



WELLNESS

magazine

SPRING 2024

WELLNESS brought to you by ESS

HEALTHIER MIND HEALTHIER FOOD HEALTHIER BODY HEALTHIER WORLD

WELCOME TO THE LATEST ISSUE OF OUR WELLNESS MAGAZINE!



As the trees burst into bloom and the days grow longer, we're filled with a renewed sense of energy and anticipation. Spring is a time for shedding the layers of winter and embracing a fresh start, both physically and mentally. We're excited to guide you through this season of growth and renewal, helping you harness the energy of spring.

Structured around our four pillars: Healthier Food, Healthier Mind, Healthier Body and Healthier World, we've curated a selection of content aimed at inspiring you to embrace the joys of spring and make positive changes in your life. Discover how to transform your favourite recipes into healthier versions or dive into the importance of movement for reducing stress.

This issue covers Food Allergy Awareness Week, World Autism Awareness Day and World Environment Day, which highlights our commitment to raising awareness and promoting inclusivity and sustainability.

Whether you're a seasoned gardener or just getting started, ESS gardener Janet's expert tips on prepping your garden for the summer months will help ensure you get ahead in preparing an outdoor space to enjoy all season long.

We hope you enjoy it.

A handwritten signature in white ink, appearing to read 'Leanne King', is written over a dark, textured background that looks like soil or mulch.

Leanne King
Head of Nutrition and Wellbeing, ESS

CONTENTS

Knowing the hidden dangers:	4
Understanding and managing food allergies	
The health and sustainability benefits of	6
reducing red meat and cured meats	
Ripe and ready from vine to table	8
Tips on how to reduce salt for children	10
What's in your bread and butter?	11
Understanding autism in depth	12
Embracing neurodiversity	15
Mindful moments: Loneliness	16
Making the right tech choices	17
to reduce stress	
And breathe	18
The complex relationship between	19
smoking and stress	
Setting the world alight	20
Turn that frown upside down	21
What makes you smile?	21
Sweet tooth, sour outcome	22
A sweet, healthier treat	23
Milk matters	24
Moving for your mental health	26
Can you go the distance?	28
Gut feelings	30
High fibre recipe	32
Donate blood to give the gift of life	33
Mr blue sky	34
Plastic, not so fantastic	35
Sustainable cocoa farming	36
How I stop food waste at home	37
Hello from the Defence Academy Market Garden	38

KNOWING THE HIDDEN DANGERS

Understanding and managing food allergies

FOOD ALLERGY AWARENESS WEEK: 12TH -18TH MAY 2024

In the UK, 1-2% of the UK population are affected by food allergies, meaning an estimated two million people are living with a diagnosed food allergy. Peanut and milk allergies are the most common food allergies in the UK.

A food allergy is an immune system response triggered by certain foods that the body mistakenly identifies as harmful. When someone with a food allergy consumes or comes into contact with the allergenic food, their immune system reacts by producing antibodies, particularly immunoglobulin E (IgE) antibodies, to fight off what it perceives as a threat. This immune response can cause various symptoms, ranging from mild to severe, and in some cases it can be life-threatening. If someone has had a severe reaction before, they will carry an adrenaline auto-injector (such as an EpiPen) with them to use in an emergency.

As part of the Food Information Regulations, food businesses are required by law to provide allergen information if any food they provide contains any of the major 14 listed allergens as an ingredient. Consumers may be allergic or have an intolerance to other ingredients, but only 14 are required to be declared by food law.

Prepacked, prepacked for direct sale and non-prepacked foods all require allergen labelling. This can be in the form of a label attached to the food or a ticket next to the item.

You may have heard of Natasha's Law which came into effect on 1st October 2021 and requires businesses to label all food that is prepacked on the same premises where it is being sold, with the 14 major allergens emphasised in the ingredients list. The law is named after Natasha Ednan-Laperouse, who died in 2016 after suffering a severe allergic reaction to a baguette containing sesame seeds which were not on the label or visible in the product. Sesame is one of the 14 major allergens.

The 14 allergens which must be declared are:

- **Celery**
- **Cereals containing gluten** (such as wheat, barley and oats)
- **Crustaceans** (such as prawns, crabs and lobsters)
- **Eggs**
- **Fish**
- **Lupin**
- **Milk**
- **Molluscs** (such as mussels and oysters)
- **Mustard**
- **Peanuts**
- **Sesame**
- **Soybeans**
- **Sulphur dioxide/Sulphites**
- **Tree nuts** (such as almonds, hazelnuts, walnuts, Brazil nuts, cashews, pecans, pistachios and macadamia nuts).

People might have other allergies to different ingredients, but if a product does contain this ingredient it doesn't have to be declared by law. People with these allergies need to check back of pack labelling and ask when eating out. Symptoms of a food allergy include digestive problems, skin reactions, respiratory issues, swelling, cardiovascular symptoms and anaphylaxis. Symptoms of a food allergy can occur within a couple of minutes up to a couple of hours after consumption. Anaphylaxis can happen rapidly, within minutes, requiring immediate treatment with adrenaline and emergency medical care.

Some everyday products can contain unexpected allergens:

- Celery is used in lots of recipes to enhance flavour, but often isn't listed on the menu.
- Gluten can be found in some scrambled eggs as restaurants may add pancake batter to make the eggs fluffy and appealing.
- Eggs are often used as a binder or emulsifier.





Below are some allergens and the food products they may be present in:

Celery

Tomato ketchup, stock cubes, Marmite

Gluten

Certain blue/veined cheeses, battered chips, salad dressings, mayonnaise, ready-made pasta sauces, vodka

Crustaceans

Fish stock and nutritional supplements

Egg

Artificial crab meat (surimi), fresh pasta, protein shakes, pies or breads brushed with egg

Fish

Worcestershire and barbecue sauce, Caesar salad (traditionally uses anchovies in the dressing)

Nuts

Indian cooking often uses cashews and almonds as a thickener in sauces, veggie burgers, pesto, energy bars, gin (Bombay Sapphire contains almonds)

Sesame

Cereals, houmous, noodles, stir fries

What is the difference between a food allergy and a food intolerance?

A food intolerance is when you are unable to digest certain foods or ingredients in food. An intolerance is not usually serious, but eating the food can make you feel unwell. You will usually get symptoms within a few hours of eating the food / ingredient, which may include diarrhoea, bloating, excess gas and tummy pain. They may last for a few hours or days.

Lots of foods and ingredients may contain hidden allergens and it's important to check the label before purchasing. When eating out, ask restaurant staff if you can see the allergen list before ordering if you think it might contain something you are allergic to. If you suspect you might have an allergy or intolerance, book a doctor's appointment to discuss it and they can run some tests and try you on a different diet. If you are with someone who you believe is having an allergic reaction, call 999 immediately.

Difference between a food intolerance and a food allergy:

Food allergy =

an immune response, can be life threatening, happens every time and shortly after ingestion.

Food intolerance =

uncomfortable with inconsistent symptoms (not every time you eat the food) and happens after a few hours.



THE HEALTH AND SUSTAINABILITY BENEFITS OF REDUCING RED MEAT AND CURED MEATS

BNF HEALTHY EATING WEEK: 10TH-14TH JUNE 2024

In the UK, heart and circulatory diseases are currently responsible for 160,000 (1 in 4) deaths per year. That's an average of 460 deaths each day, or one every three minutes⁹.

With the current trends towards more plant-based diets and research showing that red and processed meats have the biggest environmental impact of any foods, particularly beef and dairy cattle¹⁰, what are the nutritional impacts of reducing red meat?

A recent nutrition survey found meat and processed meat products to be the second biggest contributor of salt intake in the UK (contributing to around 26% of our intake)⁴. A diet high in salt (or sodium) can cause raised blood pressure, which can increase the risk of heart disease and stroke^{2,11}.

On average, people in the UK are also eating too much saturated fat, with a recent nutrition survey finding that red and processed meats (including beef, lamb, pork, bacon and ham) are some of the biggest sources of saturated fat in the UK diet⁵.

If you are currently eating more than 90g (roughly 2 average sausages or 3 thinly cut slices of beef) of red or processed meats a day, it's recommended to reduce this down to a maximum of 70g per day to protect your health¹.

Most of us love a bacon sarnie or a burger on the barbeque, so what are the potential health implications?

Eating too much saturated fat in your diet can raise the amount of LDL cholesterol (also known as bad cholesterol) in your blood. Having too much LDL cholesterol in your blood increases your risk of heart disease such as a heart attack or stroke.

Research has also show that eating a lot of red and processed meat increases your risk of bowel (colorectal) cancer, which is the third and second most common cancer worldwide in men and women respectively¹.

You can reduce the saturated fat in your diet by choosing leaner cuts of meat, lean or extra lean minced meat, and swapping from red meat to chicken, fish, or plant protein (like beans, lentils or tofu) instead⁵.

Change is happening. Daily meat consumption has reduced by around 17% in the last decade, with people eating less red and processed meat. However, we are eating more white meat such as poultry⁷. More progress is needed as this is still considerably below the 30% reduction recommended by the government to meet health and sustainability commitments⁸.



THERE ARE BENEFITS TOO

Red meat is known for being a great source of protein and providing us with a host of nutrients including iron, zinc and B vitamins, all of which are essential to maintain good health. Iron is essential for growth and development, as well as getting oxygen around the body. There are two types of iron in our food: haem and non-haem iron. Haem iron is the most easily absorbed by the body and can be found in foods such as red meat and seafood- it is particularly high in red meat. Non-haem iron is less easily absorbed by the body and tends to be found in vegetables, pulses and grains.

Red meat is also a good source of vitamin B12, which is naturally found in animal products. It helps to keep our nervous system healthy as well as helping the body to release energy from food.

Zinc is a mineral which supports our immune system through helping us to make new cells and heal wounds¹².

So, you might be wondering what to do for the best - should we be cutting out red and processed meat or not?

As with anything in life, it is rare that any one thing can be 100% bad or good - it's all about striking a balance and finding a middle ground that



works for you. If you are keen to look after your health and the health of the planet, there are lots of things you can do without having to go completely cold turkey (excuse the pun). For example, you could have a smaller portion when you do eat these foods, or you could eat them less often by having one meat free day a week. You could also opt for lower fat processed meats by adding turkey slices to your sandwiches rather than salami. Choosing leaner cuts of meat which contain less saturated fat is another great option, e.g. going for a fillet steak rather than a sirloin, as well as choosing reduced fat sausages and mince.

To further reduce your environmental impact, consider choosing meat which has been sourced locally to save on air miles.

WHAT COUNTS AS A PROCESSED MEAT?

Processed meat is meat that's been preserved by smoking, curing, salting or adding preservatives. This includes:

- Sausages, bacon, ham
- Deli meats such as salami and pâtés
- Canned meat such as corned beef
- Sliced luncheon meats, including those made from chicken and turkey.

WHAT COUNTS AS RED MEAT?

