



Welcome

The exciting news this month is that the first result from the small research project we did at the Stitch and Craft Show in March has emerged. Jeni at Cardiff University Psychology Department told us the research showed that knitters and

cross stitchers reported "a significant improvement in mood after knitting and stitching". Although this is something stitchers have known for a while, it's great to have it made official and particularly good for those suffering depression and low mood for whatever reason, as it offers an easily accessible tool to manage their lives more effectively.

Turn to page two and you'll find Vicky's inspiring story of how she put this into practice when she used cross stitching to help her recover from a complete breakdown. She also used it to revise for her degree and we follow this up on page 5 where we take a look at whether knitting and stitching can help you learn and retain information more easily.

Our Special Penpal this month is from Norway and you can read all about her and other new friends on page 4. Learn about Pilates on pages 6 and 7 then move on to Part 2 of our article on maintaining a healthy weight, where we have three pages of information and tips on nutrition and food. You'll find tips and advice on using your knitting and stitching to gain and maintain a healthy weight whether you're over or under weight at present.

Delectable products fill page 11 so I hope you'll sit back and enjoy a good read with your morning cuppa!

Betsan xxx

4

step action plan for next month

- When someone asks you how you are say "I feel great, thanks."
- Take time over food and enjoy every mouthful - eat slowly.
- Play a game with a child and learn to laugh again.
- Learn about Pilates and give it a try.



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My story

Vicky tells us how cross stitching has helped her through difficult times...

We know some of you have already chatted to Vicky on the Forum. We were lucky enough to meet her at the Stitch and Craft show back in March; she was full of energy and vibrant so her story really is a testimony about how effective stitching is as a therapy. We think it will be an inspiration to everyone...

"My sister introduced me to cross stitch when I was studying for the finals of my degree in 1993. At the time I was suffering from depression and found it very

finals for a year until I was better, but I didn't want to have to repeat a year of study at University. So whilst my flatmates were busy writing revision notes, I dictated all my course notes onto tape, just listened to my Walkman and stitched away for hours. I wasn't sure how successful this type of revising would be because it seemed more like relaxing instead of studying, and at times I felt quite guilty because I seemed to be concentrating more on the stitching than on the revising.

"Because I had a focus I found I wasn't concentrating on being ill, and life gradually started to improve."

hard to concentrate on anything for any length of time. It had been suggested that I deferred my

However it must have worked because I came away with a 2:1 BSc(Hons) Sociology degree!



Full of atmosphere and cuteness, Vicky's cross stitched pictures are real masterpieces to be proud of!

In the following years I carried on stitching sporadically. It was something I always enjoyed, but back then I wasn't the addict that I am now! It was something I always turned to when I wanted some "me" time. I used my cross stitching to help me relax and to lift my mood if I was feeling unhappy. I found it especially therapeutic when I had glandular fever as it didn't matter if I kept falling asleep whilst doing it!

In August 2001 I had a complete breakdown and totally fell apart. I suffered from panic attacks, started to self-harm (something that had started when I was a teenager but had been under control for several years), comfort ate, cried all the



Vicky's main passion is cross stitch, but now she's learning to knit and crochet thanks to other members!

time and was a real mess. I couldn't leave the house on my own for four months - each time I tried I had a panic attack and was physically sick, so I felt like a prisoner in my own home. Friends and family were very supportive but of course had their own lives and jobs to get on with, and I found it hard to cope with hours and hours on my own waiting for my husband to get home from work - there's only so much daytime TV you can watch!

One day I was looking through a cupboard and came across all my cross stitch stash. Remembering how much pleasure and help it had given me previously, I decided to start stitching again and haven't looked back since. Some days it was a real achievement just to get out of bed and get showered and dressed, and here I was stitching a beautiful picture that was growing in front of my eyes. Stitching gave me a real sense of purpose and I set myself little goals each day.

During my breakdown I felt really useless because I felt that I couldn't deal with everyday life whilst it seemed as though the rest of the world could, but through my stitching I felt creative and worthwhile. Because I had a focus I found that I wasn't concentrating on being ill, and life gradually started to improve. Slowly I began to feel a little more in control of what was happening to me, and I was so proud of myself when I finished the Poppy Flower Fairy - it was better than all the therapy in the world!

