

Can changing your diet fix your problems?

What happened when we sent five readers with very different complaints to see five different nutritionist? Lucy Elkins reports on their experiences

"I was amazed that cutting caffeine helped beat my throat infections"

LYNNE OMAR, 39, a bank worker, is married to Mark, 37, a corporate bank manager and lives in Llandudno, north Wales. They have two children, Thomas, five, and Ruby, two.

THE PROBLEM "I feel so unhealthy. I am often ill with chest or throat infections and I need a course of antibiotics about once a month. I am due to have my tonsils out soon to try and help, but I think the problem is that with two young children I live off cups of tea and coffee, and always eat in a rush. In the evening I am so tired that my husband and I slump down, have a glass of wine or two and snack on crisps. I'm about half a stone overweight, I have no energy, my skin is dry and I feel awful."

VICKI EDGSON is one of Britain's leading nutritionists: "By always eating the same things, Lynne is limiting her intake of nutrients, which is impairing her immune system. She is also depending on tea and coffee to keep her going through the day. This is stressing her adrenal glands and means she has no energy in the evenings. All that caffeine is also depressing her immune system."

Her other problem is that, like many tired mums, she is mindlessly eating in front of the TV in the evening."

THE CHANGES "I was amazed how much fat there is in a small bag of crisps. Vicki told me I needed to vary my diet to help kick-start my metabolism, so I try to eat something different each day and I now drink only at weekends. As I started to feel better it motivated me to continue. I still have a take away once a week, but have stuck to changes elsewhere. I hated the idea of exercise, but now I go for a 30-minute jog three times a week. I never thought I would stick at it, but I feel so energised."

LYNNE'S VERDICT "I feel like a whole new me. Since I started taking Vicki's advice I have not had a single infection, I have much more energy and I have lost nearly half a stone."

IS THIS YOUR PROBLEM?

- + Eating in front of the TV, computer or while multi-tasking makes absent minded over-eating more likely.
 - + Vary your fruit and vegetable intake to ensure a wide range of nutrients. Each week, challenge yourself to find new fruit, vegetables or salad leaves.
 - + Eat a variety of coloured fruit and vegetables: white, red, yellow and green.
 - + Restrict caffeinated drinks to one a day, as any more stresses the body and can lead to a reduced immune system.
- Initial consultation costs £150. (020) 7602 7669; vickiedgson.co.uk

"Avoiding yeast has helped clear up my eczema"

FIONA TRIMMER, 46, a housewife, lives with husband Stuart, a lawyer, in Sanderstead, Croydon. She has three children.

THE PROBLEM "I get really bad eczema around my ears which is sometimes so painful it makes my whole head feel sore. I have had it since I was a teenager and none of the creams I have used seem to shift it. I also have a problem with thrush. I get it once a month. I have tried creams and tablets, and these might help a little bit but don't cure it and only slightly alleviate my discomfort. Also, even though I get at least eight hours sleep a night I am often so shattered by the afternoon I need to go to bed for a nap."

CLAUDIA LOUCH is a nutritionist and pharmacologist: "Fiona's diet is quite high in sugar and wheat-based products (which are ultimately broken down into sugars.) This is not a good idea for someone with thrush, as it is caused by a yeast which feeds off sugars. She should also avoid having yeast in her diet as this will also increase the thrush problem."

In terms of her eczema, it is hard to be specific about the cause. Generally, it is caused by the immune system over reacting to the presence of an allergen, such as dairy products, but it could also be dust mites or detergents. I suspect Fiona's is due to her sweet tooth. She is also eating a lot of cheese which is high in saturated fat. As we get older the liver finds it hard to deal with excess fats and this can be reflected in the condition of our skin."

THE CHANGES "Trying to avoid yeast and wheat is easy enough when I'm at home, but when I am out it can be really difficult to find something on the menu without either of these in the list of ingredients. Instead of sandwiches I now have a jacket potato, an omelette or a rice dish, and I continue to eat the same sort of main meal in the evening, usually avoiding mushrooms, as these can also aggravate my thrush symptoms."

FIONA'S VERDICT "The eczema around my ears is definitely much better. It hardly itches at all, whereas before I had a constant desire to scratch. I also notice that I feel tired when I don't follow Claudia's advice. The other day, for example, I felt exhausted in the afternoon after eating lasagne which, of course, contains wheat. My thrush has been better too. For a few weeks it cleared up altogether. Now it has returned, but it is not nearly as bad as it was."

IS THIS YOUR PROBLEM?

- + If you suffer from thrush, reduce the sugar, wheat and yeast in your diet.
- + Remember that, chemically speaking, alcohol is glucose and drinking can significantly add to your sugar intake. Claudia, who specialises in skin complaints and allergies, is at the Hale Clinic. (020) 7631 0156; bookings@haleclinic.com. A consultation costs £90. >>

"Changing my diet fixed my moods and bloating"

AMANDA JONES, 46, is a sister on a neo-natal unit and lives with her partner John in Lyndhurst, Hampshire. Amanda has three grown-up daughters and two teenage stepchildren.