Red meat includes beef, lamb and mutton, pork, veal, venison and goat.



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RIPE AND READY FROM VINE TO TABLE

BRITISH TOMATO FORTNIGHT: 27TH MAY–9TH JUNE 2024

BNF HEALTHY EATING: WEEK 10TH–17TH JUNE 2024

Whether tomatoes are a fruit or a vegetable is an age old debate!

Technically, they are a fruit but tend to be found in a variety of savoury dishes and sides rather than in puddings and sweet treats. It is thought tomatoes originate from the Andes and first came to Europe in the 16th century.

There are over 10,000 varieties of tomato worldwide!

Tomatoes are traditionally red but come in lots of different colours including yellow, purple and white. Popular varieties in the UK include cherry, beefsteak and plum.

Tomatoes are full of vitamins A, C and E which can help you maintain healthy skin, bones and teeth, as well as boosting your immune system and helping your gut microbiome.

Lycopene, a carotenoid, is also present in tomatoes and is one of the most potent antioxidants – consumption has been shown to be associated with a decreased risk of chronic diseases such as cancer and cardiovascular diseases. There is also about 1.2g fibre per 100g tomatoes.

Canned tomatoes have similar nutrient levels to fresh tomatoes and are cheap and convenient to have in your food cupboard. Tinned tomatoes can be used in pasta sauces, curries and stews, but be mindful of those which have extra sugar and salt added.

80g tomatoes is one of your 5 a day.

Growing your own can be fun and result in an abundance of fresh, tasty and nutritious ingredients. You can easily grow tomatoes from seed indoors.

Be sure to sow them from late February to mid-March if you're growing them in a greenhouse, or from late March to early April if they'll be outside. To successfully grow tomatoes you'll need rich, fertile soil or compost and a good, sunny and sheltered spot. Lots of garden centres sell grow bags which you can plant tomato plants in. Water them regularly and feed weekly with a fertiliser once the plants start to flower.

Once ripe and picked, try to avoid storing them in the fridge as this will affect the texture. Tomatoes are best consumed straight off the vine but will keep for a week or so at room temperature.





TOMATO PIE

Ingredients:

- Shortcrust pastry
- 3-4 large tomatoes
- Sea salt
- 150g mature cheddar cheese
- 3 spring onions (chopped)
- Handful of basil
- Bacon sprinkles (optional)
- Approx. 2 tbsp mayonnaise

Equipment:

- Pie tin
- Rolling pin
- Knife
- Chopping board
- Cheese grater

Method:

- 1 Preheat the oven to 180°C.
- 2 Place shortcrust pastry in a pie tin and blind bake.
- 3 Slice tomatoes, put on kitchen towel and add a sprinkle of sea salt. When pastry is ready, pat tomatoes dry to remove excess moisture and salt.
- 4 Slice the cheese and put a slim layer of mature cheddar (about 1/3 of total) on the pastry which acts like a barrier.
- 5 Layer on pastry and add spring onions and torn basil (bacon sprinkles optional) and repeat to near top of crust.
- 6 Mix mayonnaise with the remaining mature cheddar and spread over top of tomato mix.
- 7 Cover with foil loosely to stop pastry burning and cook for 20-25 mins. Enjoy!



NONNA'S MARINARA SAUCE

- and it's freezable!

Makes 750ml purée**Ingredients:**

- Approx. 1kg tomatoes
- 1 onion
- 4 garlic cloves
- 3 tsp dried oregano
- 2 level tsp sweetener
- Milk

Equipment:

- Bowl
- Kettle
- Saucepan
- Chopping board
- Knife

Method:

- 1 Peel tomatoes (put in boiling water for approximately 30 secs, remove, chill in iced water and remove skins). Cut in half and remove seeds, then blend until smooth.
- 2 Chop onion and garlic cloves (a mini chopper is great for this as you don't want big lumps in your sauce).
- 3 Fry until onion is translucent, add the blended tomatoes and dried oregano, simmer for approx. ten minutes then add sweetener (taste through each process and add according to your taste).
- 4 Once happy with the taste, add a couple of splashes of milk and stir through (don't be worried that it's temporarily pink as this will pass).
- 5 Use immediately or cool and freeze.

TIPS ON HOW TO REDUCE SALT FOR CHILDREN

SALT AWARENESSWEEK: 13TH-19TH MAY 2024

BNF HEALTHY EATING WEEK: 10TH-17TH JUNE 2024



Jen McGroarty,
HR Business Partner - ESS

Too much salt can put us and our children at risk of high blood pressure and heart disease later on in life.

According to the NHS, the maximum recommended daily amounts of salt are:

Under 1 year old	Less than 1 gram
1 to 3-year-olds	2 grams
4 to 6-year-olds	3 grams
7 to 10-year-olds	5 grams
11 and older	6 grams

A reminder that 6 grams is less than a teaspoon!

There is lots of advice for how to cut down or limit your intake of salt! I have a three-year-old and here's what works for me:

- I make as many of our meals from scratch as possible ... I'm not a chef so I get as close as I can to cooking from scratch and I'm a working mum so I batch cook!
- I use leftovers from dinner for lunches.
- I try to make snacks for when we're on the go – one of our favourites is chocolate coconut energy balls and my daughter loves to get involved in making them, see the recipe below.
- We don't have salt on the table and keep it in the cupboard – out of sight, out of mind!
- I use alternatives like herbs, pepper, low salt stock cubes, soy sauce etc.
- I don't add salt when cooking as quite often I don't think it's needed.
- I try not to beat myself up if we have a takeaway – it's all about balance!



CHOCOLATE COCONUT ENERGY BALLS

with pecans and dates



Ingredients:

- 65g cup pecans
- 15 whole pitted dates roughly chopped
- 30g shredded unsweetened coconut (divided in two)
- 1 tablespoon coconut oil
- 1 1/2 tablespoons cocoa powder
- 1 tablespoon water (if needed)

Equipment:

- Food processor/blender
- Mixing bowl
- Tablespoon
- Baking tray

Method:

- 1 Put pecans in food processor and pulse until roughly chopped.
- 2 Place 15g of the shredded coconut in a small bowl. Set aside.

- 3 Add the remaining ingredients except for the 1 tablespoon water to the food processor. Turn food processor on until very well mixed. If mixture seems too dry to stick together, add the water.
- 4 Using a tablespoon measure, spoon out mixture and roll into balls.
- 5 Coat each ball in the reserved 15g shredded coconut.
- 6 Place on a parchment covered baking sheet and refrigerate for at least thirty minutes, until they harden.
- 7 Store in the fridge in an airtight container or plastic bag for up to two weeks.

WHAT'S IN YOUR BREAD & BUTTER?

BRITISH SANDWICH WEEK: 22ND- 28TH MAY 2024

Whether you're cooking up a storm at home, eating on the go or grabbing a meal deal from your local supermarket, sandwiches are one of the most popular lunchtime choices. Research has shown that around 1/3 of people in the UK buy a meal deal at least weekly¹. We've spoken to a range of people across the business and asked what their favourite sandwich is. Do any take your fancy?

Matt Moseley

ESS

Homemade egg mayo with smoky bacon crisps on white tiger bread

Matt Lord

ESS

Croque monsieur on homemade sourdough bread or BLT

Glyn Greenow

ESS

Bacon, brie and cranberry on granary

Warren Turvey

ESS

Stilton, avocado and salad, a little pepper and maybe a pickle or two on wholegrain bread

Regella Kaemena-Stokes

Thames Valley Police

Crayfish and salad

S Sgt Errol Carter

MOD

Jerk chicken with a pineapple salsa

Stephanie Wright

ESS

Prawn and Marie Rose sauce sandwich or chicken tikka and mint yoghurt sandwich on seeded brown sourdough

Timothy Reading

ESS

Toasted fresh focaccia with sundried tomato, buffalo mozzarella, fresh basil and olive oil

Ryan Hopper

ESS

Toasted ciabatta with steak, dolcelatte or Roquefort, onion chutney and rocket - and maybe a bit of English mustard mayo

Denise Draycott

ESS

Ham, lettuce and mayo on brown seeded bread

S Sgt (SSI) John Palmer

MOD

BLT on malted brown bread

Eleanor de Maria

ESS

Cheddar and onion chutney on tiger bread

Sandwiches can be a great way to have a balanced meal as they can contain carbohydrates, protein and vitamins and minerals from the fruit and vegetables you add. It's possible for the calories, fat, saturated fat, sugar and salt to mount up, but it's easy to make simple swaps to make your sandwiches healthier. Consider the swaps below:

- Opt for wholemeal, seeded or wholegrain bread instead of white
- Use lighter or lighter than light mayonnaise instead of full fat
- Butter one side of the bread or not at all
- Add salad leaves, cucumber, tomato or peppers
- Ask for salad rather than chips or crisps when eating out
- Use tinned fish in spring water or brine over sunflower oil
- Pick leaner meats, e.g. chicken or turkey, or try going meat free

UNDERSTANDING AUTISM IN DEPTH

WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS DAY: 2ND APRIL 2024



Chris Simmonds
General Manager – RAF Valley,
JSMTC Indefatigable and Outstations

My name is Chris. I am a General Manager working within ESS Defence and I am also a Lead Ambassador for Compass Group's Ability Network which focuses on raising awareness and education on the challenges faced by employees and customers who identify as having a disability, either visible or invisible.

Several members of my family are autistic, including my four-year-old son. I too was identified as autistic in my late twenties. Beyond that, I have provided support, development and inclusion during my career for people within the teams I have managed who are also autistic.

To start with, autism is probably more common than most of us realise. In the UK it is thought that around one in 100 people are autistic, around 700,000 adults and children in total.

So, what is autism? We have likely all heard of autism, but not as many of us understand what it actually is and means to those of us who have it.

Our Ability Network partner, Ambitious about Autism, describe it as follows:

"Autism affects the way a person communicates and how they experience the world around them. It is considered a spectrum condition. While autistic people share some similar characteristics, they are also all different from each other. The autism spectrum isn't linear from high to low but varies, just as one person might vary from another."

Some autistic people require little to no support, but others may face additional challenges and need support from a parent or carer every day. Some autistic people have learning disabilities, which means their support needs are different.

People with an autism diagnosis may:

- Find it hard to communicate and interact with other people.
- Find it hard to understand how other people think or feel.
- Find things like bright lights or loud noises overwhelming, stressful or uncomfortable.
- Get anxious or upset about unfamiliar situations and social events.
- Take longer to understand information.
- Do or think the same things over and over.

Some people refer to autism under different names, such as:

- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), which is the medical name for autism.
- Asperger's (or Asperger syndrome) is still used by some to describe autistic people with average or above average intelligence.

What causes autism?

To date, there have been numerous studies and theories, but we still know little about what actually causes it or if it even has a cause. There are, however, some popular misconceptions that it is caused by bad parenting, the MMR vaccination, diet or an infection that can spread to others. These have all been disproved.

