Food News

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Welcome to Food News. Spring's edition of Food News is jam packed. Firstly with the abundance of vegetables coming into Spring, we are revisiting articles about gut health, the importance of 'five-a-day' and the evidence around prebiotics and probiotics and their use in the diet, questioning if supplementation is needed. We are also looking at what processed food means.

We will fill you in on how we celebrated Nutrition and Hydration Week and lastly, we will look at what foods are in season and provide a tasty recipe for you to try.

Inside this issue:

Food News

is produced by the education & choice sub-group of Warwickshire Food forum

The forum is a multi-agency partnership aiming to improve food choices for people in Warwickshire.

The focus is on making food affordable, sustainable and providing information to help people make healthy choices. The group will also ensure that there is Warwickshire wide help for people who have difficulty affording food.

Nutrition Challenges: JSNA Snapshot

254,500 estimated number of working age adults (33%) who are not eating their 'five-a-day' fruits and vegetables across Warwickshire

Fibre

96% of adults did not meet recommended levels of fibre intake.

Red and Processed Meat

1 in 4 adult men eat over 90 grams of red and processed meat per day.

Vitamin D

Deficiency in adults was 18%, rising to 31% in Winter.

Ultra-Processed Food

As much as 54% of adult calories were accounted for by UPF.

Saturated Fat

82% of adults did not meet the recommended limits for saturated fats.

Soft Drinks

Consumption of sugar-sweetened drinks tends to decrease with increasing household income.

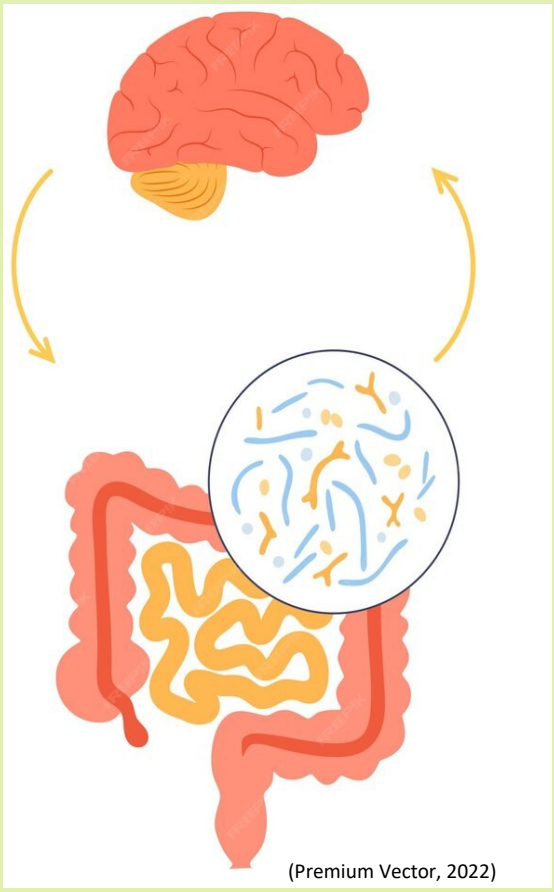
Source: Thriving Adults JSNA

Gut Health: The Key to a Happier, Healthier You

What is Gut health?

Gut health has emerged as one of the most popular topics in wellness. Our gut, often referred to as the "second brain," is home to trillions of microbes—bacteria, viruses, and fungi—that form a complex ecosystem called the microbiome (Sasso *et al.,* 2023).

A healthy gut can serve as the cornerstone for a functioning body and mind, supporting everything from immunity to digestion to mental well-being.



(Premium Vector, 2022)

Key benefits of a healthy gut:

- Enhanced Digestion and Nutrient Absorption: our gut bacteria play a crucial role in breaking down food, helping the body absorb essential nutrients like vitamins and minerals. A healthy gut and balanced microbiome can significantly reduce issues such as, bloating, gas, and indigestion, making digestion smoother and more efficient (Chen et al., 2015).
- Stronger Immune System: The gut contains over 70% of the body's immune cells, and a varied microbiome can boost immunity. Healthy gut bacteria can protect against harmful pathogens by outcompeting them and even help regulate inflammation, making your body more resilient to illness (Lipski, 2020).
- Mental Health Boost: The gut-brain connection is emerging research. The microbes in your gut produce neurotransmitters like serotonin, which is crucial for mood regulation. A healthy gut has been linked to reduced anxiety and depression, as well as improved cognitive function. This is why some scientists now call the gut the "second brain" (Peirce *et al.,* 2019). More research is being done in this area.
- Weight Management: Fat storage and metabolism are influenced by the bacteria in the gut. A diverse microbiome may contribute to more stable weight management by regulating appetite and lowering cravings. Additionally, studies indicate that specific microorganisms in the gut might facilitate the digestion of complex carbohydrates like fibre, which helps people maintain a healthy weight (Davis, 2016).