Eight months later I was well enough to go back to work and live a "normal" life again, and since then my cross stitch has never been far from my side. I stitch nearly every evening, even if it's just for half an hour. I find it helps me unwind after a long day at work, it is something completely different to concentrate on and is something that is just for me. It still helps me through difficult times - in the past two years we have moved house twice and I have started a new job, and I have come through it all relatively unscathed!

Since joining Stitchlinks I have learnt to crochet (thanks to a very patient Scarlett!), I have knitted fingerless mittens and am now attempting some Fyberspates

full of holes! So now not only do I have to find enough time to indulge in my hobby, but I then have to decide whether I'm going to knit, crochet or cross stitch!

I have accepted the fact that I am likely to be on medication for the rest of my life which doesn't worry me. After all, if it helps keep me stable, that's all that matters. I have come such a long way in recent years

"I am proof that you can recover from a mental breakdown. Life is finally good!"

socks. I am not a natural knitter and having to deal with so many needles at once can be very confusing - I won't mention how many times the whole lot has been thrown across the room in frustration! However, after reading so many members on the Forum saying that knitting socks is addictive, I am determined not to give up, and so I am currently on my fourth attempt! One of these days I will be proud to wear the socks I have made, even if they are

that it almost feels as though everything happened to a different person. I am proof that you can recover from a mental breakdown even if at times you think that you will never get better. I feel so much stronger and happier than ever before, life is finally good!"

If you've been inspired by Vicky's story, drop us a line.



We just love this little rabbit and Vicky's current project which has taken seven months so far!

Contact us

- *Writing down your story can help you and many other people, so please write in to tell us about yourself and don't forget to include a photograph. You can do it anonymously too if you have a story that will help others. Send it to us in one of the following ways -*
- **Email - Betsan@stitchlinks.com** *It's easy to attach a digital photograph. Simply click on attach, find your photo and double click on the file. A text document containing your story can be attached in the same way.*
- **Post - PO Box 3679, BATH, BA2 4WS, UK.** *Send your story and photo by post and we can scan in the image. Unfortunately we won't be able to return the photos, though.*

Did you know?

A ball of glass will bounce higher than a ball made of rubber!

In Cleveland, Ohio USA, it is illegal to catch mice without a hunting license!

The UK eats more cans of baked beans than the rest of the world put together!

Forest fires move faster uphill than downhill!

Making friends

This month we visit Norway where Mirjam tells us a bit about her life and stitching loves...

"Hello, I'm Mirjam and I live in the eastern part of Norway, half an hour from the capital, Oslo. It's not a big place, but it's close to the sea and forest, where my children and I can take trips just within walking distance.

I am a 31-year-old single mother and I have a boy and a girl of six and four. At the moment I am a student of food service; it's my first year of this course. Next year I'll study to be a pastry chef.

It's hard work with all the tests and homework, when I am alone with my two children. I don't get much spare time to stitch, certainly not as much as

I'd like, but I'm lucky to have great parents, who help me out whenever they can.

The last few days have been very summery here, so I just sit on my porch and stitch while my children play in the garden. I like to stitch big and spectacular pictures and of course Disney designs like Winnie-the-Pooh and the princesses. At the moment I'm stitching a picture for my brother; he's a Coastguard in the navy. They operate in the area around Svalbard, and he fell in love with the polar bears. So the polar bear picture you can see below will be the perfect gift for him.



Mirjam's stitching a gorgeous polar bear for her brother and loves spectacular designs and Disney.

You can see from these beautiful pictures, Mirjam lives in a wonderful part of the world.

I have so many beautiful pictures and designs just waiting for me to get started, but there's just not enough time in a day to get everything done!

I love to be a part of Stitchlinks it lightens up my days!"

email:
Post:

Don't forget to check your
Stitchlinks email accounts!

Penpals - making new friends

• **Julie Cartwright** - Hello, I am 45 years old, divorced with a daughter of 22, a son of 16, one dog and two fish. I love everything crafty and arty and enjoy knitting toys, waist coats, slippers and sweaters. I also love cross stitching, reading, films, music, baking cakes, and when I'm well enough, going for a ride on my boyfriend's motorbike. I have Crohn's Disease.

email:
Post:

• **Brenda Perry** - I had a tumour removed in 1989 and I'm now disabled and walk with a three wheeled walker. I work as a volunteer for a local cancer charity. I knit and cross stitch. I like to knit for my grand daughter and daughters and I cross stitch pictures to raffle for charity. I'd love to hear from other Stitchlinks members.

