

HER WELLBEING

helping you through life's challenges

Welcome to issue 6 of *Her Wellbeing*. In this issue we are delighted to have an article written by Geoff O'Meara, Co-ordinator of the Prison Yoga Project – UK. If you've ever thought that Yoga was too difficult for you, Geoff explains how simple Yoga can be. If you want to know more, we tell you how to get a free copy of the Prison Yoga Project's latest book *Freedom from the Inside: a woman's yoga practice guide*.

Having spent the last year hearing how dreadful and dangerous a certain virus can be in Covid-19, we look at the flip side of microbes. We focus on the gut and especially the trillions of microbes living there – the good, the bad and the ugly; how friendly microbes can support our health and wellbeing in so many ways, and how we can encourage more of these friendly bugs to take up residence inside us.

We have some exciting changes happening, which we mention in Stop Press. Make sure you keep reading future editions of *Her Wellbeing* to find out more.

With best wishes
The Food Matters Team

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Feeding your inner bugs



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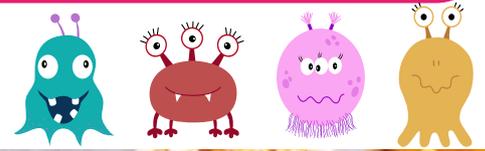
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Turn the page to read how to feed your inner bugs

Feeding your inner bugs

In the first part of a 2-part article, we introduce you to community of microbes living inside each one of us, which are so important for our health.



Over the past couple of decades, we've all become aware that we have microbes living contentedly inside us. We've become familiar with the idea that the 'friendly bacteria' found in live yoghurt and special 'live' drinks may benefit us by addressing imbalances inside our gut (digestive tract) and potentially helping conditions like Irritable Bowel Syndrome, or IBS.

Research has gone beyond just gut health and found out how important this microbe community is for building immunity and reducing inflammation. Some gut bacteria even make vitamins for us, such as B vitamin biotin and vitamin K. Astonishingly, scientists are beginning to look at how our little friends within might also have a role in our mental health.

The microbes inside us actually outnumber our own cells – there are trillions of them! Thousands of species live in our gut – the majority are bacteria, but also include viruses and fungi amongst other things. Together they are called the gut microbiome, which weights around 2kg! To put this in perspective, an adult brain weighs around 1.4kg. It's been suggested that these little bugs together might actually have more influence over our body than the brain.

So where on earth do they come from? Well, the main source is from our biological mothers – during the birth process we get an 'innoculation' of all our mother's microbes in the secretions present at birth. Those bugs will multiply and stay with us all our lives. We will also pick up other microbes through our lifetimes. Toddlers will put anything and everything into their mouths, which might not be such a bad thing. As well as introducing a wider range of friendly microbes, it helps build the body's immune system by challenging it to mount an immune response and destroy any harmful



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microbes (pathogens) swallowed. Some of our friendly microbes have a direct role in fighting pathogens by producing chemicals that stop them multiplying.

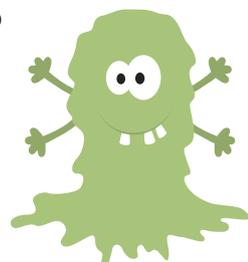
It's important to maintain the balance of the microbiome so that the 'friendly' helpful microbes outnumber the potentially harmful ones. The best way to do this is through eating food that encourages friendly microbes to grow and multiply, and eating less of the food which encourages the 'unfriendly' potentially harmful ones to grow.

The rules for doing this are relatively simple – a healthy microbiome needs lots of fruit and vegetables, wholegrains, nuts, beans and pulses which provide lots of fibre for our microbes to feast on. Fermented foods like live yoghurt and sauerkraut are also great for keeping our microbiome healthy and happy. Conversely, a diet low in these plant-based foods but high in sugar and refined carbs (white bread, biscuits, cakes and white pasta and

rice) will cause an imbalance, so more of the unfriendly, potentially harmful microbes grow. Too much processed and red meat may also contribute to this imbalance.

You might be wondering how you can do this in prison, when food choices are limited. To help you out, we've studied some canteen lists and kitchen menus, and give you some tips on doing this below.

A word of warning though – suddenly changing your diet from one low in fibre to one with lots will not give your gut microbes a chance to grow and multiply. Since we can't digest the fibre ourselves, such a sudden change might lead to some bloaty, gassy side-effects! It's better to gradually build up the amount of fruit, vegetables, beans and wholegrains you eat, to give your friendly bugs a chance to grow too.



A meal recipe your friendly microbes will love

Hummus, wholemeal pitta & crudites

For a basic hummus you will need:

- 1 can chick peas
- 1-2 cloves garlic
- Lemon juice

You will also need:

- 1-2 wholemeal pitta bread cut into fingers
- Vegetables cut into sticks e.g. carrot, cucumber, red pepper

How to make it:

1. Drain the liquid from the chickpeas and save – you might need it.
2. Place the chickpeas in a bowl and mash with a fork to make as smooth as possible.
3. Peel and finely chop the garlic and add to the mix.
4. Add lemon juice, a teaspoon at a time, to taste.
5. You're aiming for a smooth paste, so once you have the lemon flavour you like, if you need to, mix some of the saved chickpea liquid back to achieve the right consistency.
6. For a healthy gut-loving lunch for one person, serve half the hummus as a dip with pitta bread fingers and vegetable sticks.

