

Food News

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Welcome to Food News. This months edition of Food News we will aim to clarify whether low-alcohol or alcohol-free alternative drinks are healthier for us. We will also be delving into how food can affect our mood.

As always we will take a look at what foods are currently in season and discuss a topic that's been in the media lately... reduced-sugar chocolate bars!



Inside this issue:

Truth or Myth - Are low alcohol drinks healthier for me?	2-3
Food and Mood	4-6
What's In season	7
What's in the media	8-9
Further reading	10-11

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 Are low alcohol drinks really healthier for me?

The start of a new year is a popular time to re-visit our habits and try to make healthier lifestyle changes... cutting back on alcohol is often top of the list.

For low-risk drinking, guidelines suggest that no more than 14 units of alcohol should be consumed per week. These units should be spread over 3 or more days but several alcohol-free days per week are also advised. Drinking more than this amount each week has been linked to adverse health effects, including increased risk of; several cancers (mouth, throat, liver, bowel and breast), stroke, heart disease, liver disease and even mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression.

The units given to each drink are not only based on the amount and type of drink, but also by the alcohol by volume (ABV) percentage, this indicates how strong the alcohol is in the drink. Examples below;

Drink	Volume (ml)	ABV %	Units
Bottle of lager, beer or cider	330ml	5%	1.7
Can of lager, beer or cider	440ml	5.5%	2.4
Lager, beer or cider	568ml (pint)	3.6%	2
Lager beer or cider	568ml (pint)	5.2%	3
Small glass of wine (any colour)	125ml	12%	1.5
Standard glass of wine (any colour)	175ml	12%	2.1
Large glass of wine (any colour)	250ml	12%	3
Spirits (gin, vodka, whiskey, rum, etc.)	25ml	40%	1



Alcoholic drinks can also be high in calories so in addition to contributing to increased health risks they may also increase your waistline. Here are some examples are some drinks calorie equivalents in food:

Drink	Volume	ABV %	Calories (kcal)	Estimated food equivalent
Beer	568ml (pint)	5%	239kcal	1 x standard (50g) size Mars bar
Cider	568ml (pint)	4.5%	216kcal	1 x sugared ring doughnut
Wine (any colour)	175ml (standard)	12%	133kcal	3 x Jaffa Cake biscuits
Spirits *	50ml (double)	40%	120kcal	1 x 25g chocolate Mini Roll
Alcopop	275ml bottle	4%	170kcal	2.5 x chocolate digestive biscuits

*Before mixers – try to choose diet or low calorie versions.

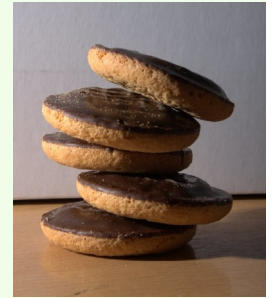
Truth or Myth

Are low alcohol drinks really healthier for me? (continued)

So what is the alternative, particularly for those wanting to lose weight? Are the alcohol-free alternatives any better for you?

Most 'alcohol-free' beer contains 0.05% ABV or less and 'low alcohol' beer contains 1.2% ABV or less. The below table shows the calorie content and their food equivalents for alcohol-free alternatives:

Drink	Volume	ABV %	Calories (kcal)	Estimated food equivalent
Beer	568ml (pint)	0%	117kcal	1 x Club biscuit
Cider	568ml (pint)	0%	142kcal	2 x Chocolate digestive biscuits
Wine (any colour)	175ml (standard)	0%	46kcal	1 x Jaffa cake biscuit
Spirits *	50ml (double)	0%	11kcal	1 x fruit pastille



*Before mixers.

Although the calorie count in 'alcohol-free' drinks is significantly reduced compared to their alcohol containing counterparts, if weight loss is the key focus for reducing alcohol intake then sugar-free soft drinks may be a better alternative as these tend to contain only <10kcal per 250ml of drink.

Fruit juice has a high sugar content so still contains ~115kcal per 250ml but does offer additional micronutrients. Mocktails may have a higher calorie value due to added syrups.