THE PROBLEM "I rely on chocolate bars to keep me going and by the time I walk through the door after work I am exhausted. I often get down in the dumps and, on top of that, I feel bloated and am about 10lbs overweight." **LISA BLAIR is a nutritionist at The Food Doctor Clinic, London:** "Nearly all Amanda's food choices of biscuits and cereal bars cause a sudden rise in blood sugar levels. The body then produces insulin which quickly brings these down, making you feel tired, and this is probably why Amanda gets down in the dumps. White flour products also slow your digestion, which causes bloating."

THE CHANGES "I swapped all the white flour products in my diet for brown, I have a bowl of porridge every morning rather than grabbing a cereal bar and I take a tub of nuts and seeds with me to work. I was drinking quite a lot of Diet Coke, but Lisa said I should have water instead. I thought I'd miss the buzz of it, but I haven't."

AMANDA'S VERDICT "I feel better than I have in years and I've lost 6lbs in a month. The great thing is I have found the changes quite easy and I still have a glass of wine in the evening. I love not feeling so moody."

IS THIS YOUR PROBLEM?

- + Eat three meals a day to keep the metabolic rate going and avoid bad food choices and hunger later.
 - + Always include protein with your meals, as this makes you feel fuller for longer.
 - + Avoid super-sweet fruit, like pineapple, which leads to sugar rushes, and stick to apples and citrus instead.
- Lisa specialises in digestive health, stress management and weight loss. An initial consultation costs £125. (020) 7792 6700; thefooddoctor.com





“My revised diet is so easy to stick to, it’s become a new way of life”

CHRISTINE ARCHBELL, 56, is a retired HR manager and lives with her husband and their daughter in Notton Wakefield, Yorkshire.

THE PROBLEM “Six years ago I was diagnosed as having a borderline underactive thyroid gland, which makes you prone to tiredness and to putting on weight. Until I was 45 I always weighed under nine stone and never dieted, but I have now put on about two stone, which is too much as I am only five foot, three

IS THIS YOUR PROBLEM?

- + Eat something every three hours to stabilise blood sugar.
- + Graze on nutritious snacks between meals to keep blood sugar levels stable. Good choices include half a dozen nuts or oatcake spread with humus.
- + Drink small sips of fluid throughout the day as this helps prevent mistaking thirst for hunger.

Suzy specialises in allergies, digestive issues, weight problem and depression. She is based at the Look After You Clinic in Pontefract, West Yorkshire. Call 01977-612008, visit look-after-you.co.uk or email suzy@look-after-you.co.uk. An initial consultation costs £45.

inches tall. However, I eat healthily with cereal for breakfast and meat or fish with vegetables for lunch, and sometimes have nothing more all day. I also regularly play tennis, but by the time the evening comes round I am always so exhausted that I am generally asleep by 10pm.

SUZY SHERATT is a natural nutritionist: “By not eating sometimes from lunchtime until the next morning Christine is starving her body. When that happens, the body reacts as if in a stressful situation and prepares for the ‘fight or flight’ response. It produces the hormone adrenaline which makes the body release lots of sugar into the blood to provide the energy to escape from this stressful situation. However, as Christine will then not use that much energy, the excess sugar is converted into fat which is then stored around the tummy and abdomen. The production of adrenaline also blocks the production of another hormone, progesterone which helps support the thyroid gland. So Christine’s eating habits are encouraging her to put on weight and contributing to her poor thyroid function.”

THE CHANGES “Suzy made me realise that I had been starving myself, which is obvious now I think about it, but it had just never occurred to me before. I have really tried to spread out my eating a bit more. I now have home-made muesli for breakfast, a light lunch, such as vegetable soup, and then a main meal, such as salmon and new potatoes, in the evening.”

CHRISTINE’S VERDICT “I have lost a little, although not tons, of weight. However, as we have recently had to do lots of socialising, involving big dinners and wine, I am happy that I have not put on a pound or two. I have not noticed a significant change in my energy levels, but now this social period is over I hope that I will.”

“Changing what I eat has raised my self esteem”

AMANDA BEATTIE, 35, is the manger of a charity shop. She lives with her boyfriend near Wells, Somerset.

THE PROBLEM “I am five foot three and weigh 12 stone. My dad died of cancer 11 years ago and I am very aware that being overweight raises my risk of developing cancer too. I am often too busy to plan in advance what I am going to eat.”

FERN MAYBEE is a nutritional therapist: “Amanda’s problem is her lack of proper meals. She is relying on sweet snacks and is lacking in sustaining foods, such as veg, whole grains and lean protein, which would all help her feel fuller for longer.”

THE CHANGES “Fern drew a picture of a plate and showed me how I should be filling it. I cannot pretend it has all been easy. I often crave something naughty mid-afternoon but rather than having chocolate now I have fruit.”

AMANDA’S VERDICT “I have lost 8lbs in six weeks and am the thinnest I have ever been. The fact that my trousers are falling down and my stomach is flatter really makes me feel good about myself.”

IS THIS YOUR PROBLEM?

- + Fill half of your plate with vegetables. These will help full you up, reduce the fat content of the meal and provide vitamins and minerals.
- + Get into the habit of reading labels. If sugar is listed third or higher on the ingredient list it is a high sugar food and you should only have it occasionally.
- + Keep a food diary. It is easy to forget how all those sneaked mouthfuls can contribute to weight gain.

Fern specialises in digestive health, is a member of the British Association of Nutritional Therapists and operates from two clinics in north Bristol. An initial 75 minute consultation costs £50. 07989-954574; fernmaybee.co.uk w&h