My son's autism diagnosis is accompanied by multiple additional needs and challenges.

- He is non-verbal, meaning he can't speak, struggling to interact with others and lacking eye contact.
- He has no sense of danger.
- He is unable to practice personal/self-care so can't do things that many of us don't think about, such as using the toilet or a knife and fork.
- He has pica, which is an eating disorder where he will put everything in his mouth regardless of what it is, although, thankfully, this has improved as he has got older.

Whilst being autistic provides challenges, it doesn't define him. He is a very happy, cheeky little boy and is funny and infectious to be around, always with a big smile on his face. He is very affectionate and playful, loves being outside and excels in other areas such as problem solving, building and is a great climber. We have a lot of fun together.

From a parenting perspective, we can't leave him unsupervised. He has his own room which we have made a safe space, there is nothing high for him to climb and potentially fall off and there is a baby gate on his window and a full height gate on his door as he was able to climb over the shorter ones. This means we know that he is safe in his room at night.

We have secured funding for him to have a 121 at school where he has an individual development plan which states his development and education between home, school and health care. He receives speech and language therapy and additional support from education specialists, all have been to his benefit, and he has shown development in all areas. Accessing support has been difficult at times and waiting lists for a diagnosis are up to six years now, but starting off with the GP is a good in road and charities such as Ambitious About Autism and the National Autistic Society can also be very helpful.



Autism in the Workplace

In the UK just 22% of autistic adults are in any kind of employment.

Whilst not every autistic adult will be able to work, those that can often find it a challenging environment for a number of different reasons, some of which can easily be overcome in organisations that offer a more inclusive approach.

A little bit of education, understanding, communication and teamwork goes a long way and can enable autistic people to shine in their roles. Some of the most amazing, gifted and high performing people I have worked with have been autistic.

In my experience a hiring manager can miss some opportunities at interview, this can be with any disclosure, not just autism. A candidate comes in, shares that they are autistic, but the interviewer doesn't explore it with them. This can be for many reasons, be it they lack confidence to do so or don't want to risk offending etc. Whatever the reason, this shouldn't be the case.

Those who share are happy to discuss and the simplest way to start the conversation is to simply ask the candidate what it means for them. Understanding one another is crucial, more so now in the workplace than ever.

Leadership is ever evolving as the world, people and culture around us change and it is now well documented that a diverse and inclusive workplace is extremely beneficial to businesses, making them more successful. A few reasons for this are:

- Gaining a broader range of perspectives.
- Understanding customers better as your teams are more reflective of the communities you provide products and services to.
- Stimulating business innovation.
- Faster, better problem solving.
- A wider range of skills and abilities to draw from.
- A healthier work environment, with better outcomes and reduced absenteeism.
- It also makes the organisation more attractive to work for and do business with.

For autism, workplace adjustments are often easy and don't cost anything. It ultimately comes down to communication and understanding. Simple things like providing clarity around why something is done the way it is, to providing more detail when training to help with understanding. Setting clear targets can also be key, along with a routine.

The main thing to remember is that if you don't know what to do for a member of your team, simply reach out and talk to others. Tap into employee networks such as Ability and talk to the person you are working to include.

Being a leader is recognising you don't have all the answers and, more importantly, that you don't have to. Be open minded and open to learning and everything else will come. You will get it wrong, but that too is a lesson to be learnt from and you will grow as a leader.

Be curious, be confident, be courageous.

EMBRACING NEURODIVERSITY

WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS DAY: 2ND APRIL 2024



My name is Dale Norman and I work for ESS Defence as a CSA in the Robson Resilience Centre, Crickhowell.

While balancing work life, I am also a theological master's student at Cardiff University and I am married with a five-year-old daughter.

My daughter was diagnosed with autism about two years ago, however my wife and I suspected she was autistic for some years before that. As parents we have always been passionate about creating an environment where she feels loved, accepted and understood. All these things play a part in enhancing her wellbeing.

Although some perceive autism in a negative manner, we have always maintained that being neurodiverse does not devalue one's life, but rather this is something to be celebrated and embraced. Autism enables an individual to see the world in their own particular way, and autistic people offer positive contributions to society. Although there are many positives to walking alongside someone who is autistic, we have also experienced various challenges along the way.

We have discovered that the common methods of parenting may not necessarily apply to an autistic child. We have had to find ways to fully understand how our daughter thinks and behaves. This has included being aware if a social occasion will

have loud noises or a large crowd. As parents we must think ten steps ahead so that we can be aware of any emotional triggers that may cause a reaction. Other aspects include allowing her to express and process her own emotions without trying to prevent them.

As parents we also need to consider our own wellbeing, which includes finding ways to spend time together as well as acknowledging that we may be neurodivergent ourselves.

Our advice to other parents with autistic children is to try your best to fully understand your children and to put things in place that can affirm and support them. We also recognise that there are social expectations placed on children that are not appropriate or achievable for our children and that we need to raise more awareness about what changes could be made to make the world a more welcoming and inclusive place for all neurotypes.

We have tried to increase awareness through social media, as well as sharing our own experience to those in our local community. I hope this short article can raise more awareness for those who are neurodiverse and open discussions about how a more affirming and inclusive environment can be achieved for everyone.

MINDFUL MOMENTS: LONELINESS

Is loneliness a mental health condition?

Feeling lonely isn't in itself considered a mental health condition, however, research suggests that loneliness is associated with an increased risk of certain mental health problems, including depression, anxiety and low self-esteem, as well as sleep and stress issues.

For individuals that are living with a mental health condition, this may feel isolating at times, especially if they don't have any professional support or peer support from those experiencing similar struggles.

Mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety can lead to people withdrawing socially, which in turn can lead to isolation and feelings of loneliness, acting as a vicious cycle.

A person's self-esteem can also influence how lonely they might feel throughout their life. People who lack confidence or struggle with social anxiety may believe that others won't like them or won't enjoy spending time with them, which can also make loneliness difficult to avoid.

What exactly is loneliness?

Loneliness is not always the same as being alone and what might cause someone to feel lonely will vary from person to person. For example, you may choose to live alone and be perfectly happy, while others may find this a lonely experience. Or you may be in a relationship or part of a family, see friends often and still feel lonely – especially if you don't feel understood or cared for by the people around you.

Loneliness isn't always easy to detect, especially when interacting online or scrolling through social media, where we can't always see the full picture.



Tips to help manage loneliness

Try peer support

If you don't feel ready to open-up in person, talking to others online can be a great first step. There are amazing online communities which offer a safe space to share with others (see support available for links).

Remember that what you see online isn't always reality

People share what they want others to see on social media. If this is negatively affecting you, try to reduce the amount of time you spend scrolling each day and mute or unfollow accounts that don't make you feel good.

Learn something new

Developing hobbies you enjoy and learning new skills can help to increase self-esteem and can help you to find like-minded people. What hobby have you always wanted to try?

Take care of yourself

Often when we feel lonely, we may feel down and begin to neglect our own needs. Taking time to look after yourself by brushing your teeth, eating regularly and getting enough sleep can have a huge impact on our mindset and how we feel about ourselves.

Support available

- Join an online community for peer support such as **Clic** or **Side by Side**
- Try a **befriender** service to make new connections
- **Employee Assistance Programme** – Qualified consultants provide practical, impartial support on all matters
- Head to **Mind** for more tips on loneliness and to hear others' stories

MAKING THE RIGHT TECH CHOICES TO HELP REDUCE STRESS

STRESS AWARENESS MONTH: APRIL

WORLD HEALTH DAY: 7TH APRIL 2024

MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS WEEK: 12TH-18TH MAY 2024

Keith Bowcott, Head of Retail Excellence,
Compass One

We all work to an increasing level with email, Word, Excel etc. and we accumulate actions from a number of sources.



While we all know we have to use these applications for our day-to-day work, it's really important that we avoid this becoming

a stress driver. Here are some simple approaches I use to combat those times when I'm feeling a little overwhelmed with the incoming emails, Teams messages and phone calls:

- Turn off the blue light on your monitor, blue light is the one that strains your eyes and creates the brightness. Also consider going into the dark mode on Outlook, it really helps.
- When working for periods on your PC or laptop, take a few moments to look away, maybe out of the window, and focus on something distant like trees or anything further away. This helps your eyes to refocus and gives you a mindful moment on something else.
- Working offline can be a great way to concentrate on a specific piece of work without being distracted by incoming emails or Teams messages, as can turning your phone onto silent. Not many things are so urgent that they have to be done right now!
- Consider your method of communication. Is a Teams channel a better way to communicate rather than emails flying all over the place? Conversations in Teams can be easier to follow than emails when many users are messaging on the same subject.
- When dealing with emails, deal with the quick wins there and then. If you've read it and no action is needed, file it or delete it if appropriate and then it's gone.
- Finally, there are some great online videos to help you use tech to better advantage. If you feel organised, you will be organised and more relaxed. Learning to use the applications really helps – try the Collaboration Coach for starters!



AND BREATHE...

STRESS AWARENESS MONTH: APRIL

INTERNATIONAL YOGA DAY: 21ST JUNE 2024

WORLD MEDIATION DAY: 21ST MAY 2024

Yoga incorporates physical postures, breathing exercises and meditation techniques that help activate the body's relaxation response, reducing levels of stress hormones such as cortisol which may help to reduce the physiological impact stress can have on your body.

Many yoga poses are designed to release tension and promote relaxation in the body, particularly in areas where stress tends to accumulate, such as the neck, shoulders and back. This can also help to decrease heart rate and blood pressure.

Breathing techniques used in yoga, such as deep belly breathing (diaphragmatic breathing) and alternate nostril breathing (nadi shodhana), emphasise consciousness, which can calm the nervous system and reduce stress levels.

Whilst regular yoga practice has been associated with various physical health benefits such as improved flexibility, strength, balance and cardiovascular health, it also encourages emotional regulation by providing a safe space to explore and process emotions and become more attuned to your thoughts. Through mindfulness, breath and present moment awareness, yoga may help to develop greater resilience to stressors and provide more adaptive coping strategies over time. Yoga can also help you learn how to stay

in the present moment. This may help with navigating life's challenges and managing stress more effectively. Attending classes can also provide a sense of community and support in times of stress.

There are many forms of yoga, so it may take a while to find the practice that suits you. There are also many ways to access yoga including online sessions, apps or physical classes.

If you're feeling stressed, why not give yoga a go?

Yoga and sleep

Yoga has been shown to improve sleep quality and reduce insomnia symptoms. Better sleep contributes to overall stress reduction and enhances mood, energy levels and cognitive function.

Yoga and stress

Over 55% of people who practice yoga find that it improves sleep and 85% reported that it reduces stress.¹

THE COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SMOKING AND STRESS

WORLD NO TOBACCO DAY: 31ST MAY 2024

STRESS AWARENESS MONTH: APRIL

Many people use smoking to cope with stress, believing that cigarettes can help them to relax or alleviate tension.