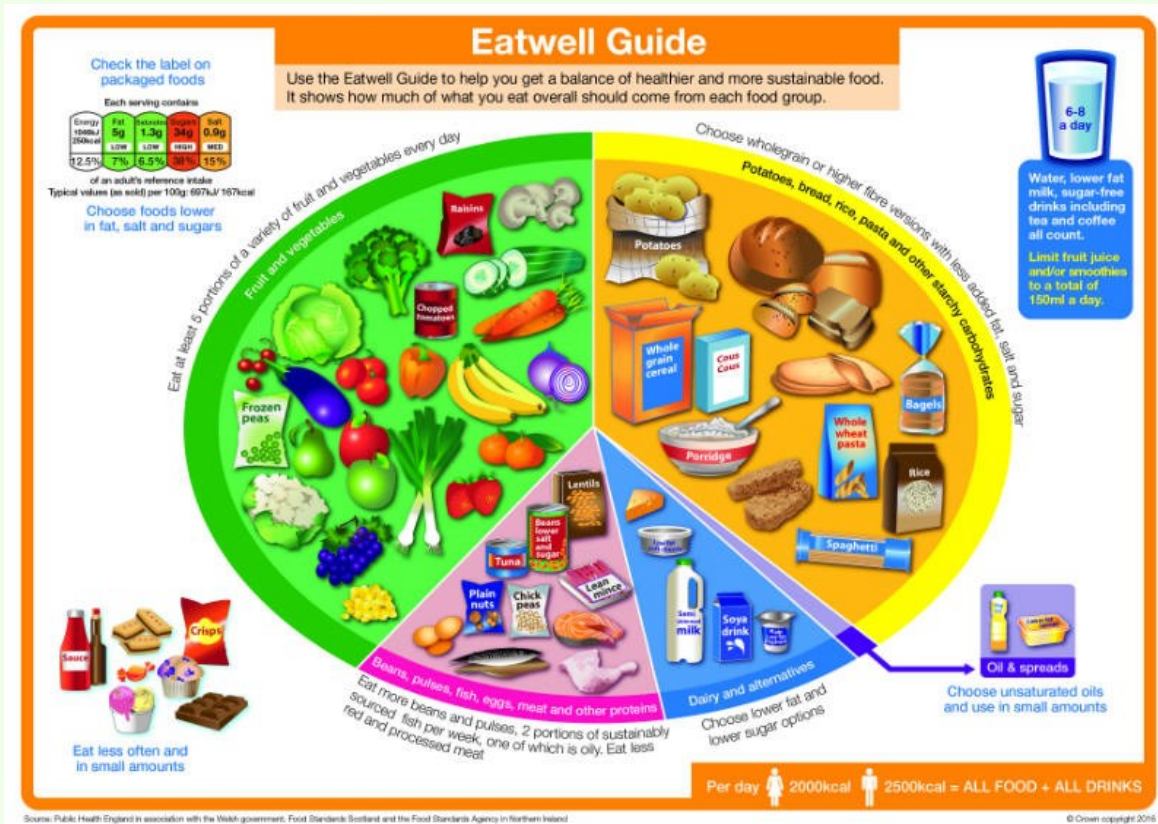
Fruit teas tend to have the same calorie value as sugar-free lemonade. Kombucha is a sweet and sour drink made with a tea that has been fermented for 7-10 days and has grown in popularity in recent years due to it's proposed health benefits and probiotic action, however there is no scientific evidence of this in humans yet. Nonetheless, Kombucha drinks contains very small amounts of caffeine and alcohol, and are low in calories (<10kcal per 250ml serving)

So are low alcohol drinks really healthier for me?

In summary, reducing your alcohol intake is known to reduce your risk of ill-health and 'low calorie' or 'alcohol-free' drink varieties do tend to be lower in calories than their alcohol-containing counterparts making them healthier on direct comparison. However, they still often contain a lot more calories than other traditionally alcohol free drinks and offer very little other nutrients. These trendy drinks also tend to be more expensive than soft-drinks and juices so you could save both calories and pennies on choosing traditionally alcohol-free drinks.

Food and Mood

At this time of year, when we are into the winter months and the days are short and dark, and we can all feel a little low and fed up. Here, we take a look at the connection between food and our mood and whether a healthy balanced diet (following the Eat Well Guide*) can affect our mood.



*The Eatwell Guide can be accessed via www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-eatwell-guide

Carbohydrates

Carbohydrates are broken down in our body to glucose and are used as a quick source of fuel. We can keep our blood sugars stable by opting for complex carbohydrates and eating them regularly throughout the day. Complex carbohydrates, are broken down slowly and they release sugar into the bloodstream gradually, keeping blood sugars stable for longer. Simple carbohydrates are broken down quickly and glucose is released into the bloodstream rapidly causing an increase in blood sugar, then a big drop soon after. If our blood sugars drop this can leave us feeling tired and irritable. Opting for complex carbohydrates such as wholegrains (wholegrain rice & pasta and oats, barley, quinoa) and avoiding simple carbohydrates, such as sweets, chocolate, sugary drinks, may make us feel **less tired and irritable**.

