

WELLNESS

WELLNESS

magazine

AUTUMN 2025

WELLNESS

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HEALTHIER MIND

HEALTHIER FOOD

HEALTHIER BODY

HEALTHIER WORLD

WELLNESS

WELCOME TO THE LATEST ISSUE OF OUR WELLNESS MAGAZINE!



Hello and welcome to the autumn edition of our Wellness Magazine.

At ESS, wellness is at the heart of everything we do. Guided by our pillars of healthier food, healthier mind, healthier body and healthier world, we are committed to supporting the wellbeing of our people and communities in meaningful and practical ways.

In this edition of our Wellness Magazine, we explore a wide range of important topics—from male incontinence and the menopause to Stoptober, grief awareness and safer gambling. We also highlight initiatives such as Zero Waste Week, Organic September and World Food Day, reflecting how individual wellbeing connects with the health of the wider world around us.

Together, these stories and insights are designed to inform, inspire and empower healthier choices for ourselves and for those we support every day.

A white, handwritten signature of Richard Jones, consisting of stylized, overlapping loops and lines.

Richard Jones
Managing Director - ESS Government



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WHAT ORGANIC REALLY MEANS: FARM TO PLATE

FROM SOIL TO SUPPER: HOW ORGANIC AGRICULTURE NURTURES BIODIVERSITY—AND YOUR PLATE

ORGANIC SEPTEMBER

WORLD VEGETARIAN DAY: 1ST OCTOBER 2025

When you see the word ‘organic’ on a food label, it often evokes images of healthy fields and chemical-free produce. In reality, it is a regulated system of farming that prioritises the health of the soil, the resilience of ecosystems, and the long-term sustainability of our food supply. The way we grow our food directly connects to what ends up on our plates, and ultimately our choices can help restore nature.

Organic farming avoids synthetic fertilisers and pesticides, relying instead on natural solutions such as compost, green manure and crop rotation. It uses non-GMO (genetically modified organisms) seeds and treats the land as a living system. According to the

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, organic agriculture now covers over 76 million hectares worldwide, a figure that has more than doubled in the past decade, showing growing demand for sustainable food systems.¹

An organic approach supports biodiversity in ways that conventional farming often does not. Meta-analyses found that organic farms host on average 30% more species and up to 50% more individual organisms than non-organic farms.² Hedgerows and wildflower strips left intact on organic fields provide vital habitat for bees, butterflies and birds, while healthy soils—free from synthetic inputs—teem with microbes and earthworms that help crops thrive. In a world where the United Nations (UN) estimates that one million species are at risk of extinction, farming practices that create refuges for wildlife are more important than ever.³

However, this isn’t just good news for nature—it affects what we eat too. Healthier soils lead to more resilient crops. Some studies suggest organic produce can contain higher levels of certain antioxidants and polyphenols. For example, recent research reported that organic vegetables often contain 20–40% higher antioxidant activity compared to conventional equivalents.⁴

Lending itself to organic, plant-based choices can lighten our environmental footprint and improve our wellbeing. A vegetarian diet is linked to reduced greenhouse gas emissions—the EAT-

Lancet Commission (2019) highlights that shifting towards plant-based eating could cut food-related emissions by up to 50%.⁵ Choosing organic on top of that deepens the impact. Organic farms typically use 45% less energy per unit of output and emit significantly lower levels of nitrogen pollution compared to conventional farms.⁶ When you opt for organic vegetables, pulses and grains, you are supporting farming systems that prioritise biodiversity and soil health. These systems often source from local or regional growers, which reduces food miles and fosters community resilience.

Even small actions add up. Preparing a meal with organic ingredients or visiting a local organic farmers’ market makes you part of a global movement to protect ecosystems. Growing a pot of organic herbs on your windowsill is a small gesture with big symbolism: a reminder that biodiversity begins in the soil and flourishes when we care for it.

