

Eat Well: Food as Medicine

What a summer it has been!

Since my last article, we have experienced repeated spells of extraordinary heat across the UK. We have also seen considerable change nationally, including welcoming a new Prime Minister. Closer to home, gardens have needed rather more watering than usual, lawns have struggled with the heat, and many of us have simply been trying to keep cool. As September arrives, the children return to school, and our usual routines begin again. It also seems a fitting time to explore the final pillar in our Lifestyle Medicine journey: **eating well**.



Food Really Is Medicine

What we eat affects almost every part of our health. A healthy pattern of eating can reduce our risk of heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and some cancers, while supporting our gut health, weight and energy levels. But healthy eating can sometimes sound unnecessarily complicated. We hear about fasting, low-carbohydrate diets, superfoods, supplements and the latest foods we are apparently supposed to avoid. For most of us, the basics are much simpler.

Think About What You Can Add

Rather than starting with everything you shouldn't eat, ask: *What healthy food could I add to my plate?*

Perhaps another vegetable with dinner, fruit with lunch, beans or lentils in a stew, wholegrain bread instead of white, or a handful of nuts instead of biscuits.

September is a wonderful time to try this, with apples, pears, plums and many vegetables in season. You don't need exotic "superfoods". Some of the healthiest foods are ordinary foods that have been eaten for generations.

Another simple principle is to eat the rainbow. Different coloured fruits and vegetables provide different nutrients, so aim for variety rather than perfection.

What About Ultra-Processed Foods?

Not everything that comes in a packet is unhealthy. However, many ultra-processed foods contain lots of salt, sugar or unhealthy fats while providing relatively little fibre.

That doesn't mean never having biscuits, crisps, cake or a takeaway! An ice cream on a hot summer's day is part of enjoying life.

What matters most is our usual pattern of eating, not the occasional treat.

Food Is Also About People

Food doesn't just nourish our bodies; it brings us together. Cooking with children, sharing Sunday lunch or inviting a friend or neighbour for a meal can nourish our relationships too. Eating well therefore connects beautifully with another pillar we explored earlier this year: community and connection.

September Challenge

Choose just one or two:

- Add one extra portion of fruit or vegetables each day
- Eat a greater variety of colours during the week
- Swap one regular processed snack for fruit, yoghurt or nuts
- Cook one meal each week using mostly fresh ingredients
- Share a device-free meal with family, a friend or neighbour

There is no perfect diet. You don't need expensive foods, complicated recipes or the latest nutritional trend.

Over the past few months, we have explored movement, sleep, connection, managing stress, avoiding harm and now eating well. That completes our journey through the six pillars but not our Lifestyle Medicine journey. They all share one simple message:

Small changes, repeated regularly, can have a powerful effect on our health.

Warm wishes

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