

7 day refocus

Homeopathic treatment in the 21st century can be a challenge as we live in a world where contamination of food and our environment is rife. When a body is in a state of dis-ease (i.e. it is under stress mentally, emotionally or physically), homeopaths prescribe a remedy to stimulate the body's natural life force and allow it to return to its natural state of balance. However, we also have to take into account 'maintaining causes', which are factors that serve to keep us in a state of dis-ease.

Diet is one of the biggest contributors to maintaining causes. It is also one of the most contentious and the thing that many people get very defensive about.

These details are designed to help everyone. If you identify with any of the points please do not feel they are aimed directly at you. They're not. In the current world we are all struggling to make sense of what is going on around us, and what we consume. If you are experiencing dis-ease you need to make changes, continuing the same habits and expecting a different outcome makes no sense.

Health is our greatest gift and without it life becomes increasingly hard. It is within the grasp of most people to contribute to a greater level of health by adjusting their diet (however good they think it is at the current time).

Any state of dis-ease (physical, mental or emotional) is likely to have a dietary contributing factor and if you hear yourself saying that 'I don't eat as badly as xy or z', that 'I only have processed food occasionally' (crisps, sweets, ready meals) / aspartame / sweeteners / excess alcohol, cigarettes etc, you are missing the point. Those are excuses and justifications in your own mind so that you don't have to take responsibility and make changes.

There are three main factors which contribute to a poor / unbalanced diet:

1. a lack or under-consumption of fresh seasonal fruit and vegetables
2. a lack of dietary fibre
3. the over-consumption of sugar, common salt, additives & unhealthy fats

These are all easy to address if we embrace change with an open mind and real desire.

1. Lack or under-consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables

Government guidelines suggest that we eat 5 portions of fresh fruit and vegetables a day. This is downgraded from the scientific advice that we eat 10 portions. Why so? Because the government believes that people will see 10 portions as unattainable and therefore give up entirely and not bother eating any. However you look at it, if you're not even eating 5 portions, you're not eating enough. 5 should be the absolute minimum – daily. Why? Because fresh fruit and vegetables provide us with vitamins and other nutrients that we need for the body to function in a state of health. They are the building blocks and the 'cement' which keep everything in balance. They are water-dense and fibre-dense and this is what keeps cells healthy. What are healthy cells and what do they do?

Healthy cells are soft and flexible, they let nutrients in and toxins out. They are our energy batteries affecting metabolism and healthy brain function (mood).

Eating a good variety of seasonal fruit and vegetables is the basis for good health and should never be underestimated. For optimal health 80% of our diet should consist of fresh fruit and veg. For most people this is unattainable in the short term but it must not put you off. Increased consumption will lead to greater wellbeing that will spur you on to greater consumption still. Start increasing your intake (eat something raw before every meal), and do not count processed fruit and veg (e.g. flavoured yoghurts, fruit juices, dried fruit in processed cereals, processed desserts, ready meal vegetarian curries etc) as these will contain excess amounts of sugar, salt and harmful fat.

Your digestion may initially protest. Why? The most common reason is that you have faeces impacted in your gut. You may not think you are constipated but years of low-fibre, low-nutrient food will have taken their toll and this needs to be addressed. Short-term discomfort such as excess wind is not a reason to give up and once your body has adjusted this will no longer be a problem.

2. A lack of dietary fibre

Dietary fibre is in all fruit and vegetables and all wholegrains (wholemeal bread, brown rice, wholewheat pasta etc). Processed foods from white flours and grains (i.e. refined carbohydrates) are almost completely devoid of fibre. A healthy gut is our best defence against disease. It is the 'soil' from which all health grows. If you want to feel well you cannot make excuses about preferring white bread, white rice etc. they should no longer appear on your radar (except in rare circumstances). Fibre is paramount like it or not. A healthy gut relies on fibre so that it can perform the function of peristalsis effectively. This is how food is processed through the gut, nutrients are extracted and proper elimination takes place daily.

3. Over-consumption of sugar, common salt, additives & unhealthy fats

There are many ways in which we over-consume sugar. Sweets, cakes, biscuits and ready meals are just the tip of the iceberg. Carbohydrates are sugars – wholegrains contain fibre and more balanced sugars that the body can naturally process and use, refined carbohydrates (white bread, pasta, rice etc) however are simple sugars that upset the body's balance. Alcohol is sugar.

Common salt is used as a cheap filler and additive in processed foods and snacks. Along with sugar and additives it is used by the food industry to produce a 'bliss point'. This is the level which they have found will 'coerce' you into eating more of the product more frequently. Salt interferes with cell membranes, it makes them more brittle and less able to absorb and use nutrients effectively. It affects the body's natural water balance which is essential for good health.