Gut health

It is important to look after your gut health, there is something called a gut microbiome (human large bowel has trillions of bacteria). Some research suggests that the gut microbiome has a bigger role in affecting our mood, this research has only been carried out on animals, so further research is needed here to confirm this. We currently do know that increasing dietary fibre, following a healthy diet, and including fermented foods can **increased well-being and improve mood in humans**. This can be done by following the Eat Well Guide, having at least 5- a-day of fruit and vegetables, opting for complex carbohydrates and including some fermented foods in diet, fermented foods include bio live yoghurts, sourdough bread, kefir, miso, tempeh, pickles and sauerkraut.

Food and Mood

Omega 3 Fatty Acids

Omega 3 fatty acids *may* be protective in the **prevention and treatment of depression**. Depression is seen less in nations who eat large amounts of fish, which often contains omega 3s. Research carried out on omega 3 supplementation showed that omega 3s may be beneficial for people with mood disorders, but further research is needed on the mechanism of action.

Omega 3 fatty acids come in 3 forms, ALA (alpha-linolenic acid), EPA (eicisapentaenoic acid) and DHA (docosahexanoic acid). ALA cannot be made in the body but can be found in vegetable oils, rapeseed and linseed, nuts and leafy greens and is a precursor to EPA and DHA. EPA and DHA can be made in the body in small amounts but eating rich sources can be beneficial for anti-inflammatory, cell structure and development purposes. A great source of EPA and DHA is found in fish, especially oily fish (salmon, mackerel, sardines, fresh tuna), and it is recommended to have 2 portions of fish, one being oily, per week. Plant-based sources include some seaweeds, nuts, seeds, and fortified soy products.



Vitamins and minerals

Iron- If you aren't getting enough iron in your diet, you can often feel weak, tired, and lethargic. Rich sources of iron include red meat, chicken, pulses, fortified cereals and dark green leafy vegetables. Opting to have vitamin C sources e.g. fruit and vegetables with iron containing foods will increase the absorption. Tea can hinder the absorption of iron so avoid having around meal times.

B vitamins- It's important to get enough of the b vitamins, as these can impact our mood; deficiency can make us feel tired, irritable, and depressed. These b vitamins include vitamin b1 (thiamine), b3 (niacin), b12 (cobalamin) and b9 (folate). Thiamine is used in the releasing of sugar from carbohydrates and is found in wholegrain cereals, fortified white flour, fortified breakfast cereals, legumes, nuts and seeds, broccoli, green beans, brewer's yeast and extracts and orange juice. Niacin also helps the release of energy from foods and is found in meat, liver, kidney, fish, nuts, some fruits and vegetables, fortified breakfast cereals, brewer's yeast. Cobalamin is involved in the metabolism of fats and folate, and can be found in liver, meat, poultry, dairy, eggs, and fish. Whilst, folate is used in the metabolism of proteins and can be found in liver, green vegetables, oranges, beans, and fortified foods.



Selenium- It's important to get enough selenium in the diet, as deficiency may increase the risk of depression. Selenium has numerous functions within the body; it's involved in antioxidant reactions, thyroid function and in the immune system. Selenium can be found in Brazil nuts, meat, fish, seeds, and wholemeal bread.

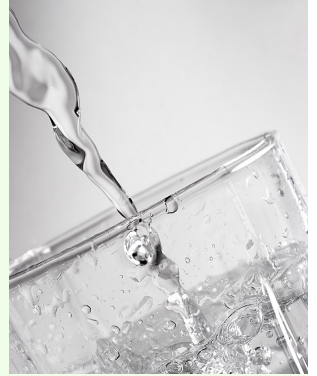


Food and Mood

Fluids

Drinking enough fluid is essential, if you don't you may find it difficult to concentrate or to think clearly and it may make you prone to constipation; it's important to aim for at least 6-8 glasses of fluid/day.

Drinking caffeinated drinks such as cola, coffee, energy drinks can cause us to have quick bursts of energy, it acts as a stimulant causing alertness, masking the fatigue, however regular users may have withdrawals and reduced normal levels of alertness. Caffeine may also disturb sleep if drunk too late. It's best to opt for decaffeinated versions or have in moderation; if you are drinking caffeine having it earlier on in the day to prevent sleep disturbances.