It’s true that organic food often carries a higher price tag. On average, organic fruit and vegetables can cost 20–40% more than conventional produce because farmers use labour-intensive methods, maintain higher welfare and environmental standards, and cover certification fees. That extra cost is also an investment in healthier soils, thriving pollinators and fewer chemicals on your plate. For many, the challenge is balancing those benefits with a realistic food budget.





The good news is that going organic doesn't have to mean going all in. You can start with a few smart swaps that make the biggest difference, such as organic apples, spinach or oats, which are known to carry higher pesticide residues when grown conventionally.

Buying seasonally keeps prices lower, and own brand organic ranges in supermarkets are often far more affordable than premium labels. Local farmers' markets and veg box schemes also offer good value and cut out some of the supply chain costs. By mixing these approaches, you can bring more organic choices into your kitchen without stretching your budget—proving that eating well and treading lightly on the planet can go hand in hand.

Every plate of food is part of a wider chain that starts with the land. When choosing your plant-based food, choose organic means. This will support the systems that sustain them—and us. It's a simple, powerful way to align your wellbeing with the wellbeing of the planet, one meal at a time.

Top tips for affordable organic food

- Start with high impact swaps**
 Focus on items known for higher pesticide residues, such as spinach, apples and strawberries. Even a few organic choices make a difference.
- Buy seasonal**
 Organic produce in season can cost up to 30% less than out of season imports—it's fresher and tastier too.
- Look for own brand organic ranges**
 Supermarket own label organics are often 10–20% cheaper than premium brands.
- Use local box schemes or farmers' markets**
 Cutting out the middleman often means better value, as well as supporting nearby growers.
- Go plant forward**
 Organic vegetables, grains and pulses are usually far cheaper than organic meat. Shifting more meals towards plants can stretch your budget further.
- Mix and match**
 You don't have to go 100% organic—combine organic staples with conventional basics to balance cost and impact.



1 Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), The State of Food and Agriculture 2023.

2 Environmental Evidence (2021) meta analysis: Organic farming supports 30% more species on average.

3 IPBES Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity (2019): ~1 million species at risk of extinction.

4 British Journal of Nutrition (2021): Organic produce often has 20–40% higher antioxidant activity.

5 EAT Lancet Commission on Healthy Diets (2019): Plant based diets could cut food related emissions by up to 50%.

6 Nature Sustainability (2020): Organic systems use 45% less energy per unit of output.

FERMENTED, FAKED OR FUNCTIONAL?

HOW TO CHOOSE FOODS THAT TRULY FEED YOUR GUT

SOURDOUGH MONTH: OCTOBER 2025

Fermentation is a natural biochemical process in which microorganisms, such as bacteria, yeast and occasionally moulds, convert sugars into acids, alcohols, gases, and other bioactive compounds.

Lactic acid fermentation—a process driven by bacteria like *Lactobacillus*, *Leuconostoc* and *Bifidobacterium*—forms the basis for many fermented foods including yoghurt, kefir, sauerkraut, kimchi, kombucha and sourdough. These fermentations generate compounds like short-chain fatty acids, exopolysaccharides, bacteriocins and peptides, all of which may help modulate your immune system, quell inflammation and support gut barrier function.

The human gastrointestinal tract (the pathway food and liquids take through your body) hosts a complex and dynamic ecosystem of microorganisms—collectively known as the gut microbiota—which play essential roles in immune function, metabolism, brain health and mood.¹ Fermented foods are among the most studied dietary approaches to support this ecosystem, delivering both probiotics (live microbes) and postbiotics (their beneficial metabolic by-products).

Consumption of fermented foods can help support a healthy balance of gut microbiota (a community of microorganisms in a specific environment). In fact, studies have linked regular intake of fermented items to increased microbial diversity and enrichment of beneficial microbial taxa.² However, the real-world impact

of fermented foods depends on several key factors: the number of viable microbes at the point of consumption (measured in colony-forming units, CFU), strain specificity (the exact types of bacteria), serving size and frequency, and the individual's own gut environment.