Nicotine, the addictive substance in cigarettes, can provide a temporary sense of relaxation or relief from stress by triggering the release of dopamine in the brain. This is why some individuals feel a sense of calm when they smoke.

However, while smoking may provide temporary relief, it often exacerbates stress overall and can lead to a range of negative health implications and increase stress levels in the long term. The addictive nature of nicotine can lead to dependency. Over time, individuals may feel that they need cigarettes to cope with stress, leading to a cycle of smoking behavior. Nicotine withdrawal symptoms such as irritability and anxiety can occur between cigarettes, contributing to overall stress levels and making it even more difficult to kick the habit.

Approximately 8 million people die prematurely each year from tobacco use.¹

We are all aware that smoking is associated with numerous health risks, including lung cancer, heart disease and respiratory problems. Smoking is also an expensive habit, especially for individuals on a tight budget. If you have become addicted to smoking and are finding it hard to kick the habit, these health and financial concerns may create additional stress and anxiety, further exacerbating the cycle of smoking and stress.

Quitting smoking can be challenging, especially for individuals who use cigarettes as a coping mechanism for stress. However, stopping can lead to significant improvements in both physical and mental health, ultimately reducing overall stress levels.

So, while smoking may provide temporary relief from stress, it ultimately contributes to increased stress levels and negative health outcomes. Quitting smoking and adopting healthier coping strategies are essential steps towards reducing stress and improving wellbeing. Approaches such as exercise, meditation or talking to a therapist can be more effective at reducing stress in the long term and promote overall wellbeing without the negative health consequences of smoking.



SETTING THE WORLD ALIGHT

WORLD NO TOBACCO DAY: 31ST MAY 2024

NATIONAL CLEAN AIR DAY: 20TH JUNE 2024

As well as being harmful to our health and the health of those around us, tobacco products have a damaging impact on the planet.

Tobacco use is a leading cause of preventable death and disease worldwide, contributing to millions of premature deaths each year, and the cultivation, manufacturing and consumption of tobacco have significant environmental impacts throughout its lifecycle.

Tobacco cultivation often leads to deforestation as forests are cleared to make way for tobacco farms. This can result in a loss of biodiversity, disruption of ecosystems and loss of habitat for wildlife.

Tobacco crops are heavily reliant on pesticides to control pests and diseases. The use of these chemicals can contaminate soil, water and air, leading to pollution and adverse effects on ecosystems, food chains and human health.



Intensive tobacco farming practices, such as monoculture and excessive use of agrochemicals, can degrade soil quality, deplete nutrients and reduce soil fertility over time. This can result in erosion, desertification and land degradation.

Tobacco production, processing and transportation also contribute to greenhouse gas emissions, including carbon dioxide (CO₂) from fossil fuel use and methane (CH₄) from soil and fertiliser management.

In addition, tobacco smoke contains thousands of harmful chemicals, including carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and particulate matter. These emissions also contribute to climate change and global warming.

Every year the tobacco industry costs the world 22 billion tonnes of water and 84 million tonnes of CO₂.²

The carbon footprint from producing, processing and transporting tobacco is equivalent to one-fifth of the CO₂ produced by the commercial airline industry each year.²

5% of total deforestation is from tobacco farming, with approximately 200,000 hectares of land being used for tobacco agriculture and curing each year.¹

Finally, let's not forget the significant amount of waste the manufacturing and packaging of tobacco products generate, including paper, plastic and other non-biodegradable materials. Cigarette butts, which are the most commonly littered item globally, contain toxic chemicals and can pollute the natural environment, particularly waterways and beaches. Efforts to mitigate the environmental impacts of tobacco include promoting sustainable farming practices, reducing pesticide use, implementing tobacco control policies and raising awareness about the environmental consequences of tobacco production and consumption.

By addressing these issues, we can work towards a healthier and more sustainable future for both people and the planet.

1. [bath.ac.uk/tcrg/2023/05/31/five-facts-about-tobacco-farming](https://www.bath.ac.uk/tcrg/2023/05/31/five-facts-about-tobacco-farming)

2. www.who.int/news/item/31-05-2022-who-raises-alarm-on-tobacco-industry-environmental-impact

TURN THAT FROWN UPSIDE DOWN!

NATIONAL SMILE MONTH: 13TH MAY-13TH JUNE 2024

WORLD LAUGHTER DAY: 5TH MAY 2024

It may seem strange, but there are physiological and psychological advantages of smiling. Yes, you read right - there are scientific benefits of a single smile!

When we smile, we release endorphins. These are known as neurotransmitters and give us a happy and pleasurable feeling. Even a forced smile will make you feel a little happier!

Smiling can also improve stress by reducing levels of the stress hormone cortisol, which in turn can support cardiovascular health and overall immune function.

Smiling is contagious and fosters positive social interactions. It can improve your likeability, trustworthiness and approachability, which can strengthen your relationships with other people. Studies have shown that people who smile more frequently tend to live longer lives.

And let's not forget the benefits to our physical appearance! Smiling engages our facial muscles helping to tone them and, over time, potentially reduces the signs of ageing.

Overall, incorporating more smiles into your daily life can have benefits for both your physical and mental wellbeing, as well as for your relationships with others. It's a simple yet powerful tool that can positively impact your life in a variety of ways!

WHAT MAKES YOU SMILE?

NATIONAL SMILE MONTH: 13TH MAY-13TH JUNE 2024

The impact of a smile can be profound and far-reaching, influencing both the individual who smiles and those who receive it. A smile has the ability to uplift one's mood almost instantly.

When you smile, your brain releases endorphins, neurotransmitters that are responsible for feelings of happiness and pleasure. Smiling is also a universal signal of friendliness, warmth, approachability and empathy - those who smile are perceived more positively by others.

A smile is contagious and has the power to influence the mood and behaviour of those around you. By sharing a genuine smile, you can brighten someone else's day, inspire positivity and create a ripple effect of kindness and compassion. Why not send a smile someone's way today?



Jenni Lawson
Operations Manager - ESS

Creating a safe space for girls aged 10-14

years to be themselves at Guides

"I have volunteered with Girl Guides in Stonehaven for 16 years. We allow the girls to try new things, learn new skills and make memories. Giving the girls new experiences like going camping and supporting the local community is key. This makes me smile each week and we have lots of smiles and laughter on a Tuesday night."



Spencer Grant
Mess Hand - ESS

"The thing that makes me smile at work is seeing that everyone is

happy, especially when I'm serving on the hotplate and talking to the cadets about their activities and hear that they're enjoying their time on camp. It's always nice to see them happy and chatting away to you as you serve them, which in turn makes me happy and puts a big smile on my face as I go about my day."

SWEET TOOTH, SOUR OUTCOME!

NATIONAL SMILE MONTH: 13TH MAY-13TH JUNE 2024

DIABETES AWARENESS WEEK: 9TH-15TH JUNE 2024

BNF HEALTHY EATING WEEK: 10TH-14TH JUNE 2024

Excessive sugar consumption can significantly impact dental health.

When you consume sugary foods and beverages, bacteria in your mouth feed on the sugars, producing acids as a byproduct. Over time, these acids can erode the enamel, the protective outer layer of your teeth, leading to tooth decay and cavities. High sugar intake will also make your teeth more susceptible to damage due to the acidic environment sugar creates in the mouth.

To minimise the negative effects of sugar on teeth, it's essential to practice good oral hygiene habits such as brushing your teeth at least twice a day, flossing daily and using fluoride toothpaste. Limiting sugary foods and drinks, especially sticky sweets and fizzy drinks, can help reduce the risk of dental problems. Choosing water or unsweetened beverages instead of sugary alternatives can also support better dental health.

Regular dental check-ups and cleanings are crucial for detecting and preventing tooth decay early. Dentists can provide personalised advice on maintaining optimal oral hygiene and may recommend fluoride treatments or dental sealants to protect the teeth from decay.

As well as helping to improve our teeth, reducing sugar intake can be beneficial in helping us to maintain a healthy weight. Why not try some of the tips below to help you reduce your sugar intake?

Limit sugary drinks:

Cut back on sugary drinks such as fizzy drinks, fruit juices, energy drinks and sweetened teas or coffees. Replace them with water, sparkling water, herbal teas or unsweetened drinks.

Read food labels:

Check the labels on packaged foods and beverages to identify hidden sugars. Look for ingredients like sucrose, high fructose corn syrup, glucose, fructose and other syrups or sweeteners. Opt for products with a lower sugar content or choose alternatives with no added sugars.

Plan your meals:

Plan your meals and snacks ahead of time to make healthier choices and avoid impulsive purchases of sugary foods. Stock up on nutritious snacks like nuts, seeds, yogurt or cut-up vegetables to satisfy cravings.

Cook from scratch:

Prepare meals and snacks at home using fresh ingredients. Cooking allows you to control the amount of sugar added to your dishes and helps you avoid hidden sugars present in restaurant meals or takeout.

Choose whole foods:

Focus on whole, unprocessed foods such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins and healthy fats. These foods are generally lower in added sugars compared to processed or packaged foods.

Opt for natural sweetness:

Use natural sweeteners like fresh fruits, dried fruits or pureed fruits to sweeten foods and beverages instead of refined sugars. These options provide sweetness along with additional nutrients and fibre.

Free Sugars

Includes both naturally occurring sugars and sugars added to foods and beverages during processing or preparation. Free sugars include monosaccharides such as glucose and fructose, and disaccharides such as sucrose and lactose. Free sugars can

be found naturally in fruits, vegetables and dairy products, but they can also be added to foods and drinks as sweeteners. So, while refined sugars are a subset of free sugars (as they are added during processing), not all free sugars are necessarily refined.

A SWEET, HEALTHIER TREAT

DIABETES AWARENESS WEEK: 9TH-15TH JUNE 2024

BNF HEALTHY EATING WEEK: 10TH-17TH JUNE 2024

WORLD BAKING DAY: 17TH MAY 2024

Diabetes is a condition where you have higher levels of glucose in your blood.

Type 1 is an autoimmune disease which requires insulin injections and consistent medical monitoring. It cannot be prevented or reversed by dietary interventions.

Type 2 is where the pancreas fails to supply enough insulin and the onset is gradual and less severe. Type 2 diabetes can be heavily influenced by your diet. Excessive consumption of free sugars can increase your likelihood of being overweight and therefore increase your risk.

Both types of diabetes require management of diet, especially sugar intake. When baking, you can experiment and reduce sugar in most recipes; alternatively, you can replace sugar with fruits and vegetables.

Beetroot is a great option and the following beetroot brownie recipe has half the sugar of the traditional alternative as shown in the nutrition information below. It uses OGGs® Aquafaba and is therefore suitable for vegans.

Practice mindful eating:

Pay attention to your hunger and fullness cues and eat slowly to fully enjoy and appreciate the flavours of your food. This can help prevent overeating and reduce the desire for sugary snacks.