Alcohol

Alcohol can affect your mood, it may initially give you a boost, but due to alcohol being a depressant, the next day all of your neurotransmitters, which are your happiness chemicals (serotonin and dopamine) may be used up. These neurotransmitters need to be at a certain level to prevent anxiety and low mood, so after drinking you may feel symptoms of low mood or anxiety. Low-risk drinking is discussed in this month's 'Truth and Myth' article.

Summary

In summary, opt for complex carbohydrates and have them regularly to keep blood glucose stable and include omega 3 fatty acids as they may prevent depression. Ensure caffeine isn't consumed too soon before bed, to prevent sleep loss. Maintain gut health by eating a healthy diet, having good sources of fibre and including fermented foods. Ensure that you have a varied diet and are getting enough iron and eating rich sources of b vitamins as this can prevent lethargy and tiredness, irritability and depression. The following are rich in these b vitamins: fortified whole grain cereals, legumes, nuts, seeds, brewer's yeast, dairy, eggs meat, liver kidney, fish, fruits and vegetable. Getting enough selenium may also reduce the risk of developing depression. Finally, being well hydrated and avoiding excess alcohol and caffeine can help in feeling well and avoiding slumps in mood and energy. The overall message to improve your mood through food is to get variety, eat in regular intervals, consume a healthy balanced diet and be well-hydrated.



What's in Season?

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

Fruit	Vegetables
Apples and Pears	Beetroot, Brussels Sprouts, Cabbage, Carrots, Celeriac, Chicory, Jerusalem Artichokes, Kale, Leeks, Mushrooms, Onions, Parsnips, Purple Sprouting Broccoli, Spring Greens, Spring Onions, Squash, Swedes

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.

Beetroot risotto with feta (serves 2)

Ingredients:

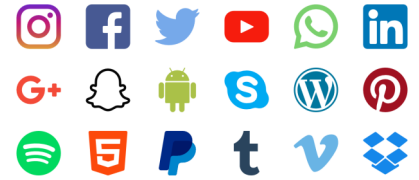
- 2 tbsp olive oil, plus extra to serve
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 300g raw beetroot, grated
- 1 garlic clove, crushed
- 175g risotto rice
- 100ml white wine
- 600ml hot vegetable stock
- 50g grated parmesan or vegetarian alternative
- 1/2 lemon, zested and juiced
- 40g feta, crumbled

Heat the oil in a large saucepan. Add the onion and beetroot, and cook over a low-medium heat for 15 minutes. Add the garlic and cook for 1 minute.

Stir in the rice and fry for a couple of minutes, then pour in the wine and bring to a simmer. Add half the stock, stirring until it is absorbed. Add the remaining stock, a ladleful at a time, stirring continuously until the rice is al dente. Stir through the parmesan and lemon juice, adding a splash more stock to loosen if the risotto seems a little thick. Season to taste.

Toss the feta with the lemon zest and dill, if using, and spoon over the risotto. Finish with a drizzle of olive oil.



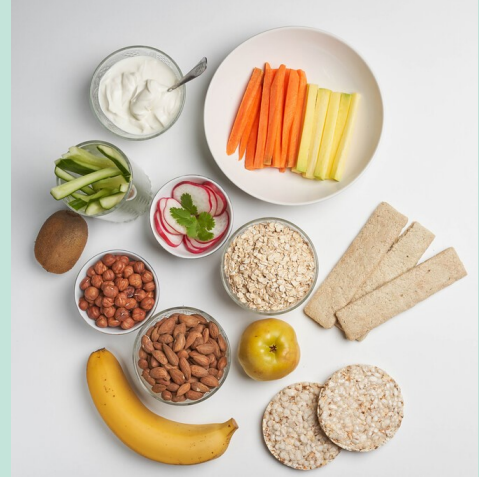


Reduced Sugar Chocolate Bars

Low calories snacks (under 100kcal) are a staple recommendation for watching our waistlines and promoting good health. It helps us to identify lower calorie snacks to curb hunger between meals, without piling on the pounds.

Examples of 100kcal snacks include:

- Houmous and veg sticks
- 2 small oat cakes
- 1/3 pint of semi-skimmed milk
- 1 packet reduced fat crisps
- 25g almonds



However, in 2021, The Sun online ran a 'choc shock' article off the back of a TikTok clip, highlighting the appearance of a new class of snack to add to this list... Lightweight (literally) chocolate bars. In 2023, new 'lower calorie' chocolate confectionary from well-known brands are selling well off supermarket shelves.