How to Nourish Your Gut with Food

Achieving a healthy gut starts on your plate.

Here are some gut-friendly foods that can support and balance your microbiome:

- **Fibre-Rich Foods:** Prebiotics, which nourish your gut bacteria, are just as important as probiotics. High-fibre foods such as **fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and legumes** provide the nutrients that beneficial bacteria thrive on. Notably, garlic, onions, asparagus, and bananas are excellent sources of prebiotic fibers that support the growth of healthy microbes in your gut (Krumbeck *et al.*, 2016).

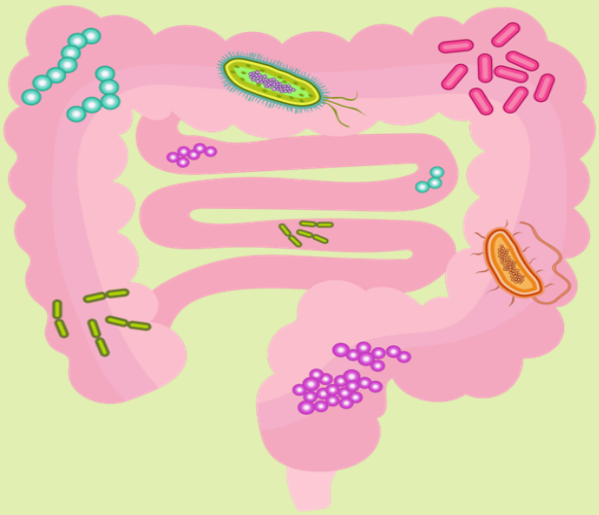
- **Fermented Foods:** Foods like **yogurt, kefir, sauerkraut, kimchi, and miso** are rich in probiotics—live bacteria that replenish the gut microbiome. Adding these to your diet can help maintain a healthy balance of gut bacteria and support digestion (Butel, 2014).

- **Omega-3 Fatty Acids:** Found in fatty fish like salmon, flaxseeds, and chia seeds, omega-3 fatty acids have anti-inflammatory properties that can help reduce inflammation in the gut and support the overall health of the microbiome (Costantini et al., 2017).

- **Polyphenol-Rich Foods:** Polyphenols are plant compounds that have antioxidant properties and can contribute to gut health. Foods including dark chocolate and berries and green tea are sources of polyphenols that promote the growth of beneficial gut bacteria (Jawhara, 2024).

- **Limit** Ultra-Processed Foods and Sugar: Eating too many ultra-processed foods and sugary snacks can nourish harmful bacteria in your gut, which may disrupt the balance of your microbiome. Over time, this imbalance can lead to digestive problems and ongoing inflammation, making it harder for your immune system to function well. By choosing more whole, unprocessed foods (such as fruits and vegetables), you can help create a healthier environment for the beneficial bacteria in your gut (Baspakova *et al.,* 2023).

A healthy gut goes beyond just good digestion; it is essential for your overall health. By adding gut-friendly foods to your diet, you can nurture a microbiome that promotes a happier and healthier you.



(Lonsdale, 2023)

How To Meet 5 A Day Guidelines

What is the 5 a day guideline?

Recommendations are that we should all be aiming to consume at least 400g, or 5 portions, of a wide variety of fruit and vegetables each day. This will reduce our risk of chronic diseases and help ensure sufficient daily intake of dietary fibre (World Health Organization (WHO), 2020).

(Safefood, 2024)

How does consuming fruit and vegetables help with gut health?

Fruits:

- Fruits are vital for maintaining overall health, particularly when it comes to supporting a healthy gut.
- Fruits are rich in soluble and insoluble fibre, which are essential for gut function. Soluble fibre, found in fruits like apples, pears, and berries, aids in controlling bowel movements and improve absorption (fruit peel and seeds). Insoluble fibre, found in fruits like oranges and grapes, increases stool volume, prevents constipation, and promotes regularity.
- Fruits, like bananas, are rich in natural sugars and prebiotics, such as insulin, which promotes healthy gut bacteria growth and maintains a balanced microbiota (Slavin, 2013).
- Additionally, fruits like berries and citrus contain antioxidants and polyphenols, which reduce inflammation and protect the intestine lining.