Be mindful of portion sizes:

Pay attention to portion sizes when consuming sweet treats or desserts. Enjoy them in moderation and consider sharing with others to avoid overindulging.

Find healthier alternatives:

Experiment with healthier alternatives to satisfy your sweet tooth, such as dark chocolate, sugar-free desserts or homemade treats with reduced sugar or additional fruit to compensate.

By incorporating these strategies into your daily routine, you can gradually reduce your sugar intake and improve your overall health and wellbeing.

Refined Sugars

Sugars that have been processed to remove impurities resulting in a product that is mostly pure sugar. Common refined sugars include white table sugar which is often added to processed foods and beverages to add sweetness.



BEETROOT BROWNIES

Ingredients:

- 260g caster sugar
- 500g beetroot
- 1 tsp vanilla essence
- 80g cocoa powder
- 60ml OGGs® Aquafaba
- ½ tsp bicarbonate of soda
- 150ml rapeseed oil
- 3 tsp white wine vinegar
- 300g self raising flour

Equipment:

- Bowl x2
- Weighing scales
- Spoon
- Greaseproof paper
- Baking tray

Method:

- 1 Preheat the oven to 170°C.
- 2 Grate the beetroot and press down in a sieve to remove as much juice as possible.
- 3 In a bowl, combine the aquafaba, vanilla and vinegar and whisk, then set aside.

- 4 In a second bowl, combine the flour, cocoa powder and bicarbonate of soda.
- 5 Add the oil and sugar to the liquid.
- 6 Slowly pour all the liquid into the flour and mix while stirring.
- 7 Add the beetroot (don't worry if the mix looks dry, the beetroot releases a lot of moisture while baking).
- 8 Bake for 30-40 mins or until a knife comes out clean.

Vegan Brownie (per average serving, 103g)

Energy	Fat	Saturated	Sugars	Salt
1590kJ 385kcal	14g	5.8g	39g	0.03g
19%	20%	29%	43%	1%

of an adult's Reference Intake (8400kJ/2000kcal)

Typical values per 100g: Energy 1544kJ/369kcal

Adults need around 2000 kcal a day

Vegan Beetroot Brownie (per average serving, 127g)

Energy	Fat	Saturated	Sugars	Salt
1602kJ 383kcal	16g	1.6g	30g	0.53g
19%	23%	8%	34%	9%

of an adult's Reference Intake (8400kJ/2000kcal)

Typical values per 100g: Energy 1264kJ/302kcal

Adults need around 2000 kcal a day

MILK MATTERS

WORLD MILK DAY: 1ST JUNE 2024

Milk is a nutrient-rich drink that contains a wide range of essential nutrients needed for growth and development.

These include calcium for bone and muscle function, protein for growth and repair and vitamin D which helps the absorption of calcium to support bone health. Milk also provides an array of micronutrients such as vitamin B12, potassium, niacin and iodine which are needed to maintain cognitive function, maintain a healthy immune system and to help maintain healthy blood pressure. This makes milk a nutritionally dense and cost effective option.

Producing dairy milk does however involve significant environmental resources, including water, land and feed for livestock.

Additionally, dairy farming contributes to greenhouse gas emissions, primarily through methane produced by cows and carbon emissions associated with feed production, transportation and processing. 27% of global methane emissions are due to animal agriculture and cows are the biggest contributor.

So, can we replace dairy milk with plant-based varieties and achieve the same health benefits with a reduced environmental impact?

The nutritional content of plant-based milk varies depending on the type and any fortification during processing. For example:

- Soya milk is often fortified with calcium and vitamin D.
- Almond milk is naturally low in calories but may be lower in protein unless fortified.
- Oat milk contains some fibre and may be fortified with nutrients like calcium and vitamin D.
- Coconut milk is higher in saturated fat but may provide beneficial medium-chain triglycerides.
- Rice milk is typically lower in protein and other nutrients unless fortified.

Plant-based milk alternatives generally have a lower environmental footprint compared to dairy milk. They often require less water and land to produce and generate fewer greenhouse gas emissions.

However, the environmental impact can vary depending on factors such as farming practices, processing methods and transportation and the factors to be considered are often complex – so while soya production is linked to deforestation, only 7% of soya is used for products like soya milk with 77% being used for animal feed.

Oat milk is a good option for both low carbon emissions and water, using 70% less carbon than dairy for each litre of milk and more than 90% less water.¹

The table below shows the nutrition/100ml for different milks.

Milk	Kcals	Fat	Saturates	Sugars	Salt	Protein	Calcium	Iodine	Vitamin B12
Whole	66kcal	3.7g	2.4g	4.7g	0.11g	3.5g	124mg	32µg	N/A
Semi-Skimmed	50kcal	1.8g	1.1g	4.8g	0.11g	3.6g	125mg	31µg	N/A
Skimmed	35kcal	0.1g	0.1g	5g	0.12g	3.6g	130mg	31 µg	N/A
Rice*	50kcal	1g	0.1g	7.1g	0.10g	0.1g	120mg	N/A	0.38µg
Soya (unsweetened)	33kcal	1.5g	0.2g	0.4g	0.10g	3.5g	120mg	22.4µg	0.38µg
Soya (sweetened)	42kcal	1.6g	0.3g	2.7g	0.2g	2.5g	120mg	22µg	0.38µg
Oat*	41kcal	1.4g	0.2g	2.5g	0.09g	0.4g	120mg	N/A	0.38µg
Almond* (sweetened)	24kcal	1.1g	0.1g	2.3g	0.15g	0.5g	120mg	22.5µg	0.38µg
Lactose Free (semi-skimmed)	41kcal	1.7g	1g	3.3g	0.09g	3.2g	108mg	N/A	0.40µg

Nutrition is taken from an online supermarket website and all products are own-brand apart from those with * which are branded.

HEALTHIER BODY

HEALTHIER FOOD

HEALTHIER WORLD

While plant-based milks can be better for the environment, are they nutritionally equivalent?

Studies are showing that the shift towards more plant-based diets is resulting in deficiencies that were almost eliminated in the UK. This is something that needs to be considered when deciding which milk you want to purchase. Currently, there is no law which requires plant-based milks to be fortified. A lot of brands do add in vitamins and minerals which are often common deficiencies in plant-based diets but these vary between products and manufacturers.

Some products have added sugar, so it is important to buy the unsweetened variant and check the ingredients list on back of pack for fortification. It is worth noting that, by law, organic products do not allow the use of fortificants. This means that organic plant-based milks won't have added calcium, iodine and vitamin B12 which can increase the risk for deficiencies.

The table below shows the environmental impact of one glass (200ml) of different milks:

Milk	Emissions (kg)	Land use (m2)	Water (L)
Dairy	0.63	1.79	125.6
Rice	0.4	0.07	54
Soy	0.2	0.13	5.6
Oat	0.18	0.15	9.6
Almond	0.14	0.1	74.3

Overall, milk is nutrient-dense and can contribute to a healthy diet when consumed in moderation and as part of a balanced diet. While dairy-free milk alternatives can provide essential nutrients, they may not always match the nutritional profile of dairy milk.

For individuals with specific dietary requirements or preferences, it's essential to choose a dairy-free milk that meets their nutritional

needs. Both dairy milk and dairy-free milk alternatives have their advantages and considerations in terms of environmental impact and nutritional content.

Choosing between them will depend on individual factors such as dietary preferences, nutritional needs and environmental concerns.



MOVING MORE FOR OUR MENTAL HEALTH

NATIONAL WALK TO WORK DAY: 5TH APRIL 2024

WORLD HEALTH DAY: 7TH APRIL 2024

ON YOUR FEET BRITAIN: 25TH APRIL 2024

NATIONAL WALKING MONTH: MAY

MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS WEEK: 12TH-18TH MAY 2024

Why should we get moving?

We are advised to exercise regularly, carrying out at least 150 minutes per week. Studies have shown inactivity is linked to being overweight and obese as well as type 2 diabetes, some types of cancer and early death. Many adults in the UK are spending around nine hours a day sitting down, including sitting at a computer, reading and watching TV. Research has shown that regular movement through the day can lead to better physical and mental health, increased motivation and improved concentration.

Walking is simple, free and one of the easiest ways to get active! Walking briskly can help to increase your stamina, burn excess calories and make your heart healthier. Even a brisk 10-minute walk has benefits.



Walking for 30 mins will burn 100-200 calories.

Incorporating regular walks into your routine can have numerous positive effects on mental health, including stress reduction, mood enhancement, cognitive improvement and increased overall wellbeing.

Walking, particularly in natural environments such as parks or forests, can help reduce levels of cortisol, the stress hormone, and stimulate the release of endorphins which are neurotransmitters in the brain that promote feelings of happiness. The rhythmic movement and exposure to nature can promote relaxation and calmness, leading to decreased feelings of stress and anxiety and elevation of mood.

Walking can also provide an opportunity for solitary reflection and introspection. It allows individuals to unplug from technology, disconnect from distractions and reconnect with themselves, fostering self-awareness and personal growth. It can help clear the mind, boost mental clarity and enhance overall cognitive performance.

Regular physical activity, including walking, can improve sleep quality and duration. Walking during the day helps to regulate circadian rhythms and reduce insomnia symptoms, leading to better overall sleep patterns and increased energy levels during waking hours.

Whether it's a brisk walk around your neighbourhood or a leisurely stroll in the park, taking time to walk can be a valuable tool for nurturing physical and mental health. Listening to music or a podcast can help to pass the time when you're walking and help you get into a rhythm.

It can be hard to get your steps in each day, especially if you work from home, so why not try 'commuting to work'? Go on a walk each morning before sitting at your desk to mimic travelling to the office. This can help to improve your mood, help you feel energised and get your brain ready for the day.

Some other ideas for increasing your steps include:

- Taking the stairs rather than the lift.
- Parking at the far end of the car park.
- Getting off the bus one stop early.
- Walking part of your journey.
- Walking to the shops.
- Meeting a friend to go for a walk, rather than a drink.
- Walking the children to school.

There is increased evidence that sitting down too much can be a risk to your health. Research has shown that when sitting for long periods, your metabolism starts to slow which affects your body's ability to regulate blood sugar, blood pressure and break down body fat¹.

Here are some ways to get on your feet during the day:

- Stand during phone calls.
- Stand and take a break from your computer every 30 minutes.
- Arrange standing or walking meetings.
- Eat lunch away from your desk.
- Set a reminder to stand up every 30 minutes.
- Place your laptop on a box or similar so you can work whilst standing.



1: Why we should sit less - NHS (www.nhs.uk)

Walking for health - NHS (www.nhs.uk)
On Your Feet Britain (yo-yodesk.co.uk)

CAN YOU GO THE DISTANCE?

LONDON MARATHON: 21ST APRIL 2024

The spring marathon season is starting in the UK, with London and Edinburgh both on the horizon.

A marathon is 26.2 miles / 42 kilometres long. The men's world record is held by Kelvin Kiptum at 2:00:35 and the women's world record is 2:11:53, set by Tigst Assefa.