Post:

Your opinion

Could knitting and stitching help some of us to learn more efficiently...

As we heard in *My story* this month Vicky's cross stitching project helped her revise for her exams. But Vicky isn't the only one to tell us that knitting and stitching has helped them at exam time. Sarah said, 'I used my knitting as a way to manage my stress levels during my A levels.' She went on to say, 'Not only did it calm me down, but whilst stitching I was able to mull over the things I'd learnt.' This got us thinking...

What does Vicky and Sarah's information actually mean? Could it be that by keeping the mind occupied at a certain level, knitting and stitching are enabling information to enter into the subconscious mind where it is stored, retained and easily retrieved? This theory is backed up by Susan's comment, 'I find if I'm watching a film when I'm knitting, the next time I pick up my needles the details of the film come flooding back.' Dawn told us, 'When I was in school in the late 1960's, our English Literature teacher used to get us all knitting and then he'd read out the plays and poems we needed to learn. We looked forward to the classes, and we remembered what he told us.'

Many people fiddle, shuffle, doodle or tap when they're taking in information. But does this mean they can take it in more easily this way? These people are often considered rude and children who behave in this way are often told off and punished. Perhaps Dawn's literature teacher has a lot to teach us all!

This isn't the only way that knitting and stitching can help those taking exams, though. And with A levels, GCSEs and end of year exams in full flow, everyone including parents could benefit from effective stress management. What better way than enjoying half an hour's stitching to empty the mind daily?

One of the perils of working into the late hours is not being able to switch off at bed time or waking up in the night and finding your thoughts are going around and around. We've all been there at some stage, but now we have a remedy. Keeping a small project by the bedside and knitting or stitching for half an hour before sleep just stops those ever circling thoughts; it empties and calms the mind for a good night's sleep.

As we mention in our *Medical update* this month, stress and the resulting release of the hormone, cortisol, causes cravings for sugary foods and stimulates fat storage. This, and the fact that you're less active when studying, often leads to weight gain. Sugar also suppresses the immune system making you more susceptible to colds and other infections. So next time you get the revision out, keep a knitting or stitching project by your side. Not only will it help you manage your stress and your weight, but it will keep you calm, encourage relaxing sleep and may help you fight off those colds to perform at your best. And, like Vicky, you may find it helps you remember more effectively, too.

If you've had similar experiences we'd like to hear about them, so please drop us a line to tell us all about them.

Drop us a line at *Stitchlinks*, PO Box 3679, Bath BA2 4WS; email betsan@stitchlinks.com. or visit the *Stitchlinks* website at www.stitchlinks.com

Contact us

Please include the enclosed information in the following sections

- The Stitchlinks penpal list*
- Special message board*
- My story*
- Between friends - letters*
- Making friends - special penpals*
- Swap shop*
- Ideas for Something new*
- I include a photo of myself**

Name

Address

Town

Post code

Country

Email

Phone

Membership

Message (include more if you need to!)

* We're sorry we won't be able to return any photographs.

Something new...

Pilates is an exercise regime that's good for the mind and body and can be done by the majority even into old age. Let's take a look...

We're going to introduce you to the basic principles of Pilates (Pil-ah-tis). It's a great form of exercise to learn because it can be done by the majority of people and continued into old age.

The history

Joseph Pilates was born near Dusseldorf, Germany in 1880. As a child he suffered from rickets, asthma and rheumatic fever but became intent on improving his body image through a fitness regime and sport. During his internment on the Isle of Man during the First World War he developed an exercise regime to keep himself and other inmates fit. On his return to Germany after the War he was introduced into the world of dance. Later he emigrated to America where he set up his first fitness studio in New York.

His exercise regime attracted a wide range of rich and famous people, ballet dancers and sports people. They loved it because it was a way of building muscle strength and length, flexibility and shape without adding bulk. Also by coordinating breathing with movements it involved the mind, so was a way of achieving balance and relaxation, too.