Vegetables:

- Vegetables are essential for healthy digestion, providing minerals and fibre. Leafy greens and cruciferous vegetables like kale and broccoli are rich in insoluble fibre, aiding in intestinal regularity.
- Prebiotic fibers in vegetables like leeks, onions, and garlic support gut flora (Carlson et al., 2018).
- Short-chain fatty acids produced by bacteria improve gut health and reduce inflammation.
- Vegetables are also rich in antioxidants, reducing the risk of gut-related conditions like leaky gut syndrome, irritable bowel syndrome, and colon cancer.

Probiotics & Prebiotics - is there a need for supplements & powders in our diet?

Social media has a lot of talk on prebiotics & probiotics and ways to buy them, such as supplements and powders that can be bought online or in many shops. Big claims are made that they will completely change your gut health and therefore improve your overall health. These claims range from weight loss, to fighting colds & flus, to controlling blood sugar and boosting mood (Holland and Barrett, 2022). BUT are these statements true and are prebiotics and probiotics needed?

Prebiotics

- They do not contain any live bacteria or microorganism
- They are a type of insoluble fibre
- They provide a food source for the bacteria already in the gut
- There is a wide range of prebiotics with some feeding specific bacteria, some others are used by groups of bacteria.
- Naturally present in wide range of foods from plants e.g. vegetables and whole grains (ISAPP, 2022)

Probiotics

- Are live microorganism
- Found in active cultured dairy products, supplements, and some fermented foods
- They also work in the large intestine where they compete with existing bacteria in the gut for nutrients and aim to take up residency.
- Promote balance of microbes in the microbiome of the gut (Pandey et al., 2015; Pichon, 2024).

Benefits of consuming prebiotics and probiotics.

- Studies have found that probiotics help reduce the risk and duration of the common cold and chest infections (Jenkins & Mason, 2022; Quigley, 2019; Lin et al., 2014).
- They restore beneficial bacteria in the gut after antibiotic treatment, and associated diarrhoea (Pandey et al., 2015).
- Have a positive impact on vitamins and minerals such as B12, iron, zinc, calcium, and folate aiding in absorption (Pichon, 2024).
- There is some emerging evidence of our gut health affecting our mood but no solid evidence to back the use of probiotics to help with mood (Jenkins & Mason, 2022).
- Prebiotics studies have found they can assist and help with our gut function, such as improving digestion, improving bowels movements, help boost immune system, promoting absorption of calcium and aid in feeling fuller for longer (Quigley, 2019; Jenkins & Mason, 2022; Pichon, 2024).

Overall, taking probiotics and prebiotics are beneficial to the gut but they may not be effective for everyone as one size does not fit all. Most probiotic supplements are targeted for healthy adults without a compromised immune system or underlying health condition (WGO Global Guidance, 2023; Markowiak & Slizewska, 2017). Also, consider how effective a supplement or powder is when a balanced diet, full of a variety of foods, is the best way to support our gut.

Speak to your health care professional before taking any supplements.

Are probiotics and prebiotics more effective through supplements or diet?

- The most recent evidence tells us to aim consistently for a balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, dairy, and fermented foods. This way you naturally get prebiotics in your diet and help nourish beneficial bacteria in the gut (Oh *et al.,* 2021; Andoh, 2016).
- Research also tells us that fermented foods like kefir, kombucha, sauerkraut, and sourdough contain live microorganisms. However, these foods can vary in quality and might not meet the definition of a probiotic product (Oh *et al.*, 2021: Jenkins & Mason, 2022).
- With supplements it is different, where the packaging will explain all the ingredients and type of strain and the specific amount thus increasing the chance of the probiotics being affective. These come in the form of powders and capsules that can be taken daily (Ferraris *et al.,* 2020).
- However, clinical trials have been conducted that indicate that specific strains of probiotics work better with certain health conditions. When choosing a prebiotic for a specific problem do the research on what strain will work best for you and speak to healthcare professional (Tomasik & Tomasik, 2003).

How to Include probiotics and prebiotics in the diet?

Prebiotics

- Fruits and veg such as bananas, onion, berries, garlic, and leeks
- Some products can have prebiotics added to them such as biscuits, cereals & dairy products (Ferraris et al., 2020).

Probiotic

- They are not in all fermented foods, but some include yoghurts, Kombucha (fermented tea drink), Sourdough bread and Kimchi (fermented spicy cabbage) (Rinninella *et al.,* 2019).