So, what's the best way to fuel up for this epic challenge?

Nutrition and hydration play a very important part in training, as well as on race day, so it's important to practice and get it right. During training, your appetite will increase so make sure you are eating enough to ensure your performance isn't negatively impacted. Read on to find out why and how to achieve this.

Carbohydrate is your main energy source for any exercise as it promotes strength and endurance, helps to delay muscle fatigue and speeds up recovery which can reduce your chance of injury.

For exercise over an hour, it is recommended you ingest 30-60g carbohydrate per hour. For anything over three hours, you should be aiming for 90g carbohydrate per hour.

A lot of people chose sweets or a sports drink, while others carry carbohydrate gels. Research has shown 60g glucose is the maximum that can be digested per hour. Therefore, to achieve 90g of carbohydrate per hour, athletes generally ingest glucose and fructose in a 2:1 ratio. Carbohydrate gels often have a mix of glucose and fructose but it's worth checking the ingredients label. Popular brands include SIS, High 5 and Maurten.

What does 30g of carbohydrate look like?

- 2 average sized bananas
- 2 very large medjool dates
- 40g raisins
- 6 jelly babies
- 500ml isotonic sports drink
- Energy gels have between 20 and 25g

After training, it's important you have a meal rich in carbohydrates as this will help replenish your glycogen stores which will have depleted during training.

Protein is important to help with muscle growth and repair. Research has shown you should be aiming for 1.2-1.8g protein per kg body weight, which equates to 84g-126g protein for a 70kg adult across a day. Choose lean sources such as skinless chicken, low fat yoghurt and tofu.

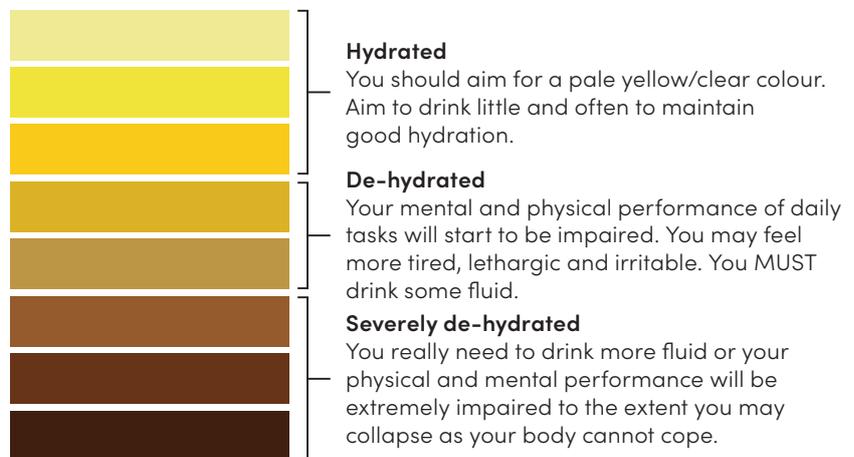
Protein is more effectively absorbed from food than supplements so try a food first approach to reach your intake requirements before reaching for protein powders.

Fluids are very important to consider as part of your training regime. When the body doesn't get enough fluids, the blood thickens meaning the heart works less efficiently, your heart rate increases and it's harder to pump blood around your body. As well as lack of fluids, sweating can cause dehydration which can make you feel tired, and everything seem harder. When you sweat, you excrete electrolytes such as sodium and potassium. Electrolytes play a crucial role in regulating your nerve and muscle function, balancing pH and regulating body temperature. If your body is low in electrolytes, it can cause fatigue, headaches and dehydration. Good food sources that provide electrolytes include potatoes, leafy greens such as kale and spinach or coconut milk.

How can you measure your hydration status?

Ideally, you want your urine to be the colour of pale straw (1-3 on the chart), 4-5 indicate dehydration and 6-8 are extreme dehydration.

Monitoring the colour of your urine is a great way to ensure you are fully hydrated. Using the guide below will help you keep track.



You can also measure your sweat rate to determine how much fluid you need to consume during and after the race. Weigh yourself before and after a run and calculate the difference. To rehydrate you then consume 1.2-1.5L fluid per kg of bodyweight lost.

Sports drinks are also effective at replacing lost electrolytes, with three different types – hypotonic, hypertonic and isotonic – each containing various levels of fluid, electrolytes and carbohydrates:

- Hypotonic drinks are very low in carbohydrate and are designed to quickly replace fluids lost during exercise. For example, sports waters such as Lucozade Sport Fit Water.
- Hypertonic drinks are designed to supplement the body's carbohydrate intake and are best consumed after exercise to replace glycogen levels. Currently, there are

very few of these on the market and they are more likely to be in the form of gels such as Science In Sport gels.

- Isotonic drinks are designed to quickly replace lost fluids as well as carbohydrates. Lucozade Sport, Powerade and Gatorade are popular brands.

General advice is that you don't need to consume additional electrolytes during a marathon, however, if you are a heavy sweater you may want to consider a sports drink or adding an electrolyte tablet to your water bottle.

Looking at your urine is an easy way to assess how hydrated you are.

So, what should you eat and drink in the lead up to race day?

In the run up to the event:

A food first approach should always be taken. You might have heard of the phrase 'carb loading', which is where you eat lots of carbohydrates in the days leading up to the marathon to ensure your muscle glycogen stores are topped up.

Carbohydrates are converted to glucose and excess is stored as glycogen in the liver and muscles, providing instantly available energy which will fuel you on race day. In the carbohydrate loading phase, it's advised you consume 8-10g/kg bodyweight which is between 560g and 700g a day for a 70kg individual.

Below are some examples of foods and their carbohydrate content to help you put this into practice:

- 75g raw pasta (170g cooked) = 60g
- 75g raw long grain rice (205g cooked) = 59.5g
- 1x 60g wholemeal tortilla = 29.5g
- 100g potato = 23g
- 2 slices malt loaf = 30g
- 150ml orange juice = 15g

Where possible food should be consumed to reach your requirements; however, gels are a popular, convenient way to meet your carbohydrate needs during the run if you find it hard to eat. Gels can cause gastrointestinal discomfort in some people and people react differently to different brands and types, so make sure you practice taking them during training.

It is also good to practice re-hydration techniques prior to the event. We are approximately 2% dehydrated before we feel thirsty. Consuming a lot of fluid all in one go may create a stitch for some while others may be fine, therefore it is important to trial the best way to take fluid on board prior to the race. This could be gradual sips or larger amounts at one time.

On race day:

Your last meal should be made up of carbohydrates like white bread or pasta and some protein consumed 3-4 hours before the race to allow your body time to digest. You should also avoid foods high in fibre and only consume a small amount of fat as too much can cause gastrointestinal issues. Drinking 400-600ml fluids about two hours before the race start allows time for your body to excrete it and you to start the race in a hydrated state. Don't try anything new on race day that you haven't practiced with in training, including a different pre-race breakfast or different brands of energy gels.

During the race:

Heat, humidity and sweat rate will affect how much water you need to consume during the race but between 400-800ml/ hour is a good place to start. Be mindful of not consuming too much water as this can lead to hyponatraemia (where your blood sodium decreases) and can lead to black outs, dizziness and nausea for which you'll need to seek medical attention. Make sure you keep your



carbohydrate levels topped up, aiming for about 60g of carbohydrate per hour. Don't wait until you are tired before consuming – start after 30-45 minutes and then every 30 minutes after that.

After:

Carbohydrates are the most important nutrient to consume post marathon. Ideally, you want to try and consume a high carbohydrate snack containing 1.2g carbohydrate/ kg body weight, within 15-25 minutes of completing the event. For example, a 70kg individual would need 84g carbohydrate and this can be in the form of a sugary carbohydrate such as a piece of fruit, dried fruit or malt loaf. Research also suggests that consuming 15-20g protein along with a high carbohydrate snack soon after you have completed the event helps to maximise muscle glycogen recovery. If this is not possible, any time within two hours of finishing is acceptable as glycogen levels replenish at 150% of the normal rate during this time¹.

Protein's main role in this instance is to facilitate the absorption of the carbohydrate into the muscles for recovery. Chocolate milk is a good option as milk is 90% water and it has carbohydrate in the form of milk sugars and protein. A fruit smoothie, a fruit yoghurt or a flapjack containing dried fruit and nuts are also suitable options.

Make sure you rehydrate too – for every kg of weight lost, aim to consume about 1.2-1.5L of water over an hour.



1 The Science of Nutrition by Rhiannon Lambert

Thinking of training for your first marathon?

There are lots of blogs and advice available online so it can be easy to get overwhelmed, but Runner's World have a range of training plans and advice if you fancy the

challenge. If you are not usually active, remember to consult with your doctor before beginning any vigorous activity for the first time and take things one step at a time!

GUT FEELINGS



BOWEL CANCER AWARENESS MONTH: APRIL

The importance of digestive health and the benefits of fibre.

When we think of digestive health, we may think of being constipated or having an upset stomach, however there is so much more to it than just getting rid of waste. Our digestive health really can have an impact on our overall health. Research has found that greater than 70% of our immune system is found in our digestive tract and there is increasing evidence that bad food habits can impact our gut and make us more susceptible to diseases, infections, illness and even our mental health.

Digestion begins as soon as we put food into our mouth. Chewing is the first step, with saliva softening the food helping it to move down the oesophagus and into the stomach where stomach acid helps to further



break it down. After that, it moves into the small intestine and then the large intestine where digestive enzymes are secreted from the pancreas and liver and absorption of the nutrients takes place. The large intestine is also where the waste food bulks together ready for excretion.

Bowel (colorectal) cancer is the fourth most common cancer in the UK with 4300¹ people being diagnosed each year. Recently, there has been increased awareness due to the efforts of Dame Deborah James (Bowelbabe) who fought the disease while increasing awareness and raising funds for research.

Whilst it predominately affects those over 50 (94% of cases)¹, you can get bowel cancer at any age. Therefore, it is important to ensure you do everything within your power to reduce your risk. As with any diagnosis, the sooner it is caught the better the chance of successful treatment, therefore it is best to get the following symptoms checked by your GP.

- Bleeding from your bottom and/or blood in your poo
- A persistent and unexplained change in bowel habit
- Unexplained weight loss
- Extreme tiredness for no obvious reason
- A pain or lump in your tummy

Taken from bowelcancerUK.org

However, please note that the presence of these symptoms does not necessarily mean you have bowel cancer.

The Importance of Fibre

Fibre is a key component to good digestive health. It supports the growth of friendly bacteria needed to help

maintain a healthy gut, reduces the absorption of cholesterol and helps to control blood sugar levels by slowing down the absorption of glucose into the bloodstream, hence the term 'feeling fuller for longer'. It also adds bulk to stools which helps keep you regular. Research has shown that a diet high in fibre may help to reduce our risk of heart disease and stroke, type 2 diabetes and bowel cancer.