Why the hype?

There is mounting scientific evidence that unhealthy weight gain and tooth decay lead to greater risk of disease in adulthood. This is not a new story - back in 2015 the **World Health Organisation (WHO)** halved their recommendations for sugar intake.

We need sugars from carbohydrates in our foods as fuel for our bodies, but not in the form of '**free sugars**'. Free sugars are: all sugars added to home recipes or manufactured goods (including confectionary); sugar in fruit juices (sugars in whole fruit and milk are not free sugars, and so not included in restrictions); sugars in purees and pastes where cell structures have bene broken down; and sugars naturally present in honey and syrups.

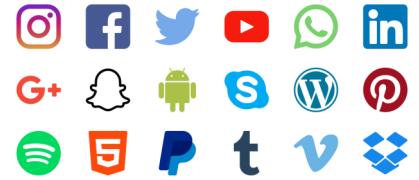
WHO recommends that less than 10% of daily intake of calorie intake should come from free sugars, and in fact, for additional health benefits, aim for around 5%.

In real terms, 5% of an average daily calorie intake (2000kcal) means a daily limit of 100kcal from free sugar. This amount can be found in single average chocolate bar alone.

Major food retailers and manufacturers are pledging to help consumers make healthier choices and investing heavily in 'better-for-you' food offerings. They are responding to current consumer trends, but also to the sugar reduction public health policy.



What's in the media?



In 2016, a **government sugar reduction program** began in the UK, aiming to improve health and reduce some of the £6 billion reportedly spent by the NHS on obesity related healthcare in the UK (gov.uk, 2022).

However, a government report published in December last year revealed that there had only been a 3.5% reduction in sugar in retail products from 2015 – 2020 (gov.uk, 2022). The original target was a 20% reduction.

What's the hold up? Some people see restraints on sales and advertising of high fat, sugar and salt (HFSS) products as over-controlling and out of line with consumer preferences (Institute of Economic Affairs). Furthermore, the 'unforeseen and unprecedented' events of the last 3 years have delayed state action on reduction of sugar.

Despite these criticisms and setbacks, the government still plans to go ahead with rolling out further restrictions on promotions and sales of HFSS foods in the next 12 months and is the reasoning behind new recipes from some well-known confectionary brands.

Manufacturers have had 3 options available to them to cut the sugar in their products:

1. Gradually reformulate recipes over time to contain less sugar, to minimise consumer rejection. *This is the preferred option from a public health point of view.*

2. Reformulate packaging and size of their product. Less product = less sugar. *Hence the advent of the lightweight 100 calorie chocolate bar.*

3. Create 30% less sugar products to market alongside the original full sugar product. *This may avoid risking consumer dissatisfaction, but experts from Action on Sugar explain that when a food is promoted as a lower sugar/calorie choice, it may appear less satisfying and lead to 'compensatory behaviour'. In other words, perhaps we feel we have been short-changed so we may go on to eat more unhealthy foods later!*

It is clear that improving public health through sugar reduction whilst maintaining freedom of choice is a difficult to balance and hotly-debated topic.

Looking to the future: Development of a 75% lower calorie and sugar chocolate bar was recently announced. Whilst a 'healthy diet' might include chocolate in small amounts, this always needs to be balanced with a daily intake of nutritious food from all the major food groups. Whether or not government policies influence any potential decision to replace your favourite chocolate bar with a lower sugar alternative, the 'healthier' version looks set to stay, and is - rightly or wrongly - being touted as a potential key player in the fight against obesity, but perhaps investment in promoting enjoyment of nutritious whole food might bring bigger health benefits than promotion of miniature chocolate treats?





Warwickshire eating and drinking for health group.

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Food and Mood article:

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What's in the media article:

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If you have an interest in food , hydration and health, and would like to join the Warwickshire Food Forum, please contact the editor.

If you would like more information about any of the articles in this newsletter, please contact the editor who will pass this on to the author of the article.

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Food and Mood

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www.bda.uk.com/resource/food-facts-food-and-mood.html

Gov.uk- Eat well Guide www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-eatwell-guide

MIND -Food and Mood. www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/food-and-mood/about-food-and-mood/

What's in season

www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/beetroot-risotto-with-feta

www.bda.uk.com/food-health/your-health/sustainable-diets/seasonal-fruit-and-veg-a-hand-guide.html



References, further reading and resources (continued)

What's in the media

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