Probiotics

Probiotics are live micro-organisms that offer a health benefit to their host when administered.³ In the UK, the term 'probiotic' is regulated under EU retained legislation (Regulation (EC) No 1924/2006)⁴, prohibiting its use on food labels unless a specific health claim has been authorised. This has resulted in limited consumer transparency regarding the probiotic content of commercially available fermented products.

The British Dietetic Association has advocated for clearer labelling standards, including disclosure of specific types of microbes and how many live ones are present in their products, to support evidence-based consumer choices.⁵ Currently, only a limited number of UK producers, typically smaller-scale artisan companies such as Loving Foods and The Cultured Collective, provide unpasteurised, live-culture fermented products aimed at retaining as many

beneficial microbes as possible.

Postbiotics

Non-viable microbial cells, their parts, or the metabolites produced during probiotic fermentation can still provide health benefits.⁶ These bioactive substances include short-chain fatty acids, peptides, enzymes, and cell wall fragments, which help balance immune function, reduce inflammation and support gut barrier integrity.

Unlike probiotics, postbiotics do not require live microorganisms to be effective, offering advantages in terms of stability and safety in food and supplements.

What is taxa?

A scientific term used to refer to groups of organisms that are classified together—for example, species, genera, families, etc.





What impacts the effectiveness of fermented foods on the gut?

The gut microbiota is highly individualised and responsive to dietary inputs. However, how well fermented foods function as dietary interventions depends on several critical factors:

- **Microbial viability:** The number of live microorganisms (measured in CFU) at the point of consumption.
- **Strain specificity:** Different bacterial strains have unique effects and benefits.
- **Dose and frequency:** Sufficient and regular intake is likely necessary for it to make a difference.
- **Host factors:** Individual gut environment and genetics influence how they respond.

Despite the potential benefits of natural fermentation, many supermarket products—particularly in the UK—include shortcuts that diminish microbial diversity. These include pasteurisation after fermentation (which kills both helpful and harmful microbes), shortened fermentation times, use of narrow-strain starter cultures, and the addition of preservatives that inhibit microbial activity.⁷ Compounding this, UK food labelling currently does not mandate disclosure of live microbial counts or strain details, leaving consumers in the dark.⁵

Sourdough is a standout example of fermentation's potential. It uses naturally occurring LAB (lactic acid bacteria) and wild yeasts, and when made authentically with prolonged fermentation (often 12–24 hours or more), it aids digestion by breaking down gluten, FODMAPs^a, and phytic acid, making it easier for your body to absorb nutrients.^{9,10} The organic acids generated during fermentation

also slow starch digestion, which can moderate blood sugar responses.^{11,12} While the baking process kills live microbes, it leaves behind postbiotic compounds that support gut health. Recent studies have shown that fermentation increases health-impacting water-extractable arabinoxylans—a type of dietary fibre linked to gut wellbeing.¹³

In response to consumer confusion over sourdough labels, Defra launched a consultation in 2024 proposing clearer labelling for method of production and origin, making it easier to distinguish authentic artisan fermentation from industrial shortcuts.¹⁵ This initiative aims to support bakers using traditional methods and empower consumers choosing healthier foods.

Home fermentation remains an accessible alternative to industrial products, though it requires strict hygiene to avoid contamination—guidelines are set out by the UK Food Standards Agency.¹⁶ A major European research effort—the HealthFerm Project—is now collecting sourdough starter samples from home bakers to map starter biodiversity and test their health effects, including human trials aimed at decoding the impact of fermented foods on our microbiota.¹⁷

What are FODMAPs?

FODMAPs are a group of short-chain carbohydrates—Fermentable Oligosaccharides, Disaccharides, Monosaccharides and Polyols—that are poorly absorbed in the small intestine. When ingested, they draw water into the gut and are fermented by bacteria in the large intestine, often causing gas, bloating, pain and altered bowel habits, particularly in individuals with Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS).⁸

How to spot authentic sourdough

Ingredients:

Look for a short ingredient list—ideally just flour, water, salt and starter. Avoid loaves with added vinegar, yeast, ascorbic acid or emulsifiers.