In simple terms, fibre is the indigestible form of carbohydrate. It is broken down during digestion into 'simple sugars' known as glucose, however the fibrous part of carbohydrate can't be broken down to produce glucose so instead is excreted.

Fibre is only found in plant-based foods such as vegetables, fruit, legumes, nuts, seeds and grains. One of the best ways to increase fibre is by looking out for wholegrain options – such as wholemeal bread, pasta and wholegrain rice. During the grain milling process, the high fibre outer shell of the grain, known as the 'husk', is not removed which gives the flour its brown colour. This is the fundamental difference between white rice, bread and pasta and the wholegrain varieties. These wholegrains take longer for the body to break down which explains why absorption is slower. It is also what adds the bulk which helps with the feeling of fullness, aids digestion and helps prevent constipation.

The government recommend that we should be consuming 30g of fibre per day, however currently we only consume 19g on average.

So let's delve a little deeper on the different types of fibre and how can we increase fibre in our diet:

There are three types of fibre which all have different roles to play in the bowel and promoting or maintaining good digestive health. These are:



SOLUBLE

Dissolves in water and turns into a gel like substance during digestion which helps soften the stool, making it easy to pass through the bowel. Soluble fibre also helps to give the feeling of fullness and slow down transit time though the gut enabling digestion of nutrients.

As a result, including foods which contain soluble fibre in your diet can help manage weight and can help reduce spikes in blood sugar levels.

Soluble fibre has also been shown to help reduce blood cholesterol levels as it binds to cholesterol, reducing absorption into the blood.

Sources include: oats, apples, citrus fruits, carrots, brussels sprouts, sweet potato, turnip, aubergine, peas, green beans, barley.

As mentioned above, a diet containing a good source of fibre can support weight loss or maintaining a healthy weight by helping keep you fuller for longer. This in turn helps reduce the risk of obesity and the health implications that come with it such as increased risk of type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease, stroke and some cancers. Therefore, it is important to have a good mix of all three.

HOW CAN I INCREASE FIBRE?

- Opt for a high fibre breakfast such as porridge or wholewheat cereal (Shredded Wheat, Weetabix).
- Swap white pasta, rice and grains to whole grains.
- Include beans, lentils and peas into soups, stews and sauces where possible.
- Opt for potatoes/chips with their skins on.
- Sprinkle dried fruit, nuts and seeds on top of breakfast cereals.
- Aim for five fruit and vegetables per day – dried and canned (in natural juice of course) are good choices.
- Keep the skins on fruit and vegetables where practically possible.
- Snack on unsalted and unsweetened nuts (a 30g portion contains 3.8g fibre).



INSOLUBLE

Does not dissolve in water but attracts water to the stool helping it to stay soft and move easily through the small intestine and into the large intestine. It adds bulk to the stool and helps speed up the removal of waste.

Sources include: wholewheat flour, wheat bran, brown rice, quinoa, peanuts, almonds, walnuts, pumpkin, chia and sesame seeds, beans and vegetables, such as cauliflower, green beans, sweetcorn and potato skin.

TOP TIP

If you need to increase your fibre intake, do it gradually to avoid feeling bloated and ensure you drink sufficient fluids.

DID YOU KNOW...?

The small bowel is actually larger than the large bowel. The reason it is called the small bowel is because it is narrower than the large bowel!

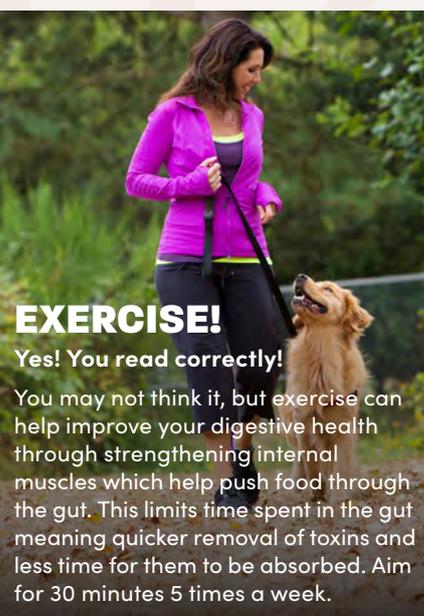


PREBIOTIC FIBRES

(including resistant starch)

These are not digested by the small intestine but instead move into the large intestine where they act as food for good bacteria to grow - in other words they are the fertilisers of the gut.

Sources include: oats, wheat bran, lentils, chickpeas, almonds, hazelnuts, artichokes, garlic, onions.



EXERCISE!

Yes! You read correctly!

You may not think it, but exercise can help improve your digestive health through strengthening internal muscles which help push food through the gut. This limits time spent in the gut meaning quicker removal of toxins and less time for them to be absorbed. Aim for 30 minutes 5 times a week.

TOP TIP

Include a variety of fibre containing foods to ensure you get all types of fibre.

HIGH FIBRE RECIPE

BNF HEALTHY EATING WEEK: 10TH-17TH JUNE 202



Scott Freeman
Culinary Director - ESS

We all know that a good diet is important for our overall health and wellbeing, but did you know a diet high in fibre is associated with a lower risk of bowel cancer as well as heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes?

Fibre is only found in plant-based foods such as fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, grains and legumes such as the lentils used in this tasty dal bowl recipe.



DAL BOWLS

I cook a lot of spicy foods at home and this lentil dal is always on at some point during the week. It doesn't use a lot of ingredients and if you have a slow cooker, you can put it all in the one pot and come back a few hours later and enjoy a cheap and healthy meal that will fill you up. It freezes really well, so is good for batch cooking for evenings where you need a meal in a rush but don't have much time to prepare something from scratch. It is also super-cheap with 500g bags of lentils typically costing around £1.50.

We make "dal bowls" at home and layer in raw spinach and broccoli, big ladles of dal and then top with either roasted salmon or paneer, but you could easily swap this out for any protein such as chicken, tofu or even just a tin of red kidney beans. I sometimes add some extra stock to any leftovers and have this as a quick and nutritious bowl of soup for lunch, always piling on extra chilli at the end to keep my cravings at bay.

Ingredients

- 500g red lentils (washed really well)
- 25ml olive oil
- 2 onions, diced
- 2 cloves of garlic, finely chopped
- 1 red chilli, finely chopped
- 1 tin of chopped tomatoes
- 1 teaspoon ground turmeric
- 1 teaspoon ground coriander
- 2 teaspoons curry powder

Method

- 1 Bring 1 litre of water to boil and add the washed lentils. Simmer this for 15 minutes, then drain and set aside.
- 2 In a separate saucepan, heat the oil and soften the onions for 5 minutes, or until they are golden-brown.
- 3 Add the garlic and chilli and continue cooking for 2 minutes.
- 4 Add the tin of tomatoes and cook for a few more minutes before adding the dried spices.
- 5 Now add the cooked lentils and 1 litre of cold water to the saucepan and bring to a simmer.
- 6 Cook this for a further 10 minutes, or until the dal has thickened and has absorbed the flavours of the sauce.

DONATE BLOOD AND GIVE THE GIFT OF LIFE

WORLD BLOOD DONOR DAY: 14TH JUNE 2024

There are eight blood types:

- 1 O+ is the most common, 35% of donors have this blood type
- 2 O- donors make up 13% of the donor base and are often called the 'universal donor' because their blood can be given to people of any blood type in an emergency
- 3 Around 30% are A+
- 4 1 in 13 are A-
- 5 8% are B+
- 6 2% are B-, making it one of the rarest blood groups
- 7 1 in 50 donors are AB+, making it very rare
- 8 AB- is the rarest, accounting for only 1% of blood donors.

Why give blood?

Giving blood helps to save lives!

Blood or the components of blood are used to treat patients with medical conditions, such as anaemia, cancer and blood disorders, as well as those having surgery. Blood is made up of a number of components, including red blood cells, platelets and plasma. Each can be used to treat many different conditions.

Donated blood or components are given to a patient through a blood transfusion via a line into a vein. Blood transfusions can also improve the quality of life for people with illnesses that have no cure. Some blood is also used in research and training, and in helping to develop tests.



The NHS Blood and Transplant Service needs:

- 4,300 blood donations every day on average to meet the needs of our hospitals.
- Over 140,000 people to donate blood for the first time this year.
- 12,000 new Black heritage donors, to meet the growing demand for ethnically matched blood for sickle cell patients who need regular transfusions to stay alive.
- More young people aged 17-35 to donate, to ensure we have enough blood for the future.

The donation process:

- 1 Check you are able to give blood ([Who can give blood - NHS Blood Donation](https://www.blood.co.uk/why-give-blood/how-blood-is-used/))¹.
- 2 Sign up online and book an appointment – there are thousands of donation venues across England, from permanent donor centres to pop-up community venues.
- 3 Men can give blood every 12 weeks and women every 16 weeks due to having lower iron levels than men.

¹ <https://www.blood.co.uk/why-give-blood/how-blood-is-used/>

² <https://www.blood.co.uk/who-can-give-blood/>

MR BLUE SKY!

SUN AWARENESS WEEK: 6TH-12TH MAY 2024

We all love a hot, sunny day and, while there are dangers associated with over exposure to sunshine, sunlight plays a crucial role in our health and wellbeing.

Excessive sun exposure can be harmful to the skin, increasing the risk of skin cancer and premature ageing, however moderate sunlight can benefit our overall health.

For most people, the primary source of vitamin D is exposure to sunlight. When UVB rays from the sun penetrate the skin, they trigger the production of vitamin D in the body which is essential for calcium absorption, bone health and supporting immune function. Sunlight exposure may help to improve conditions such as psoriasis, eczema and acne, and through promoting adequate levels of vitamin D may reduce the risk of infections, including respiratory infections, autoimmune diseases and certain types of cancer. Vitamin D can also help prevent conditions such as osteoporosis and reduce the risk of fractures and bone-related disorders.

In the UK winter, sunlight exposure is limited.

So, it is recommended that everyone should supplement their diet with 10micrograms of vitamin D from September through to the end of March.

Did you know that the body's internal clock, or circadian rhythm, is regulated in part by exposure to natural light? Exposure to sunlight during the day and darkness at night aid in the synchronisation of circadian rhythms which are essential for controlling hormone production, sleep-wake cycles and other physiological functions.

Early morning light exposure signals to the body that it is time to wake up and starts the creation of the hormone melatonin, which also helps control sleep-wake cycles whilst boosting energy levels and combatting feelings of fatigue and lethargy. Exposure to light in the morning also kick starts the body's countdown to bedtime which can help you to get a better night's sleep!

Research has connected exposure to sunlight with enhanced mental health and mood.

Serotonin is a neurotransmitter linked to feelings of happiness and relaxation that is produced in response to sunlight. Sufficient exposure to sunlight has been shown to mitigate symptoms of depression and seasonal affective disorder (SAD).

