

Foundations of Health – Diet

A Healthy Diet

I am sometimes asked what the *best diet* is for everyone to follow. After working with hundreds of patients and their food choices on an individual level, I know there is no correct answer to this question. Everyone is different and everyone has their own food history. Sensitivities, allergies and intolerances, poor chemical processing, disruption to the gut microbiome, nutritional deficiencies and deeply personal or spiritual beliefs will inform the best way for each of us to eat.

At the clinic we are here to listen to your needs and to work with your body and your unique set of requirements, to find the nutritional plan which works best for you. This may sometimes take us down blind alleys before we find the correct path for you – but with each trial we learn something new about your needs and how your body works best.

While we cannot give specific guidance on your own particular needs here, there are some basic principles which will be helpful for most people:

Increase Phytonutrient Intake

The majority of people will benefit from 9–13 servings of whole plant foods per day to prevent or reverse chronic disease. Aiming to eat a variety of colours is a great way to ensure there is a good variety of antioxidant sources in the diet. Aim to 'eat the Rainbow' each day with help from our colourful guide and starter recipes which are linked below.

You can find inspiration to help expand your diet in colour and read about the benefits of each of the Phytonutrients in the colourful handout below:

<https://drsarahdavies.online/document/the-phytonutrient-spectrum/>

For those with children (or who prefer the simpler format), our Phytonutrient Checklist can be printed out and kept on the fridge to encourage healthy eating and to record how many different colours you eat per week. Setting up a competition with children can help to make this exciting.

<https://drsarahdavies.online/wp-content/uploads/Phytonutrient-Checklist.pdf>

Looking for inspiration? Our Rainbow Recipe guide can be used to help increase colour and enjoyment in your cooking:

https://drsarahdavies.online/wp-content/uploads/Dr_Sarah_s_Rainbow_Recipes.pdf

Eat Whole, Unprocessed Foods

Highly processed or Ultra-processed foods will generally contain few or no minimally / non-processed ingredients and tend to be higher in salt, fat and added sugars. They often also contain unhealthy flavour enhancers, preservatives or thickeners. You can read more about these here:

<https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/junk-food-vs-healthy-food>

Processed foods have become widely available and it's difficult to avoid these while shopping. The more processed food we have in our diets, the higher the risks of developing chronic health issues such as cardiovascular disease, cancer and autoimmunity.

In the clinic we encourage avoidance of these foods and instead encourage high intake of good quality, minimally processed wholefoods such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, legumes, extra virgin olive oil and spices alongside lean meat and fish. While these foods often require more home preparation, taking time to develop your culinary skills, an interest in healthy meal planning and cooking from scratch is one of the best investments you can make in your health long term.

Reduce Sugar and Balance your Meals

Eating refined grains and foods high in sugar increases the risk of heart disease and diabetes. Eating a healthy source of protein, fibre and healthy fats with a meal can help stabilise your blood sugar – especially when eating starchy vegetables like potatoes, fruit or whole grains.

Protein, fibre and fat will slow down the absorption of sugar/ carbohydrate into the bloodstream, help to manage appetite and stabilise blood sugar levels. These foods are also good for metabolism and digestion.

For those who need to lose weight, improve mood swings and hormonal health or improve diabetic control, choosing healthier and lower carbohydrate options can be very beneficial. We have created a resource with some ideas to help you manage blood sugar and cravings:

<https://drsarahdavies.online/wp-content/uploads/Dr-Sarahs-Low-Carb-Tips-1.pdf>

Increase Healthy Fats

The key to improving the quality of fat in the diet is to avoid processed foods containing unhealthy vegetable and trans-fats. While fats have historically been demonised in popular health advice, newer studies show that using healthy fats in the diet and reducing sugars is a far more beneficial way to eat than following the low-fat diet. We encourage all our patients to actively seek out and include the following healthy fats in their diets:

Wholefoods rich in healthy fats and valuable fat-soluble vitamins and essential fatty acids include:

- Avocados
- Oily Fish: choose the healthier SMASH fish – Wild Caught Salmon, Mackerel, Anchovies, Sardines and Herring
- Nuts and Seeds, Nut Butters and Tahini

Cold pressed oils (not to be heated), which can be enjoyed in dressings and drizzled on vegetables:

- Extra Virgin Olive Oil
- Avocado oil

Healthy oils for cooking and baking:

- Ghee
- Coconut oil
- Olive oil (for low temperature cooking only)

Stay Hydrated

Research shows that drinking enough water each day is crucial for many reasons: to regulate body temperature, deliver nutrients to cells, keep joints lubricated, support the immune system and keep organs functioning properly. Being well-hydrated also improves sleep quality, cognition, and mood while curbing food cravings.

Most people need at least 1.5-2L of water daily. This can be as hot or cold drinks (for those with sensitive digestion room temperature water is better). Opt for water or herbal (decaffeinated) teas as caffeine is diuretic, which means that increases the production of urine and as a result may inhibit hydration.

Avoid Snacking Between Meals

Overabundance of foods in Western society, especially those which are highly processed and of poor nutritional and high sugar content, has created an obesogenic environment. Unstable blood sugars and the misconception that we need to eat frequently to maintain energy had caused an epidemic of overeating leading to a rapidly growing overweight population.

Studies show that eating three [balanced](#) meals a day with at least 3-4 hours between them can improve satiety and reduces hunger cues compared with higher meal frequency diets.

Other benefits to fasting between meals includes improvements in:

- Recognition of hunger cues and restoration of the ability to eat intuitively according to the body's needs (rather than eating for comfort or reward).

- Gastrointestinal motility and the ability to move intestinal contents efficiently through the gut, reducing the occurrence imbalanced gut bacteria and excessive fermentation leading to gas and bloating.
- Healthier eating habits and reduction in snacking on ultra-processed foods which lead to obesity.
- Mood and mental health as stable blood sugars reduce hormonal imbalance and maintain healthy cortisol levels.

Choose Clean, Lower Toxin Foods

Our Food Plans place emphasis on eating clean foods for life and reducing exposure to harmful environmental toxins such as plastics, heavy metals and pesticides. There are many ways to minimize intake of these substances including:

Choose lean, organic meats (grass fed if possible), over fatty cuts, as pesticides concentrate in fat.

Buy organic vegetables where possible. The Environmental working group lists those foods most likely to be heavily contaminated and those which are safer:

<https://www.ewg.org/foodnews/summary.php#dirty-dozen>

Peel off the skin or remove the outer layer of leaves of leafy produce. You can remove surface pesticide residues, waxes, fungicides, and fertilizers by soaking the food in a solution of sodium Bicarbonate (1 teaspoon to every 2 cups of cold water), then rinsing well.

Wash produce before peeling it so dirt and contaminants aren't transferred from the knife onto the fruit or vegetable.

Swap plastic water bottles for glass or steel versions

Choose non-toxic pans, skillets, and pots made of cast iron or steel, ceramics or glass. Make your own non-toxic, non-stick pans by seasoning it with olive or coconut oil. There's a good guide on how to do this here: <https://www.serious-eats.com/how-to-season-cast-iron-pans-skillets-cookware>

Filter your cooking and drinking water to remove chlorine and other contaminants. Filters we like are:

- Berkey: <https://berkey-waterfilters.co.uk>
- Aarke: <https://www.aarke.com/uk/explore-purifier>

Practice Mindful Eating and Meal Hygiene

Research shows that it is not just what we eat but also how we eat that matters. Mindful eating has been shown to improve digestion, mood and nutrient absorption while reducing food cravings.

Mindful eating and meal hygiene recommendations include:

Create a relaxed environment – away from your workplace – when eating, as nervous tension at mealtimes can affect digestion. If you are feeling stressed take a moment to practice [diaphragmatic breathing](#) before you start eating.

Be in the moment – Try to be fully present, avoid multitasking or watching TV. Sit down and just eat. This helps with noticing internal and external cues that affect how much we eat and what we eat.

