

# Food News

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**Welcome to Food News.** This months edition of Food News has a focus on bowel health. We will explore whether or not you need to buy 'bacteria boosting' commercial food products to have a healthy gut and also look into how diet can keep your bowel happy and prevent constipation.

As always we will take a look at what foods are in season and what's news in social media.



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## Warwickshire Food Forum

### 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

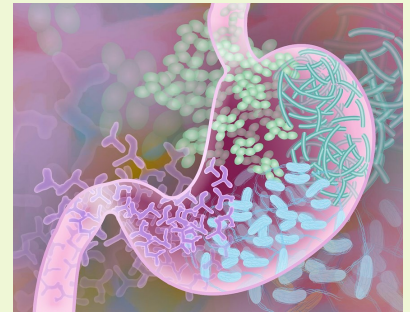
choices. The group will also ensure that there is Warwickshire wide help for people who have difficulty affording food.

# Truth or Myth

## Do I need to buy 'bacteria boosting' commercial food products to have a healthy gut?

There is a lot of noise around gut microbes lately and more and more products popping up claiming to boost your gut-friendly bacteria but is there any truth in it or is it just the next nutrition fad?

Our guts contain trillions of microbes, weighing around 2kg in total. Yet it's only in recent years that research into this microscopic universe within our bodies has really taken off revealing some pretty mind-blowing results. Research shows that the balance of microbes within our gut could have profound effects on mental wellbeing, and the development of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, inflammatory bowel disease, cancer, and obesity. Whilst genetics and environmental factors play a part in determining our gut bacteria, diet can have a significant impact on improving microbial diversity. So, what should we be eating to boost our beneficial bacteria?

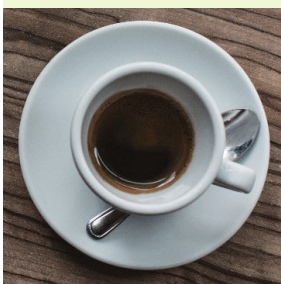


**Fibre:** microbes love fibre, preferably from non-processed foods such as **fruits, vegetables, beans, pulses, and wholegrains**. These foods are known as **prebiotic foods**. The bacteria in our guts feed on the fibre that we can't digest and if we don't eat enough of it then there won't be enough for your gut bacteria to thrive, leading to an imbalance between the good and bad

bacteria in your gut.

Some fruits and vegetables are **polyphenols**, recognised for their antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties to create a perfect environment for healthy microbes to multiply. Aim for 30 different plants a week to get as much variety as possible. Not as hard as it sounds when all fruits, vegetables, legumes, herbs, spices, nuts and seeds count. Even having two different colours of pepper in your stir-fry will give you more variety for your microbes to dine on. However, sufficient intakes of fibre need to be a daily habit to maintain a healthy balance of bacteria long term.

**Fermented foods:** Kefir, kombucha, kimchi, sauerkraut, miso, tempeh, live yoghurt and sourdough bread are fermented foods have hit our shelves in a big way recently. These foods are known as **probiotic foods** as they contain strains of beneficial bacteria that thrive on the naturally occurring sugars produced during the fermentation process. Having live yoghurt for breakfast, adding kimchi or sauerkraut to salads, or sipping on kombucha or miso soup is a great way to keep your gut happy.



**Coffee:** Great news for coffee lovers, your gut microbes enjoy a cup of coffee as much as you do! Although we can't say precisely why, studies show that coffee drinkers tend to have higher microbial diversity. This may be because coffee contains **polyphenols** and soluble fibre compounds that act as food for our beneficial gut microbes and increases their diversity and activity. Coffee also contains antimicrobial molecules that can help reduce the presence of harmful microbes, making room for 'good' bacteria and helping them to flourish.

# Truth or Myth

## Do I need to buy 'bacteria boosting' commercial food products to have a healthy gut? (continued)

**Red wine:** It goes without saying that all alcohol should be consumed in moderation, but red wine has been shown to increase the amount of gut bacteria known to promote gut health and decrease harmful gut bacteria such as clostridium. This is thought to be because of the amounts of polyphenols found in red wine which reduce oxidative stress and expand beneficial gut bacteria. Other sources of alcohol however have the opposite effect, gin and other spirits for example decrease beneficial bacteria (well we can't have it all)!



**Dark chocolate:** Another good source of polyphenols. However, be aware that refined sugar has an adverse effect on gut bacteria so the higher cocoa, lower sugar choices of dark chocolate are the ones to go for when it comes to optimising gut health.