Additives (including all artificial sweeteners such as aspartame, splendor sweet 'n low, sugars in – ol e.g. sorbitol), e-numbers and other ingredients

which are chemically manufactured) also affect cell membranes. In addition, because they are foreign agents which the body doesn't know how to process, an unnatural reaction occurs which produces free-radicals. These molecules are responsible for dis-ease in all sorts of forms and disrupt body chemistry to such a degree that normal function is impossible.

Unhealthy fats come from all processed foods. Low-fat options present further problems. They are generally higher in sugar and salt to compensate for taste and mouth-feel that is altered by removing the naturally occurring essential fatty acids. They represent foreign invaders and the body doesn't know what to do with them so stores them as toxins. The cell walls then become more rigid and fat levels increase.

Natural fats (full fat dairy products including butter, natural fats in meat, nuts and seeds, olive oil and avocados) on the other hand, help cell membranes remain soft and flexible and are essential in the diet in moderate quantities.

So what to do? Keep your diet simple and natural – eat fresh, seasonal fruit and vegetables and wholegrains and avoid processed foods and additives.

Here is a 7-day plan. Firstly acknowledge that you are undertaking this because you are experiencing some kind of dis-ease. Allow yourself 7 days to give your digestive system a spring clean. 7 days in the scheme of things is a very short space of time and your body deserves a rest. It does everything in its' powers to keep you in balance 24:7, 365 days a year and any symptoms of disease you experience are its way of telling you that something isn't right.

You will need to be acutely self-aware during this process. For example, if you find that you really want to eat something after an argument, you are using food as a distraction or to punish yourself. If you feel totally resistant to spending the next 7 days eating properly (and feelings of why me, poor me, life's not fair, keep rearing their ugly heads) then you need to ask yourself why you are so resistant to change.

Start as soon as possible and if that can't be straight away then still begin by increasing your fruit and veg intake and reducing the amount of processed foods you eat.

What about cost? Yes fruit and vegetables are expensive but when you have pruned out all the unnecessary extras (sodas, processed foods, crisps, chocolates, biscuits etc) you should find that you are quids-in financially and massively quids-in from a health perspective. Remember this is only for 7 days and after that you can go back to where you were before or continue to make healthy choices using your own ideas and recipes.

Drink mainly water during the 7 days. An occasional coffee is fine (not packet cappuccino mixes) as is tea (preferably green or white with no milk). Herb teas using a single ingredient are also OK but avoid all flavoured teas such as fruit teas, white or green tea with fruits, lemon and ginger, honey and vanilla etc.

Eat 3 meals a day and aim not to snack at all in between. If you really need something then have fresh fruit, sticks of vegetables (good to have chopped and stored in the fridge) or nuts / seeds (measure out 50g at the start of the day and do not exceed this amount). The suggestions below should suffice for 7 days. Some options will need to be repeated. There are no overly expensive or difficult to find ingredients. Please be vigilant and follow the suggestions to the letter e.g. if the suggestion is something followed by a banana then do not substitute any other fruit. If an option is something like chicken and doesn't suggest bread, rice or potatoes with it then don't add them. Wine is occasionally suggested as an extra but avoid if possible for the 7 day period.

BREAKFASTS

1. One type of fruit with natural yoghurt or coconut milk. Add up to one dessertspoon each of any of the following – wheat or oat bran or germ, desiccated coconut, raisins or sultanas, ground or flaked almonds, pumpkin, sunflower or sesame seeds. Add one teaspoon of honey or maple syrup if absolutely necessary.
2. One or two slices of wholemeal toast with butter.
3. Raw muesli (see recipe below)
4. Porridge (not microwave) made with water. Add natural yoghurt or one small spoonful of crème fraiche at the end of cooking to make creamy. Serve with a banana if desired and up to one dessertspoon each of any of the following – desiccated coconut, raisins or sultanas, ground or flaked almonds, pumpkin, sunflower or sesame seeds. Add one teaspoon of honey or maple syrup if absolutely necessary.
5. Apple followed by bacon, eggs and grilled tomatoes (no toast). This is a very occasional option and should not be repeated every day.

LUNCH

This will need planning and making the evening before if you have to take lunch to work with you. If you are at home then you can prepare before eating.