Pilates exercises have evolved and developed over the years and are now taught everywhere from specialist studios to classes in village halls. Physiotherapists teach modified Pilates exercises to those with back problems. There are also numerous books, DVDs and videos available if you want to learn them in the privacy of your own front room. The beauty of Pilates is that the exercises can be adapted to the individual. No two classes are the same; specialist Pilates studios will have equipment which utilise springs and pulleys, whilst ordinary classes may only use mat exercises or perhaps a pole and

gym ball. Exercises can be tailored to your specific needs or medical condition and increase muscle strength, length and flexibility as well as improving posture. You can even add light weights for greater effect if you so desire.

What makes Pilates different from other exercise regimes is its holistic approach and in this way it is similar to Eastern programmes that combine mind and body. It requires you to focus your mind on every movement, developing your body's sensory feedback. For this reason, as well as being great for toning up your body, it's also extremely relaxing and a great stress reliever. Betsan says, "I used to go to a Pilates class every Saturday morning and at the end of the class I felt as if the weight of the world had been lifted from my shoulders. It was fantastic for getting rid of the stresses of the week and gave me a great sense of inner calm. It makes you realise how stressed you've been and how it feels to have it melt away." She went on to say, "As a mind/body exercise it fits in well with what we believe at Stitchlinks."

Getting to the core

So why is Pilates so appropriate for most people? It concentrates on using the 'core' postural muscles to achieve stability of the trunk, and particularly of the pelvis. In every position our postural muscles work to keep us upright providing a stable base from where other muscles, joints and limbs can function at their best with minimal stress. Maintaining good posture also affects our vital organs enabling them to function at their best. Weak core muscles lead to instability of the trunk and a pelvis that tilts inappropriately causing back and hip pain, and to problems throughout the body. For example the hamstrings are

attached to the pelvis, and if it's tilting when it should be providing a good stable anchor it can lead to hamstring strains and tears as well as back, hip and knee pain. Even someone with strong abdominals can have weak core muscles. For this reason more and more sports clubs are recognising the importance of core stability and are incorporating Pilates exercises into their training programmes.

Instability equals pain

For the back pain sufferer and for those who want to avoid back pain, core stability exercises are essential. Every engineer will tell you that having core stability is essential for any machine or building to avoid cracks and damage. Imagine a crane trying to lift a heavy weight without a stable base to work from – there would soon be damage to the structure and it wouldn't be able to function at its best. The same principles apply to your body.

Pilates takes you through a wide range of movements including those you may not do in your day-to-day life. This helps to strengthen weak muscles, lengthen those that are short and improve joint mobility.

Normal movement only occurs when the body is in perfect alignment, when muscles are the correct length and joints are free to move in flowing coordination. Problems in any of these areas or as a result of poor posture will cause abnormal stresses and strains, which may not be immediately obvious. But our bodies will adapt to them causing muscle imbalances leading to problems as we age. During all Pilates exercise programmes, the maintenance of correct postural position is paramount. You are taught to think about the angle of your pelvis and curves of your

spine as you move. Soon they will become second nature and transfer across into everyday life.

The exercises also improve coordination, body alignment, and the stamina and endurance of your core postural muscles which can help to decrease the risks of problems as you get older. Balance is also improved and again this will lower the risks of falls in old age. The beauty of these exercises is that they can be adapted and done into old age, and are great for those wanting to take up exercise for the first time at any age. But as with all forms of exercise you should consult your GP first.

Pilates is all about natural flowing movement and is best done to relaxing music. Research has shown that the best stability is achieved by first drawing up the pelvic floor before 'engaging' the abdominal muscles, so each exercise begins with the pelvic floor. Pelvic floor exercises are important not only for stability but for maintaining continence later in life, particularly for women who have had children. There's also evidence that they are just as important for men and the younger you start the better.

Exercises are combined with specific breathing control, taking air deep into your lungs. Immense

concentration is needed and it is this total immersion in the exercise that enables you to reach a deep relaxation at the same time as working your muscles. You're asked to focus your mind on what each part of your body is doing with each movement. Your awareness of your own body is heightened, you begin to feel and sense each part of each movement taking place and with time and practice this awareness will transfer across into everyday activities. Friends will comment on the way you hold yourself and as we discussed in our Stitchlinks posture leaflet, improved posture will give you an air of confidence and even make you look thinner!

From basic to advanced

Pilates exercises have many levels, so you can start with the very easiest and gradually move on to making them more difficult as your strength and flexibility improve.