### The rise of "gut friendly" convenience foods:

So, the above examples are all things we can include in our diet to help improve our gut health but go into most supermarkets these days and there are numerous "on the go" products to choose from that claim to boost your gut bacteria. From yoghurt drinks, which have been around for a while now, to chocolate bars or cereal bars and even "gut friendly" crisps. So, **how do we know if their health claims stack up?**

Whilst it's true that these products contain strains of bacteria, there is currently no legislation on how many strains or which strains need to be in a product in order to call it "gut friendly". More research is needed into the functions of different strains of gut bacteria before any specific health claims can be made. Furthermore, some of these products are high in sugar or artificial sweeteners which have been shown to adversely affect gut bacteria, potentially counteracting any beneficial effect they may have.



### **The final message:**

When browsing the shelves check the labels and look for products with lower sugar content (less than 5g per 100g) and high fibre content (at least 6g per 100g) and where possible snack on unprocessed or minimally processed probiotic and prebiotic foods such as the ones listed above, your microbes will love you for it!

# Healthy Habits for a Happy Bowel

Constipation is a common digestive disorder which affects 1 in 7 adults and 1 in 3 children at any one time. Rates of constipation increases in women, especially during pregnancy. Constipation can be very uncomfortable and can affect your quality of life.

Everybody has their own norm, but lifestyle modifications can help to improve stool texture and regularity. **The main lifestyle factors to impact bowel health are fibre intake, hydration and physical activity.** A sudden change to diet or activity can also have an impact, as can experiencing stress, anxiety or depression or taking medications such as opiates, antihistamines and antidepressants.

## But what can we do to prevent it?

As discussed in this months 'Truth or Myth' article, fibre plays an important role in our bowel health. Fibre is plant-based carbohydrate that is neither digested or absorbed in the small intestine. Fibre passes through the gastrointestinal tract into the colon and forms the bulk of the stool after being partially or completely broken down by bacteria. The recommended target in the UK is 30g, but the average Brit over 15 years old consumes only 18g/day.



There are different types of fibre. **Soluble fibre** draws water into the stool forming a gel-like substance, which softens and eases the passage through the bowel, reducing the time it takes to empty the bowel. Foods containing soluble fibre are less likely to cause bloating than insoluble fibre.

**Examples of soluble fibre:** oats, fruit (especially with skins or seeds), dried fruit, vegetables, beans, peas, lentils, barley, psyllium.

**Insoluble fibre** does not dissolve in water but adds bulk to the stool. It therefore needs to be consumed with plenty of water to prevent stools becoming dry and hard.



**Examples of insoluble fibre:** wholemeal bread/pitta bread, rye bread, wholegrain bread and cereal, brown bread, wholemeal pasta, potatoes with skins on, brown rice, wheat bran and corn bran, vegetables (cabbage, carrots, Brussel sprouts), legumes, small seeds (strawberries).

**Tips:** • Regularly eat fruit, vegetables, wholegrains, beans and pulses -these can be fresh, frozen or tinned. • Leave skins on fruits, vegetables and potatoes to increase the fibre content • Opt for wholegrain/brown variations of pasta, rice, bread, chapattis and wraps. • Swap cakes and biscuits for oat bars, malt loaf, fig rolls or snack on a portion of unsalted nuts, fresh or dried fruit, rye crackers or oat cakes. • Add lentils and chickpeas to curries, pasta sauces and casseroles. • Choose wholegrain cereals like branflakes, wheat biscuits, porridge and fruit and fibre instead of white cereals. • Stay hydrated, drink at least 1.5-2L fluid per day • Regular physical activity.

## What's in Season?

Here is a list of what fruit and veg are in season in September

Fruit	Vegetables
Blackberries, Damsons, Pears, Plums, Raspberries, Rhubarb, Strawberries	Aubergine, Beetroot, Broccoli, Brussels Sprouts, Butternut Squash, Carrots, Cauliflower, Celery, Courgettes, Chicory, Chillies, Cucumber, Garlic, Kale, Kohlrabi, Leeks, Lettuce, Mangetout, Marrow, Onions, Parsnips, Peas, Peppers, Potatoes, Pumpkin, Radishes, Rocket, Runner Beans, Samphire, Sorrel, Spinach, Spring Greens, Spring Onions, Summer Squash, Sweetcorn, Swiss Chard, Tomatoes, Turnips, Watercress, Wild Mushrooms

**Cooking in season** You'll notice these ingredients are more abundant in supermarkets and market stalls this month, so here is a tasty seasonal recipe to try.