Variations:

- **Lemon & coriander** – add some lemon zest and finely chopped coriander to the basic mix for a delicious combination of flavours.
- **Beetroot** – mash a cooked beetroot in with the chickpeas for a startlingly purple hummus
- **Chilli** – add ½ - 1 teaspoon of chilli flakes, or a few drops of hot chilli sauces to give your hummus an edge.



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Meal ideas for a happy microbiome



If you make wise choices from the menu, perhaps with some additions from the canteen, it is possible to choose food which will keep the bugs of your microbiome happy and your gut healthy. Here are some ideas to get you started.

Breakfast

- Porridge & Banana
- Bircher Muesli (for recipe see issue 1) – oats soaked overnight in fruit juice, with raisins, chopped apple and natural yoghurt (or better still, live yoghurt if you can get it)
- Weetabix with milk, topped with a sliced pear (fresh or canned)
- Wholemeal bread (or toast) with peanut butter

Lunch

- Tuna and salad sandwich on wholemeal bread
- Hummus, wholemeal pitta & veg sticks (see our recipe)
- Salad with butter beans and Ryvita
- Remember to have a piece fruit

Dinner

(inspired by recipes that have appeared on kitchen menus)

- Daal - lentil curry
- Veggie chilli con carne
- Beanburger in a wholemeal pitta & salad (replace the white bread bun with canteen-bought pitta)
- Choose a piece of fruit

In the next issue, you can find out more about how the microbiome affects so many aspects of physical and mental health.

Part 1: Yoga – simple



Before moving to the UK, Geoff was the Prison Yoga Program Director for the American non-profit organisation 'Community Yoga'. Now living in Leicester, he teaches public Yoga classes and workshops, organises a Yoga community

(The Space To Breathe Collective), shares Yoga in schools with Mindful Warriors, and coordinates the Prison Yoga Project's delivery of Yoga and other Mindfulness practices throughout the UK.

Starting something new can often be daunting. Watching others practice yoga, it can seem complex and perhaps unachievable for nervous beginners. But is it really so complicated? For almost 20 years, the Prison Yoga Project has been sharing Yoga and other Mindfulness practices with incarcerated populations around the world. Geoff O'Meara is the Co-ordinator for the Prison Yoga Project UK. In the first of two articles, Geoff explains what Yoga really means in the simplest of terms.

Yoga, simply put, is paying attention to what you are experiencing in the present moment. It's not remembering what the past was like, and it's not projecting what the future might hold; it's opening to, and then continually observing exactly what your life is right now. Another word often used for this practice is Mindfulness.

Yoga is often understood to be a practice in which one moves into particular 'poses' designed to open and relax the body. While there are common poses and transitions between these poses, you don't need to be so scripted in your practice. You could simply stand and observe your experience of your body as it maintains this easily accessible shape.

You might follow your curiosity: "Could I stand with a bit more intention – perhaps slightly lifting my chest, pressing into my feet, reaching through the crown of my head, opening the palms of my hands?"

What does that feel like? Are there any areas of tension? Relaxation? Resistance? Fatigue? Do new sensations arise over time while others fade? If you don't have the energy to stand, no problem – observe your experience as you simply sit here reading this article.

Again, be curious: "What am I experiencing in this 'pose'? What happens if I adjust my seat, perhaps by sitting a bit taller and lengthening my spine, rolling my shoulders back, and relaxing the muscles in my face? Can I ease my breath into a long exhale? What is the quality of my mind as I sit in

this gentle Yoga pose? Is it restful, remaining focused on the sensations in my body? Or is it scattered, on the move or trying to go somewhere else?"

All these experiences are okay! They are natural qualities we find in every human body and mind. However, through this simple practice of paying attention – Yoga! – we can start to get more familiar with ourselves.

To this newfound understanding we can add some gentle discipline, spice it up with some playful creativity and, before we know it, Yoga has taught us how to skilfully guide the movements of our body and mind, finally giving us the power to drop negative patterns and replace them with positive ones.

Whether it's standing, sitting, walking, eating or Sun Salutation, it's all Yoga, if you simply and gently pay attention to your experience. It's not necessarily easy, but one of the wonderful discoveries of Yoga practice is that we are all able to develop the skill and strength to be present with our life – whatever it looks like.

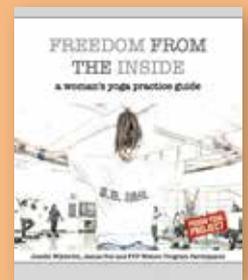
We will find that ability inside. That's the gift of Yoga. Please practice and see for yourself.

In issue 7 of Her Wellbeing, you can learn more about yoga and mindfulness from Geoff.

The Prison Yoga Project has just printed a brand new book – *Freedom From the Inside: a woman's yoga practice guide*.

It's a beautiful resource that will carefully support you in beginning – or continuing! – your Yoga practice.

To receive a FREE copy, please write to them, with your name, address and room number at: Prison Yoga Project (HW), PO Box 10873, Leicester LE5 9LL



STOP PRESS

Her Wellbeing now has a Freepost address, so that you can contact us at no cost to yourself. We would love to hear your views on *Her Wellbeing*, or send us a contribution such as favourite a no-cook recipe or wellbeing tip. To get in touch, just address the envelope: Freepost FOOD MATTERS.

We have some very exciting news in the next issue about a new food project you can all be involved in. Make sure you read issue 7 to find out more.

We are going digital! If you're getting out soon and would like to continue receiving *Her Wellbeing*, you can subscribe to a brand new e-newsletter, with a focus on life outside. When you're released, send an email to info@foodmatters.org or give us a call and we will sign you up.