In summary:

- Fermented foods offer a natural source of probiotics but often lack the precise characterization and standardization of supplements.
- Probiotic supplements, with their defined strains and dosages, allow for targeted interventions based on clinical research.
- A balanced diet rich in prebiotics is essential for nourishing a healthy gut microbiota and may enhance the effectiveness of probiotic supplements as stated previously.
- Speak to healthcare professional if you plan to take any probiotic supplements and *visit the NHS website for more information on Probiotics; Probiotics - NHS (www.nhs.uk)*

Processed foods are a part of everyday life

The term 'ultra-processed foods' comes from the NOVA food classification system, which differentiates food into 4 categories based on how much they have been processed during their production, in brief;

Unprocessed foods: fruit, vegetables, eggs, meat and grains

Minimally processed foods: may have been dried, crushed, roasted, frozen, boiled or pasteurised, but contain no added ingredients. They include frozen fruits and vegetables, frozen fish, pasteurised milk, 100% fruit juice, no-added-sugar yoghurt, spices and dried herbs

Processed culinary ingredients: sugar, salt, butter, lard, oils, vinegar

Processed foods: canned or bottled vegetables, fruits and legumes; salted or sugared nuts and seeds; salted, cured, or smoked meats; canned fish; fruits in syrup; cheeses and unpackaged freshly made breads

Ultra processed (Similar to processed items but include industrial formulations typically with five or more ingredients, many not commonly found in culinary ingredients and with additives whose purpose is to imitate sensory qualities, extend shelf life, disguise undesirable qualities, etc.)**:** ice cream, ham, sausages, pre-prepared meals, chicken nuggets, crisps, mass-produced bread (because of emulsifiers or colourings), breakfast cereals, biscuits, carbonated drinks, fruit-flavoured yogurts, instant soups, pastries, buns, cakes, pre-prepared chips, Plant-based meat and cheese substitutes are also ultra-processed and some alcoholic drinks including whisky, gin, and rum

All of these foods can be a part of a balanced diet. An accessible way to think of them is everyday foods, good choice, and foods to consume less often and in smaller portions

Ultra-processed foods are often high in saturated fat, salt and sugar. When we eat some of these foods, we leave less room in our diets for more nutritious foods which are better for our health. Research also shows that the additives in these foods could be responsible for negative health effects and associated with over-eating, so some are best to have less often.

Are Ultra-Processed Foods All Bad?

The short answer to this is no. It is important to remember that, *"NOVA is the food classification that categorises foods according to the extent and purpose of food processing, rather than in terms of nutrients"* (Monteiro, Cannon, Levy, et al, 2016). This means a food or drink is considered ultra-processed based on how it was made and what has been added to it. This can include food staples such as wholemeal, seeded bread (which is great for getting more fibre in our diet). Also, tomato pasta sauce may be considered ultra-processed however it can be a part of a balanced diet. It is one of your 'five-a-day' and especially great if you add vegetables and wholemeal pasta and it.

Food fortification, adding vitamins and minerals into foods, is a form of processing; however can be very beneficial. Some high-fibre breakfast cereals, with added vitamins and minerals, are a good option for a quick and nutritious breakfast.

In addition to food fortification, preservatives or stabilisers may be added to extend shelf life, making them ultra-processed. This could be foods such as hummus (a great way to get plant based protein and increase your fibre intake) or baked beans (another good plant based protein and source of fibre).

In Brief

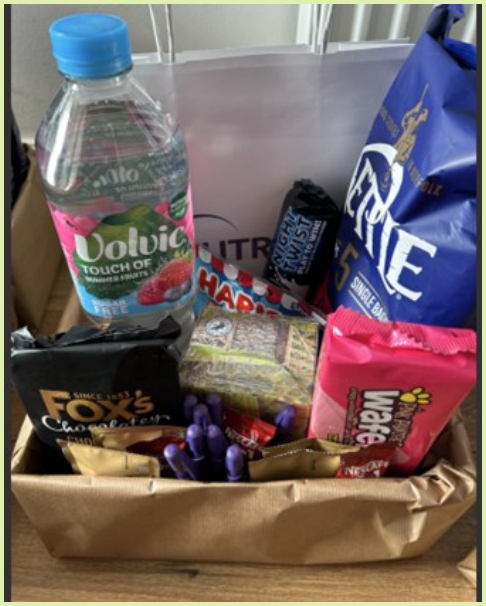
Yes, we should be cooking at home as much as possible instead of eating out or having ready meals. "*The golden rule is to always prefer natural or minimally processed foods and freshly made dishes and meals to ultra-processed products*" (Monteiro, Cannon, Levy, et al, 2016).