Ensure you chew each mouthful thoroughly as chewing aids with breaking down food into absorbable components and improves digestion. The food needs to be completely mashed before you swallow. Increased time spent on chewing promotes awareness of eating which is essential for recognition of satiety. In general, it takes about 20 minutes for your brain to signal to your stomach that it is full, so allow at least 30 minutes for each meal.

Avoid drinking any fluids with meals as it has been shown to inhibit the production of digestive enzymes and gastric acid leading to suboptimal digestion of foods

Eat slowly with your mouth closed to avoid gulping down air with your food

Avoid drinking from a straw as this can make you swallow air and lead to increased bloating.

Avoid eating a large meal late at night as that can hinder proper digestion and can also interfere with the quality of your sleep. Ensure that your last meal is at least 3 to 4 hours before bedtime.

Nutritional Supplementation

Unfortunately, due to intensive farming practices and loss of mineral and micronutrient content from the modern diet, most people will benefit from taking a good quality, well formulated Multivitamin. These supplements can help to bridge the gap between the nutrients provided by a healthy diet and those needed for optimal health. While we support the move towards plant-based diets and protection of our environment, without regular consumption of animal products, there is a high likelihood of developing micronutrient deficiencies (especially B12 and iron). For those who choose not to eat fish, we would also advise supplementation with a good quality Omega 3 for brain health and a healthy immune system.

Vitamin D is naturally made in our skin following sunlight exposure. Unfortunately, due to our latitude, UK residents are only able to access the correct sunlight frequencies to make this essential vitamin from March to October, and almost all become deficient in the winter months without supplementation.

Vitamin D is essential for immune health, fighting infections and bone health. Everyone in the UK is advised to supplement Vitamin D, especially those with weaker immunity, pregnant women, children, the elderly and those with darker skin tones.

To avoid deficiency in essential micronutrients, our favourite recommendations include:

Multivitamin Options:

Biocare Methyl Multinutrient:

<https://myfunctionalapothecary.co.uk/collections/biocare/products/methyl-multinutrient-120-capsules>

Biocare Female Multinutrient:

<https://myfunctionalapothecary.co.uk/collections/biocare/products/female-multinutrient-90-capsules>

Nutri Advanced Multi Essentials for Women:

<https://myfunctionalapothecary.co.uk/collections/nutriadvanced/products/multi-essentials-for-women-60-tablets>

Nutri Advanced Multi Essentials for Men:

<https://myfunctionalapothecary.co.uk/collections/nutriadvanced/products/nutriadvanced-multi-essentials-for-men-60-tablets>

Omega 3 Options:

Biocare Mega EPA Fish Oil: https://myfunctionalapothecary.co.uk/products/mega-epa-omega-3-fish-oil-60-capsules?_pos=1&_sid=a3b8088ac&_ss=r

Cytoplän Vegan Omega 3: https://myfunctionalapothecary.co.uk/products/omega-3-vegan-60-capsules?_pos=3&_sid=a3b8088ac&_ss=r

Vitamin D Options:

BetterYou DLux+ (Vitamin D3 and K2):

https://myfunctionalapothecary.co.uk/products/betteryou-dlux-vitamin-d-k2?_pos=9&_sid=513d23326&_ss=r

NutriAdvanced Vitamin D3 Drops: https://myfunctionalapothecary.co.uk/products/vitamin-d3-drops?_pos=10&_sid=513d23326&_ss=r

Recipe Books:

From the Hemsley sisters Jasmine and Melissa Hemsley 'The Art of Eating Well' Vegan Cookbook from Saskia Gregson Williams 'Naturally Sassy'

Detox Kitchen Cookbooks by Lily Simpson and Rob Hobson Amelia Freer 'Eat Nourish Glow'

Websites:

<https://www.cleaneatingmag.com/clean-eating-recipes/>

<https://www.wellplated.com/>

<https://nourishingmeals.com/>

<https://www.sweetashoney.co/recipe-search/>



My Notes: