

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!

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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.