However, ultra-processed foods can be a part of a balanced diet. The food to try to cut back on are ultra-processed foods that are high in fat, salt and sugar—think crisps, bacon, sausages, cola, cakes and biscuits. These foods are a part of our culture and celebrations, but may not be every day foods. Focus on the benefits the food has to your health. Read the nutrition label and look at the traffic light system. It is about balance, not perfection.

Nutrition and Hydration Week at SWFT

Nutrition and Hydration week was in March and SWFT dietetics teamed up with nursing and Nutricia to encourage staff and patients to look after their nutrition and hydration with three key messages:

* **Have plenty of plant based fibre in your diet.** This is includes beans, pulses, legumes, fruits, vegetables and wholemeal foods.
* **Every day enjoy plant based sources of protein such as lentils or chickpeas, and once a week have oily fish such as salmon which is rich in Omega 3 or flax seeds for a vegan option.**
* **Stay hydrated with 6—8 glasses of water a day, but all fluids count.**



The first six wards to hang up the posters received a treats hamper, kindly donated by Rebecca Mitchell, RD, Clinical Territory Manager – Adult Oral Nutrition, at Nutricia.

Nutrition and Hydration Week 2026

Fibre

Evidenced to reduce risk of heart disease, stroke, diabetes and bowel cancer. Sources include wholegrain carbohydrates, pulses, fruit and vegetables

The recommended fibre target is 30g per day, but only 4% of us meet this goal!

Protein

Protein needs are usually met for the average adult, but plant based sources and oily fish are neglected.

Pulses such as lentils and chickpeas are excellent sources of fibre, and oily fish like salmon are rich in omega 3

Fluid

All fluids count as a source of hydration, try to chose sugar free options where possible and limit fruit juice to 150ml per day

What's in Season?

Here is a list of what fruit and veg are in season this Spring & a recipe to try

Fruit

March and **April**: Rhubarb with strawberries also coming into season in **May**.

Vegetables

March

Artichoke, Beetroot, Cabbage, Carrots, Chicory, Leeks, Parsnip, Purple Sprouting Broccoli, Radishes, Sorrel, Spring Greens, Spring Onions, Watercress

April

Adding to the list: New Potatoes, Kale, Morel Mushrooms, Rocket and Spinach

May

Adding more to the list: Aubergine, Chillies, Elderflowers, Lettuce, Marrow, Peas, Peppers, and Samphire

Blueberry, Walnut & Banana Muffins by Riverford

Ingredients

- 100g unsalted butter
- 50g walnuts
- 180g caster sugar
- 3 ripe bananas (you'll need 200g of mashed banana)
- 1 egg
- 250g self-raising flour
- 1 tsp bicarbonate of soda
- pinch of salt
- 120ml milk
- 125g punnet blueberries

Method

Step 1: Preheat your oven to 180°C/Gas 4.
Step 2: Line 12-hole muffin/cupcake tray with paper cases.
Step 3: Put the butter in a small pan and melt it over a gentle heat.
Step 4: Meanwhile, coarsely chop the walnuts and mix them in a small bowl with 2 tbsp of the sugar. Add 2 tbsp of the melted butter and give it all a good mix together. This will be the walnut topping. Keep to one side.
Step 5: Tip the remaining sugar and melted butter into a mixing bowl and whisk them together for 1 min. Add the mashed bananas and whisk until the bananas are smooth. Next whisk in the egg, followed by the milk.
Step 6: Sift the flour and bicarb into a separate mixing bowl and add a pinch of salt. Stir them together so that they are evenly mixed.
Step 7: Add the flour to the wet mix and fold it together a couple of times until half-mixed. Avoid using an electric mixer for this part; use a spatula or wooden spoon instead. Now add the blueberries and fold it together a few more times, until it has just come together into a batter. Take care to not overmix it; stop as soon as you stop seeing any dry parts in the mix.
Step 8: Now divide the mix evenly into the muffin tray and sprinkle some walnut topping on each one.
Step 9: Transfer gently to the oven and bake for 25-30 mins, until golden and risen. A knife tip or skewer should come out clean when they are ready. Leave to cool in the tin for 5 mins before cooling on a rack. Muffins are best eaten the day they are made, preferably still slightly warm. They will keep for a couple of days if you make sure to store them in an airtight container as soon as they have cooled.

Method

Preparation time: **15 mins** / Cooking time: **30 mins** / Vegetarian

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Gut Health: The Key to a Happier, Healthier You

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