Nutrition

FINDING FOOD Harmony

Food is more than just fuel – it can impact our mood, energy levels and more. Nutritional therapist and author of *Do Nourish*, Sarah Bayliss, explains how to get back in balance with your eating



Below Author Sarah worked in London and suffered burnout before retraining as a nutritional therapist.

Many people think nutrition is just about eating delicious food and that when life gets stressful, having a tasty treat can make us feel better; even if this is short-lived.

Real nutrition is about more than delicious food. When we eat nutritious food it fills our 'resilience bucket'. It gives us the ability to think clearly, make conscious decisions, handle whatever life throws at us and recover more quickly. But many people don't realise the connection between what they eat and how resilient they feel mentally and physically. Just as nutritious foods can energise our minds and bodies, unhealthy eating habits can drain us over time.

Food is information. It's a message to the body that influences your biology and how your cells function. Your body is a complex network of systems and processes; you have a microbiome, an immune system, hormones, neurotransmitters and messenger molecules, all of which are influenced not just by calorie intake, but by the informational qualities of the food you are eating.

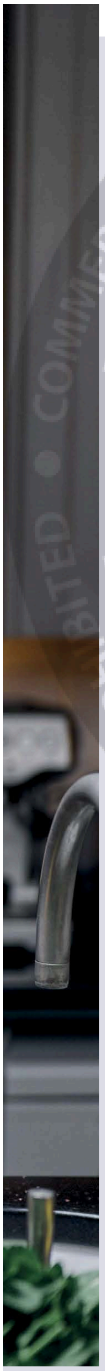
"When we eat nutritious food it gives us the ability to think clearly, make conscious decisions, handle whatever life throws at us."

The food you choose has a profound effect on everything in your body and that effect can be dramatically different depending on its nutritional make-up. Understanding this concept will transform your perspective and the choices you make.

Raring to go

Your goal is to start eating in

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alignment with your body's physiological needs. By prioritising the nutrients that are essential for your body, you will feel full and satisfied, diminish cravings and increase energy and functioning. Remember, the perfect nutrition plan is the one that works for you and meets your physiological requirements. It must also be one that you enjoy.

To begin, we must briefly talk about how your body makes and uses energy. Your daily fluctuations in blood sugar and insulin levels serve as vital health markers, greatly influencing how you use or store energy. They play a key role in determining your overall resilience and susceptibility to disease.



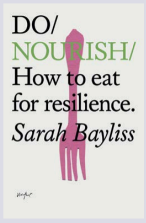
Introducing insulin

I am going to get a little sciency here, but this is super important — the information will help you to understand why your food choices matter so much.

Glucose is a simple sugar that serves as your primary source of energy for your body. It is derived from many foods, including carbohydrates, fruits, vegetables and grains. When you eat these foods they are broken down during digestion and the glucose is released into your bloodstream. This glucose now circulates in your blood as blood sugar, ready to be used to fuel your cells and organs.

Glucose is a critical energy source for many cells. Insulin is a hormone that is produced in the pancreas and circulates in the blood, influencing various tissues in the body. Its main role is to get the glucose that is now in your blood into cells to be used for energy or stored away. It acts like a key, unlocking cell doors so that the glucose can get inside. Every cell has insulin receptors to receive this fuel source.

Insulin tightly controls the amount of glucose in your bloodstream at any given time (only about one teaspoon's worth). Too much glucose is toxic to cells and your brain, as it can bind to proteins, fats and DNA through a process called glycation, impairing their normal function.





DISCOVER MORE

This is an edited extract from *Do Nourish* by Sarah Bayliss (Do Books) RRP £9.99.

GIVE YOUR BODY THE FOODS IT NEEDS

Here's a guide to what to include at each meal, to ensure you feel at your best



BUILDING YOUR IDEAL PLATE*

- 50% non-starchy vegetables
- 25% protein
- 10% complex carbs
- 10% healthy fats
- 5% spices and herbs

*using a standard 25cm plate

Once the glucose has got inside the cell, the mitochondria — known as the powerhouses of cells — take the glucose and convert it into the energy currency of your body, known as ATP (adenosine triphosphate), so the cell can use the energy to do its many jobs. Every cell in the body has mitochondria to fuel its function; some cells have more, some have less, depending on the amount of work that they need to do and their energy requirements. When the mitochondria are fuelled with the appropriate nutrients, they can then function well and produce ATP efficiently.

Good carb, bad carb?

Carbohydrates, particularly simple and refined ones, contain the most glucose and have the biggest impact on blood sugar levels. Sugar and processed foods also fall into this category. When you eat too much of these foods, your blood sugar level rises too quickly. To compensate, your body pumps out an excessive amount of insulin (above normal levels) to try to bring your blood sugar levels back down. This overproduction then causes your blood sugar to plummet.

Your brain perceives these dramatic blood sugar drops as an emergency. It responds by releasing various hormones to prevent your glucose from falling too low. Unfortunately, these hormones disrupt your body's energy system and resilience. They promote fat storage, impair fat burning, impair appetite control and activate your stress response.

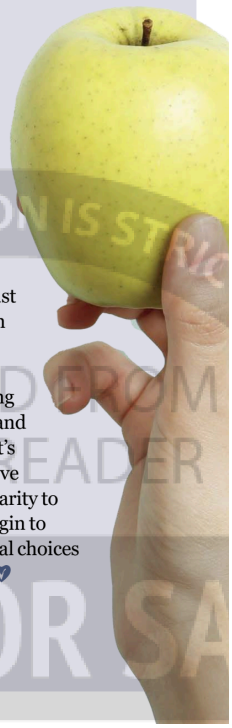
These hormones are so powerful that they put you into 'fight or flight' mode — the stress system that can affect your whole body. Your heart may race, your blood pressure may rise, you can feel anxious, irritable, shaky, start to sweat and can lose concentration and focus. Ultimately, your resilience is being put in jeopardy. You are in survival mode, likely not thinking clearly, your cognitive function is diminished, and your brain is telling you to seek sugar and/or caffeine to refocus.

This is probably driving poor choices that only exasperate the situation. You can end up in a vicious cycle. Research has now also linked these blood sugar dips with anxiety and low mood.

Ups and downs

Depending on how you are eating and what you are eating these blood sugar episodes can happen several times a day and into night and the more carbohydrates and processed foods you eat, the more extreme they will be. These steep ups and downs create hormonal havoc, continually throwing your energy system out of balance.

Of course, food is one part of the equation. Changing nutritional habits must go hand-in-hand with making mindful decisions about your lifestyle, such as taking breaks from screens and ensuring a good night's sleep. These restorative practices will allow clarity to emerge so you can begin to make more intentional choices about what you eat.



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