Another benefit is that a Pilates regime doesn't just target problem areas. If you want a flat tummy, it will do that, but it will also restore balance to your body so that every part works in harmony with each other and with your mind. It teaches you to be aware of, and listen to, your body and trains mind body communication. In the

main the exercises are not aerobic, so it's advisable to do some additional aerobic work. This makes them suitable for those who are unable to do a cardio vascular workout. It's important to bear in mind the principles of good posture and movement throughout other exercise and during your everyday life, too.

It takes a while to get the hang of Pilates but persevere and you'll soon start seeing and feeling the results. We haven't shown specific exercises as there are so many, and the ones you choose will depend on your particular needs. You'll find lots of Pilates books in the shops and on the internet and they're great for understanding the basic concepts, but we found the actual exercises are easier to learn from a class, DVD or video as written instructions can be a bit confusing. You'll find that anything written by Lynne Robinson or Gordon Thompson is usually pretty good. If you're thinking of joining a class ask the instructor if they hold a recognised qualification and how long it took them to qualify; a recognised course usually takes three months.

Visit www.bodycontrol.co.uk for more information on books, DVDs, videos and recognised instructors in your area. Have fun!

Always consult your GP before starting any exercise program.

4 tips to expand your horizon

- List the things you'd like to do, cross off the ones that are impractical like getting down to a size 8 and walking the Paris catwalks, then make the others happen.
- If there's something you hate doing but have to, organise a treat in advance so you look forward to this
- If you are accomplished at your craft or your work, move it on to the next level - perhaps learn a new stitch or a more complicated pattern.
- Look forward, don't look back at the past at the 'what might have beens'. You can't change them, but you do have the power to change the future and how you react to it.

Mind games

What number must be added to 100 and to 20 (the same number to each) so that the sums are in the ratio 3:1 ?

A: 20

Medical update



Nurture your body with good food, relaxation, stress management and plenty of sleep and you might just lose weight!...

A healthy diet is something you can live with forever – it doesn't have an end where you pile on the pounds when you revert to your previous eating habits.

This month we're going to give you a better understanding of food so you can use the knowledge to nurture your body to give it the building blocks and energy it needs. What you eat affects your physical wellbeing, your mental health and the way you behave and interact with the world.

There are three main food types; **proteins, carbohydrates and fats**. Your body also requires

these are usually incomplete and you will need to combine different foods to get the necessary complements. For example mixing rice and beans will give you a better range than rice on its own.

Good fat, bad fat

You'll know from our previous articles that there are different types of fats. **Saturated fat** is the main dietary cause of high cholesterol and is found mainly in animal products. You should aim to cut down on these by eating less red meat, cutting off visible fat and avoiding fast, processed

Omega 3 and Omega 6 essential fatty acids and whereas most of us get enough Omega 6, we need to make sure our intake of Omega 3 is sufficient. This is obtained from oily fish such as salmon and mackerel, and flaxseed. Omega 3 is increasingly recognised as being important to health.

Fats are needed for hormone production, cell membranes and a healthy nervous system. Certain vitamins are fat soluble and it's the only way we get these vitamins. A diet too low in fats can cause mood swings, joint pain, even wrinkles!

So briefly, trans fats are evil; saturated are bad; polyunsaturated are better, particularly Omega 3; monounsaturated are best and could lower your cholesterol, but remember all fats are high calorie!

"The key to successful weight control is to maintain stable blood sugar levels to banish cravings forever!"

vitamins, minerals, fibre and water for good health. We need all these but of the right type and in the correct balance. For example carbohydrates are essential fuel for brain function, but the wrong sort will cause mood swings and too many will be stored as fat.

Laying good foundations

Protein consists of a chain of amino acids, which is broken down by your digestive system into smaller molecules that enter your bloodstream. These are then used as building blocks by your cells to maintain and repair themselves. Your muscles, organs and immune system are mainly made of protein.

Your body creates some amino acids from other substances; these are called *non-essential* amino acids. But *essential* amino acids have to be obtained through food and the best sources are poultry, fish, lean meat, eggs and low-fat dairy products because they contain a complete source of protein. For vegetarians, plant sources also contain protein, but

food; grill, don't fry your food and switch to low-fat dairy products. It is also found in coconut oil and palm oil – used in snack foods and biscuits because they are cheap.