1. A decent sized portion of chopped vegetables followed by homemade vegetable soup and wholemeal bread or natural oat cakes with a small amount of butter. Banana to follow if required.
2. A large salad with cheese, egg, fish, avocado or meat. Fresh fruit (not banana) with natural yoghurt if desired.
3. Wholemeal salad sandwich, containing houmous if desired. Extra sticks of fresh veg – cucumber, carrots etc Banana to follow if required.
4. Chopped vegetables, houmous or guacamole (avocado dip) and oatcakes. Banana to follow if required.
5. Brown rice, whole wheat pasta, or quinoa salad with lots of salad vegetables and fresh herbs. Moisten with olive oil, a small amount of crème fraiche and flavor with a little natural sea salt. (No meat, fish, cheese or eggs).
6. Cold tortilla (omelet with cheese, ham, chicken & lots of vegetables but no potatoes) served with salad. Fresh fruit (not banana) with natural yoghurt if desired.

SUPPER

Chopped fresh salad veg – cucumber, carrots, tomatoes, celery etc followed by:

1. Baked potato served in its skin with a small amount of butter or crème fraiche, tinned, frozen or fresh sweet corn, mushrooms sautéed in butter and olive oil plus loads of fresh vegetables and a salad. Banana or papaya to follow if required.
2. Vegetable curry served with brown rice. Can include potato or sweet potato and butternut squash. Banana or papaya to follow if required.
3. Vegetable stir fry Add the juice of half a lemon and a spoonful of tamari (natural soya sauce) per person towards the end of cooking. If an animal protein is required then stir fry chicken, prawns, duck or steak in the pan first. Remove before cooking the vegetables then return to the pan to warm through. Vegetarians can use tofu instead. Fresh fruit (not banana) with natural yoghurt if desired. One small glass of wine if desired.
4. Chicken breast baked in the oven with lemon juice and garlic to taste (no oil required, the chicken will produce enough fat), served with loads of fresh veg (not potatoes, sweet potatoes, Jerusalem artichokes or winter squashes) and salad. Fresh fruit (not banana) with natural yoghurt if desired. One small glass of wine if desired.
5. Tortilla as above (number 6) but serve hot and make extra to pack for lunch the next day. Loads of veg (not potatoes, sweet potatoes, Jerusalem artichokes or winter squashes) and salad. Fresh fruit (not banana) with natural yoghurt if desired. One glass of wine if desired.
6. Whole wheat pasta (cook extra for a salad the next day) served with a vegetable sauce (no meat, fish or cheese). Wholemeal garlic bread made with a mixture of butter and olive oil. Banana or papaya to follow if required.
7. Any grilled fish or meat (can be done on skewers) with salad and vegetables (not potatoes, sweet potatoes, Jerusalem artichokes or winter squashes). Vegetarians can have tofu or paneer cheese instead. Fresh fruit (not banana) with natural yoghurt if desired. One small glass of wine if desired.

At the end of the 7 days you should be feeling better physically and emotionally. You can then reassess and decide how you want to carry on making improvements to your life through healthy eating.

RAW MUESLI

Raw muesli is one of the best breakfasts you could possibly have. This is because it contains a range of healthy ingredients that you can vary on an on-going basis. Soaking the grains and seeds overnight takes them to a pre-sprouting stage making their nutrients more absorbable and the breakfast even more nutritious.

It can be classed as alkali-forming, neutral or acid-forming depending on the additions you make. The grains themselves however, being soaked overnight, lose a lot of their acid-forming properties and because they are consumed in such small quantities do not need to be counted as a starch.

My advice on this one is don't stress on it's classification but enjoy frequently,

varying ingredients to suit availability and your tastes.

I make up a Tupperware box full of the mixture and keep in the fridge for months, just removing 1-2 tablespoons in the evening to soak overnight in water and use the next day. It's really easy when you get into the habit and you have to try it to find out how delicious it is.

Base recipe - use the following quantities as a guideline.

1 tbsp each of any or all of the following - rolled oats, oat meal, oat bran, wheat germ, rye flakes, rice flakes or quinoa flakes (or any combination you like). 1 tbsp of mixed seeds such as sunflower, sesame, pumpkin, hemp or linseed (vary as required). Once you have a mix you like then increase the quantities and store as detailed above.

You can also add - ground almonds, desiccated or flaked coconut, chopped nuts, raisins and/or sultanas, and for a natural chocolate flavour raw cocoa powder or nibs or carob.

How to prepare: the evening before required measure into a bowl 1-2 tablespoons of your mix and add in an equal amount of liquid – water, rice or oat milk or coconut water. Cover with a saucer and leave to soak overnight. In the morning add in 1-2 grated apples, or a chopped banana or pear and a heaped tablespoon of natural yoghurt (Total Greek full fat is best) or a few tablespoons of other natural yoghurt (cow's, sheep's, goat's) or homemade coconut yoghurt. Mix together and enjoy.