### Slow Cooker Aubergines

#### Ingredients:

- 4 tbsp olive oil
- 1 red onion, sliced
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 500g aubergines
- 300g ripe tomatoes, quartered
- 1 small fennel bulb, sliced
- 50g sundried tomatoes
- 1 tsp coriander seeds

#### For the dressing

- small bunch flat leaf parsley, roughly chopped
- small bunch basil, roughly chopped
- small bunch chives, roughly chopped
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- juice 1 lemon
- 2 tsp capers

#### For the topping

- 100g feta cheese
- 50g toasted flaked almonds

#### To serve

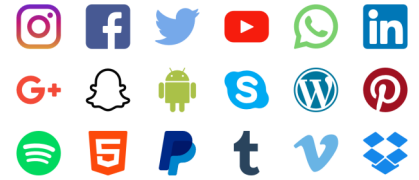
- crusty bread

Pour half of the olive oil into the slow cooker and put the onions and crushed garlic on top. Slice the aubergines into 1cm thick slices lengthways and brush with the remaining olive oil. Put them into the slow cooker on top of the onions and nestle the tomatoes, fennel slices and sundried tomatoes in and around the aubergines. Sprinkle the coriander seeds over the top then season everything well with salt and pepper.

Cook on low for 6-8 hours or until the aubergines are soft. Once cooked put all the dressing ingredients into the bowl of a mini food processor and blitz until smooth.

Transfer the cooked vegetables to a serving platter using a slotted spoon and drizzle over the herby dressing. Top with crumbled feta cheese, flaked almonds and serve with some crusty bread on the





## Menopause and diet— does it really matter?

The Daily Mail recently had an article on whether diet can help relieve symptoms of menopause. A dietitian specialising in Women’s Health and the menopause, Marcela Fiuza, helped to clarify how some diet tips may be beneficial on symptom relief.

Symptoms of the menopause can include higher blood pressure, changes in cholesterol levels (increasing risk of heart disease), and losing calcium from your bones (raising the risk of osteoporosis). Other symptoms can include weight gain, hot flashes, night sweats, irritability, poor concentration, headaches, and joint pains. These symptoms are mainly due to falling oestrogen levels, and can last for a few months or for several years.

General healthy eating advice is recommended for women going through the menopause to reduce muscles loss and prevent weight gain. Due to reduced oestrogen and testosterone levels it is harder for the body to rebuild muscle so the loss of lean mass can alter the metabolism, making it easier to gain weight. Having a lower energy diet through avoiding foods rich in saturated fats and reducing sugar intake can help to remain in an energy balance. Including high protein foods into meals, such as lean meats/ plant-based alternatives, fish, low-fat dairy, soy, beans and lentils can help maintain muscle mass.

Additionally, having a diet rich in phytoestrogens, substances found in plants that have a similar structure to oestrogen, may help ease symptoms. These include soya products (such as tofu, soya milk, tempeh, edamame beans), as well as lentils, seeds (including linseeds), fennel and beans. Having a diet rich in plant based products such as tofu, beans and lentils also increases fibre intake, makes you feel fuller for longer and is low in energy and so can prevent weight gain.



Calcium-rich foods are also important to prevent osteoporosis. Menopausal women should aim for 3 calcium rich foods per day (such as a 200ml glass of milk, a small pot of yoghurt and a 30g portion of cheese). Vitamin D supplementation is also recommended.

And finally, alcohol and caffeine are known to make hot flashes worse in a lot of women therefore reducing alcohol intake and switching to decaffeinated or naturally caffeine-free drinks may help reduce hot flashes and night sweats.



## Warwickshire eating and drinking for health group.

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## References, further reading and resources

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### What's in season

[www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/slow-cooker-aubergines](http://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/slow-cooker-aubergines)

[www.bda.uk.com/food-health/your-health/sustainable-diets/seasonal-fruit-and-veg-a-handly-guide.html](http://www.bda.uk.com/food-health/your-health/sustainable-diets/seasonal-fruit-and-veg-a-handly-guide.html)

### Social Media Know How

[www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-10588099/The-foodie-tweaks-help-relieve-hot-flushes.html](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-10588099/The-foodie-tweaks-help-relieve-hot-flushes.html)

[www.bda.uk.com/resource/menopause-diet.html](http://www.bda.uk.com/resource/menopause-diet.html)