Trans fats are man made or processed fats, often labelled as hydrogenated vegetable oils in margarines and processed snacks such as crisps. They are added to products to prolong the shelf life. Trans fats pose a higher risk of heart disease than saturated fats and should be avoided as much as possible.

We all need a certain amount of fat and these are best obtained from **poly-** and **monounsaturated fats**, particularly monounsaturated which are thought to lower blood cholesterol. These are found mainly in plant products and extracts, such as olive oil, avocados, seeds and nuts.

One type of polyunsaturated fat is the **essential fatty acid** family or EFAs – and like the essential proteins your body can't make them, so you need to get them from your food. These are the

Understanding carbs

Carbohydrates have had a bad press over the last few years, particularly with diets such as the Atkins bringing seemingly 'fast fixes' to many celebrities. It's not advisable to cut out whole food groups as not only does it create cravings, but it can adversely affect your health. Carbohydrates provide energy for every cell in your body, and are an essential fuel for your brain. But you need the right type and amount, so it will help to understand more about them and how they work.

There are two sorts of carb; **simple** and **complex**. During digestion carbohydrates are broken down into sugar and enter the blood stream as glucose. A simple carbohydrate, such as glucose, passes directly into your bloodstream to give instant energy, whereas the complex carbs (or starches) such as wholemeal bread are more complicated structures, taking longer to break down into glucose for energy. For example, the glucose from a sweet

drink will enter your bloodstream at a rate of about 30 calories per minute, but the glucose from a slice of bread enters at about two calories per minute. Body builders refer to simple carbs as fast carbs and complex ones as slow carbs and this may be easier to follow.

"Isn't it better to get the energy quickly?" we can hear you say. No is the simple answer to that. When blood sugar levels rise rapidly it stimulates your pancreas to release a large amount of insulin to keep

"You have all the tools; knowledge, your stitching, and a support network behind you to be successful!"

your blood sugar at a safe level. This leads to a yo-yoing blood sugar level and a craving for sugary foods, which can cause mood swings and irritability. And, as we discussed last month, this can drive you to the biscuit tin even more. Refined foods tend to evoke a stronger, more rapid insulin reaction mainly because they lack natural fibre which delays the absorption of glucose.

Insulin's part

We all need insulin to survive; it controls our blood sugar levels, but it also tells your body to store fat and not to release it. It's the body's way of storing the excess energy for when it might need it later. Even a 'diet' fizzy drink can cause your blood sugar and insulin levels to spike making it very difficult to lose weight, particularly if you drink them throughout the day. A study from the University of Texas found that artificially sweetened drinks increased your risk of becoming overweight by 41% for every can you drink a day!

The key to successful weight control is to maintain stable blood sugar levels to banish those cravings forever. You can do this successfully by eating complex carbs as part of a balanced diet. The release of glucose into the blood stream is more even and slower – you'll be more satisfied for longer and you won't get those

sugary highs and lows. Any big meal will also stimulate the release of insulin, so eating smaller, more frequent meals, not only boosts your metabolism but keeps your blood sugar stable too.

It's possible to measure the rate foods are converted into glucose and absorbed into the blood, and by how much this raises blood sugar levels. Scientists have called this the Glycaemic Index (GI) which runs from 0-100 with glucose having a score of 100. Other foods

are then measured against this. See our Jargon panel on the following page (p10) for a brief explanation of the Glycaemic Index.

Your body will break down carbohydrates for energy use first, before fat, and if you take in more than you need your body will convert them to fat. Your body's storage capacity for carbohydrates is limited and even though the carbs you take in are fat free, any surplus will end up as fat. So you need to look at how active you are and adjust your carbohydrate intake accordingly.

The timing of meals is important as well. We learned last month that eating breakfast kick starts your metabolism and that the majority of obese people get at least half of all their calories after 6pm. Perhaps we can begin to understand why that is now...

If, for example, you eat a high calorie, high carbohydrate meal at 7pm and then sit and watch TV for the evening, your body is unable to use the fuel it has just consumed – so it's converted to fat. If you eat a high carb meal an hour or two before exercise, you use that fuel to give you the energy you need.

