Tina Mulholland, a spokeswoman for this week's Bacon Connoisseurs' Week, said: "According to our research, biting into a crispy bacon sandwich on lightly toasted bread with a dollop of tomato ketchup generates more foodie pleasure than anything else. I think we all recognise that moment of self-indulgent rapture when we first bite into a food we just love.

"Bacon's role at the centre of family meal occasions, such as relaxed weekends, on carefree holidays, or often when fathers are cooking, triggers positive emotions throughout life.

"When speed is essential a bacon sandwich not only fits the bill but, bacon's strong, savoury sensation in the mouth is extremely comforting."

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