While moderate sunlight exposure offers numerous health benefits, it is essential to practice sun safety to minimise the risk of sunburn, skin damage and skin cancer. This includes wearing sunscreen, protective clothing and sunglasses, seeking shade during peak sun hours and avoiding prolonged exposure to intense sunlight.

Sun protection advice

- Apply sunscreen frequently:
 - Apply twice before going out – 30 minutes before and just before going out
 - Use an SPF of 30 or above to protect from UVB rays
 - Use 4 star or higher UVA protection
 - Reapply every two hours and straight after swimming – even if it is water resistant
- Reduce the time spent in direct sunlight - aim to stay in shaded areas between 11am and 3pm
- Cover up in suitable clothing and glasses
- Be extra vigilant with babies and children.¹

What to be aware of

You are at an increased risk of skin cancer if you have many freckles or moles, so it is even more important to follow the advice above on protecting yourself from the sun. You should also keep an eye out for any changes to your skin such as:

- A new mole, freckle, growth or lump
- Moles, freckles or patches of skin that have changed in size, shape or colour

Report any changes or anything new to your GP as soon as possible.¹

PLASTIC, NOT SO FANTASTIC

EARTH DAY: 22ND APRIL 2024

WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY: 5TH JUNE 2024



Plastic, once hailed as a revolutionary material, has become a ubiquitous part of modern life. But its convenience comes at a significant cost to our planet.

However, there is hope. By making simple changes in our daily lives, we can collectively reduce our plastic footprint and work towards a more sustainable future.

If everyone took small steps and made changes to their use of plastic, it could make a huge difference.

Let's explore some practical ways to minimise plastic usage at home:

- **Use reusable bags** - Bring reusable bags when shopping to minimise the use of single-use plastic bags.
- **Opt for reusable containers** - Store leftover food in reusable containers rather than using cling film.
- **Avoid single-use plastics** - Purchase staples like pasta and rice from shops which dispense the products from refillable containers.
- **Buy in bulk** - Minimise plastic waste by purchasing items such as grains and snacks in bulk.
- **Use reusable water bottles** - Carry a reusable water bottle to reduce reliance on single-use plastic bottles.
- **Choose plastic-free packaging** - Select products packaged in paper, cardboard or compostable materials whenever possible.
- **Cook at home** - Bake your own cakes and bread to eliminate plastic packaging.
- **Buy second-hand** - Purchase clothes, furniture and household goods from second-hand shops or online marketplaces.
- **Choose eco-friendly products** - Look for eco-friendly alternatives and avoid products containing microbeads.
- **Compost organic waste** - Reduce plastic rubbish bag usage by composting organic waste.
- **Support plastic-free initiatives** - Shop with businesses embracing sustainable alternatives to plastic.

By adopting these simple practices, we can all play a part in reducing plastic usage and mitigating its harmful effects on the environment. Together, let's embrace a plastic-conscious lifestyle and pave the way towards a cleaner, more sustainable future.

SUSTAINABLE COCOA FARMING

WORLD FAIRTRADE DAY: 11TH MAY 2024

Chocolate is often considered the ultimate indulgence! It was first produced over 4,000 years ago in present day Mexico (ancient Mesoamerica). Chocolate comes from the cocoa tree which produces fruits known as pods containing cocoa beans.

Cocoa is produced in tropical environments in a belt 10 degrees north and south of the equator, including Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, and can only grow in very specific conditions. Sadly, disease and age alongside climate change are making it harder for the trees to grow.

On top of this, cocoa bean prices have dropped in recent years and the majority of cocoa farmers do not earn enough to cover their basic needs, making less than £2 a day.

As the benefits of being a cocoa farmer are poor, younger generations cannot be attracted into the profession and the average age is over 50. Over two thirds of the cocoa labour force are women, but only a quarter own the farms as the rest work on land held in their husband's name.

As a result of the challenges, there is growing awareness and emphasis on sustainable cocoa farming practices and ethical sourcing in the chocolate industry. Initiatives such as Fairtrade, Rainforest Alliance and UTZ certification promote fair wages, environmental stewardship and social responsibility within the cocoa supply chain, ensuring that cocoa farmers receive fair prices for their products and adhere to sustainable farming practices.

To produce chocolate, cocoa beans undergo a meticulous process of fermentation, drying, roasting and grinding to transform into the key ingredient - cocoa mass - that gives chocolate its signature flavour and texture. The Olmec, one of the earliest civilizations in Latin America, were the first to turn the cacao plant into chocolate and use it in the form of a drink. This was then discovered by the Spanish and brought over to Europe.

It has since become one of the most popular foods in the world!

What is Fairtrade?

Fairtrade is an international movement in partnership with 2 million farmers and workers with a vision of a world in which all producers enjoy secure and sustainable livelihoods, fulfil their potential and decide on their future.

The most popular Fairtrade items include bananas, cocoa, coffee, flowers, sugar and tea. Cotton, herbs and spices, honey, nuts and oils, quinoa, rice, wine, gold and sports balls are also covered by the Fairtrade Standards.



FAIRTRADE

HOW I STOP FOOD WASTE AT HOME

STOP FOOD WASTE DAY: 24TH APRIL 2024



My name is Robert Marshalls. I'm 67 years old and I work on a part time basis in the Junior Ranks Mess as a kitchen assistant in the Robson Resilience Centre, Crickhowell.

In my spare time I am an avid vegetable gardener. Consequently, I take a very keen interest in the environment, wildlife, the food we grow, the condition of the soil we grow our food in and, above all, the reduction of food waste.

I find that with careful planning and by working with the seasons, I can pretty much produce and supply our needs at home without continued recourse to the supermarket. However, my endeavours don't always go to plan and sometimes I end up on occasions with leftovers. In the case of cooked food, depending on the type of food it is, then I will cover it and place in the fridge for reheating the following day or for inclusion into another dish, for instance a stir fry. Another method I use for leftovers, where appropriate, is sealing in a container and freezing.

A lot of my surplus veg from the garden is either blanched and frozen, fermented or canned for long term storage, not just to help with financial efficiency but also to help with the reduction of food waste. I also churn milk which is getting close to its use by date to make butter and buttermilk. Any old apples I will use to make apple cider vinegar, and if they are too far gone for use in the fermentation jar then they will end up in my compost bin.

My compost bin is where the rest of all the other organic material scraps produced in the kitchen go to help make a wonderful soil amendment which replaces the nutrients the ground needs to keep producing wholesome food. The more we reuse and recycle, in particular organic materials, the less need there will be for landfill sites.



HELLO FROM THE DEFENCE ACADEMY MARKET GARDEN

I wanted to start by saying that spring has finally put in an appearance, but I'm sat in the shed writing this article while the rain lashes down outside!



Janet Thomas
Head Gardener - ESS

It's a really busy time on the garden and we have started to put all the planning and preparation we did in the late autumn and winter into practice - the beds are being prepared and starting to be planted up, seeds are being sown and the greenhouse is full of tiny seedlings, just waiting to be transplanted to their final position.

Something I've been mulling over a lot during the winter months is the health of our soil on the garden. I'm always looking to improve the quality of the soil as I'm a firm believer that from healthy soil grows healthy produce, but this has led me to ponder whether healthier soil has a positive nutritional impact on our food. Over the many years I've been a veg grower, it seems very clear to me that the veg grown in healthy soil always looks and tastes better.

Our Market Garden is Soil Association certified organic and, as such, we are unable to use any chemical fertilisers,



pesticides or weed killers. To be honest, I wouldn't have it any other way - one of the main reasons I started to grow my own fruit and veg was to avoid unnecessary chemicals in mine and my family's diet.

We all know the health benefits of getting outside and being amongst nature, but now research seems to suggest that food grown in a more natural way, in healthy soil, without the use of chemicals actually produces more nutritionally dense food.

It's easy to see the soil as just 'that brown stuff in the garden', but a healthy soil should literally be teeming with life. The soil in your garden is a mix of organic matter, minerals, water and oxygen, and within that live bacteria, algae, fungi and nematodes, not to mention the large array of worms and other beneficial creatures that inhabit it. So, when you start to see it like that, you start to realise what an amazing living, breathing thing our soil is.

I'm no scientist, but my interest in the soil health of the garden led me to



do research around the microbes in the soil and their mutually beneficial relationship with the plants we grow. I discovered that microbes form a symbiotic relationship with the plants, in our case the vegetables, providing them with nutrition stored in the soil to help them grow. In return, the plants give back to the soil. They pull carbon from the atmosphere which is stored in the soil and help to improve its quality, they translocate sugars into the soil which in turn feeds the microbial life within it and some plants fix nitrogen into it through their root systems, which improves the quality of the soil and feeds future crops.

So, it seems that with our ever-expanding population and our increasing reliance on industrially farmed food, grown in mono cultures with a heavy reliance on chemical fertilisers and pest control, there is literally no better time for your own health and the health of our environment to get out there and grow some of your own food.

If you are interested in improving your soil health, here are a few things you can do:

- **Make your own compost** - you can add garden waste, kitchen peelings and green waste, fallen leaves, shredded tree pruning and things like cardboard egg boxes to name a few.
- **No till / no dig gardening** - when you've worked hard to improve your soil health and all that lovely mycorrhizal fungi has formed and the plants have brought the CO₂ down from the atmosphere, the last thing you want to do is break it up and release it back!
- **Mulch, mulch, mulch** - add a couple of inches of mulch to your beds, whether this be compost (homemade or bought), leaf mulch or well-rotted manure. This is best done in autumn or very early spring. No need to dig it in as the worms, insects and microorganisms will do that for you.
- **Keep soil covered at all times, preferably with plants** - if you're not specifically growing a crop, try adding a green manure which will add nutrition to the soil, assist with water retention and prevent erosion. We like to add fallen leaves to the top of our beds in autumn to keep them covered throughout the winter and any that haven't rotted down in the spring can go in the compost heap.
- **Do not use chemical fertilisers, pesticides or weed killers** as they're often detrimental to other beneficial life forms on your garden.



A nice simple way of assessing our soil health is to count the number of worms in a spade full. I counted 19 in one spadeful of ours today - I'm not exactly sure how many worms mean it's healthy, but that doesn't seem bad to me!

So, now we know how to build the foundations through good soil health, let's start growing. April and May are the best months to grow pretty much anything you want. All plants have different requirements, and it is best to decide what you want to grow and then do some research on each individual plant.

We know that not everyone has acres to grow in, but we have set up a small raised bed on the garden which is 3 metres by 1.2 metres. Luly made it

using some decking board and we filled it with some branches in the bottom and then added compost. We plan to grow as much as we can in it in one year from this March. We should have plenty to show you in the summer Wellness Magazine feature and hopefully it'll give you some inspiration to start your own veg patch.

We currently have spring onions, lettuce, beetroot, radish, red cabbage, cauliflower and mange tout growing. I will be adding some carrot seeds soon. We also intend to add a courgette, butternut squash to trail over the mesh and a cucumber and tomato to climb from the canes structure, along with more lettuce and some herbs. Watch this space...

Let's get growing!



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