The logic

So with this knowledge it made perfect sense to us to think about cutting down on simple carbs and eating more of the complex variety using the GI index as a guide. Also

it makes sense to look at your exercise levels and to eat more of this food group before activity and less when you know you're not going to need as much fuel. The numerous diets available are confusing, but this explanation made perfect logical sense to us.

A note of warning here, foods marked 'low-fat' often have a high sugar content which will cause swings in blood sugar levels. And as we mentioned before you should avoid low calorie, fizzy drinks for the same reason.

Relaxation and managing stress can help you lose weight, too. Stress releases cortisol into the blood stream, which encourages fat storage. Stress also increases adrenalin which stimulates insulin production leading to cravings for sugary, fatty foods. So learn to manage your stress by setting aside time to stitch every day. It could help you to maintain a healthy weight as well as mind.

Tools for success

Recent research has shown a link between tiredness, lack of sleep and obesity. The research showed that people who habitually slept for about five hours had 15% more of the hormone that increases feelings of hunger and 15% less of the hormone that suppresses appetite. Having eight hours uninterrupted sleep every night could help you lose those extra pounds. And if those ever circling thoughts are preventing you falling asleep, you have the perfect solution. Half an hour's knitting or stitching before bed will give your mind a rest enabling you to switch off for a deeper sleep.

The support of friends is important when making lifestyle changes, so we've added a section to the Forum for those who'd like to achieve a healthier weight. Use it to support each other and you'll soon see a difference.

It's not an impossible task if you make the changes step-by-step. You have all the tools for success; knowledge, your stitching and friends to support you.

More tips to gain and maintain a healthy weight...

- **Prepare yourself** – Start by taking small steps towards your goal. Prepare yourself and work out a plan of action for meals and exercise. Cut 100 calories a day, you'll lose about 10 pounds in a year. Cut 250 calories a day and lose about two stone in a year. Cut 500 calories a day and lose about four stone in one year.
- **Be more active** – The more active you are the more calories you'll burn. Research has shown that people who can't sit still burn an extra 350 calories a day. Exercise also suppressed appetite and releases 'feel good' hormones.
- **Make lunch your main meal** – Make your evening meal small and protein based particularly if you're sitting watching TV or stitching.
- **Avoid multitasking** – When you're distracted it's much easier to overeat. Pay attention to what you eat and enjoy every mouthful. Only eat sitting down and concentrate on chewing slowly enjoying the taste and texture of every mouthful.
- **Avoid fast food restaurants** – Research has shown that those who visit fast food restaurants more than twice a week gained five kilos more than those who ate there only on rare occasions.
- **Cut down on alcohol** – 21 units of alcohol a week is equivalent to 2,500 calories a week.
- **Eat slowly** – It takes 20 minutes for the 'full' message to reach your brain.
- **Prepare for cravings** – Keep a store of healthy foods in your fridge to snack on.
- **Be sensible** – A sensible rate of weight loss is 1-3lbs or ½-1½ kg a week. If your body isn't nourished correctly it will hang on to fat reserves.
- **Love yourself** – Use food as nourishment and don't punish yourself if you slip. This can so easily lead to a binge to lift your mood.
- **Use your stitching** – If you feel the impulse to snack or binge, wait ten minutes. Pick up your stitching and you'll find as you get engrossed in your stitching the impulse to eat will pass. Manage your stress levels and empty your mind before sleep with stitching too.
- **Contact other Stitchlinks members** – The support of friends is important when making lifestyle changes, so use the Forum to chat to others who will be doing the same.

Did you know?

Thirst can often feel like hunger, so make sure you drink plenty and next time you feel peckish, have a glass of water instead.

You burn more calories wearing casual clothes and comfy shoes than if you wear constricting clothing and heels, simply because you move more.

Frozen fruits and vegetables can have a higher nutritional content than fresh because they are often frozen immediately after picking. Fresh produce can be sitting on a shelf for a while which diminishes nutritional content.

Sugar suppresses the immune system. The sugar contained in two and a half 12-ounce cans of sodas reduced the ability of white blood cells to kill bacteria by about fifty percent. The effect lasts for up to five hours after drinking.

Jargon

• **The Glycaemic Index** – The Glycaemic Index is a measure of the speed at which you digest food and how much blood sugar levels rise after eating different foods. The faster this happens, the higher up the scale you'll find that food. The scale runs from 0-100 and as glucose is absorbed into the blood stream fastest this has been given a rating of 100.

Other foods have then been rated against this. Low GI foods are digested more slowly helping your body to maintain stable blood sugar, so that you stay satisfied for longer.

Ratings of 55 or under are considered to be low. Fruit, most vegetables, durum wheat pasta and basmati rice have low GI, while potatoes, white bread and refined cereals are higher.

We must emphasise that using GI is only part of healthy eating – some foods with a low GI rating have a high fat or salt content. For example a Mars Bar has a lower rating than a potato. So use the GI as a guide to a better understanding of food alongside the other tips we've given you.

To summarise: eat regularly to boost your metabolism, eat breakfast, chose a variety of foods and include fibre. Reduce saturated fats, particularly trans fats, whilst making sure you get enough good fats. Limit salt, alcohol and caffeine and drop even low calorie fizzy drinks.

Treat
yourself

What's new in store

The pleasure of planning your next project is all part of the fun

SAVE
20%

Opal cotton sock yarn

We thought we'd treat you to some cotton sock yarn now that summer's nearly here. This Opal self patterning yarn in shades of yellow, turquoise and green looks so fresh and summery that we just had to buy it for the shop!

Each ball weighs 100gms, enough for a pair of socks. The price to our members is **£5.50** a ball **saving 20%** on the RRP. Quote **code K-06061**. A free Get Knitted sock pattern will be included with all orders.

Buy a set of four double pointed 2.5mm needles for **£1.50**, quoting **code K-06062**.



Fyberspates sock yarn

SAVE
27%



This has to be our favourite Fyberspates colourway so far. Buy it without needles for **£7.25**, **saving 27%**. Quote **Code K-06063**. With needles for **£8.25**. **Code K-06064**. A Fyberspates sock pattern is included with all purchases.

Celtic Knot needle case

SAVE
20%



Another high quality kit from Textile Heritage. This needle case will make a fabulous gift if you can bear to part with it. The colours are vibrantly rich and the kit contains everything you need. Buy it for **£6**, **saving 20%**. **Code C-06061**.

Please fill in the order form on page 12 and make cheques payable to **Stitchlinks Limited**. Post with completed order form to **Stitchlinks, PO Box 3679, Bath, BA2 4WS** or alternatively visit our shop at www.stitchlinks.com to buy online or download an order form. We've taken a lot of care to ensure that our products are safe and of good quality, but we cannot accept responsibility for the misuse of goods.

Looking forward ...

With increasing interest in our work, we're looking forward to getting our stitching message across to groups across the world ...

With our membership steadily growing, there are more and more people who are hearing about the benefits of knitting and stitching. Every morning our email inboxes are fuller than the previous day. Excitingly, an increasing number of healthcare professionals are asking for information, too.

There's also increasing interest in the media. Betsan and Jeni are being interviewed by BBC Radio 4 on Wednesday May 24th. It's for a programme on knitting, which is being broadcast in November. We'll let you know the precise date nearer the time. Both are excited, but nervous, too.

One of the things we've been planning is a trial workshop in

conjunction with Depression Alliance. We hope this will take place in Cardiff, sometime in November. The aim is to link up a Depression Alliance group with a local knitting or stitching group for a fun few hours of chat and stitching. If this is successful then we will look at running similar events in other parts of the UK with other groups. If you have any ideas then please let us know.

Those of you with internet access will have noticed that we have been gradually changing the Forum and website and adding more information. There will soon be a section to support those who wish to lose weight, an easy-to-follow Socks for Complete Beginners Guide and a section which will contain photographs for

you to download free. We'd also like to get a list together of contact numbers for charities to knit and stitch for. So if anyone can help with supplying contact numbers, please let us know.

Last month we announced the launch of **Mindtwisters.co.uk** - a website to challenge the grey matter and for lovers of puzzles. It's now up and running and we'd encourage a visit for a good brain cell workout!

I know that some of you are in the middle of exams right now or have children who are, so we'd like to wish you all good luck and good stitching whilst you revise! Until next month, enjoy...



Order form

I would like to order the following

- Opal cotton sock yarn
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2.5 mm needles
Code K-06062
£1.50
- Fyberspates sock yarn
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With needles
Code K-06064
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- Textile Heritage Celtic Knot
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