Ask about fermentation time:

Authentic sourdough is usually fermented for many hours, often 12–24 hours or more.

Look for Real Bread accreditation:

The Real Bread Campaign offers guidance and promotes bakers who use genuine sourdough methods.

Texture & crust:

Real sourdough tends to have a chewy, open crumb (with air pockets) and a thick, crisp crust.

No added commercial yeast:

Genuine sourdough relies entirely on its wild yeast and bacterial culture to rise.



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 5. British Dietetic Association. (2023). Probiotics and gut health: Evidence review and position statement. Retrieved from: <https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/probiotics-and-gut-health.html>
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SIMPLE SOURDOUGH

A mindful ritual for nourishing body and soul.



Simon Coulter,
Group Executive Chef
- ESS, World Tapas
UK Heats Winner

Sourdough baking is more than just making bread—it's a slow, grounding practice that connects us to tradition, nature and our own rhythms. Rich in gut-friendly bacteria and free from commercial additives, sourdough is a wholesome staple that supports digestive health and encourages intentional living.

Equipment:

Starter:

Pop jar
Spatula
Whisk
Bowl

To make the bread:

A large bowl
Dutch oven or a heavy casserole pot with a lid
Small bowl of cold water for dipping your hands when handling the dough

The Sourdough Starter (aka 'The Mother')

Your starter is a living culture—nurtured over time, it becomes the heart of your loaf. Begin this process 6–7 days before baking, allowing nature to do its quiet work.

Day 1:

- 50g organic stoneground flour, preferably strong white or wholemeal
- 50ml filtered water

- 1 Mix into a loose paste in a large glass jar or BPA-free container.
- 2 Cover loosely and leave at room temperature for 24 hours.

Days 2–5:

Feed your starter daily at roughly the same time:

- 3 Add 50g flour and 50ml water
- 4 Stir well and cover again

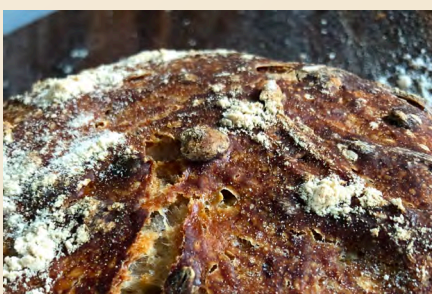
By day 5, your starter should show signs of life—bubbles, a tangy aroma and a slightly sour scent.

Day 6:

You'll now have around 500g of starter. Discard 400g (or share it with a friend) and refresh with:

- 150g strong white flour
- 150ml filtered water

Let it sit at warm room temperature for 6 hours. It should become bubbly, airy and fragrant—ready to bake.



The Loaf

Ingredients:

- 400g strong white bread flour
- 100g wholemeal, rye or mixed grain flour
- 350ml room-temperature water
- 150g active sourdough starter
- 7.5–10g sea salt

Method:

- 1 Activate the sponge. In a large bowl, mix water and starter. It should float and bubble—signs of readiness. Stir in half the flour mix. Cover and rest for 1 hour.
- 2 Build the dough. Add remaining flour and salt. Knead for 5 minutes until smooth. Shape into a ball, dust lightly with flour, and return to the bowl. Cover and rest for 45 minutes.
- 3 Stretch and fold. Wet your hands to prevent sticking. Gently stretch the dough from the edges. Rotate the bowl slightly with each fold. Shape into a ball, seam-side down, and rest for 30 minutes. Repeat the stretch and fold process three more times.
- 4 Prepare to bake. Preheat oven to 210°C. Place a Dutch oven or heavy casserole dish inside to warm. Dust the base with flour.
- 5 Final shape and score. Wet your hands, shape the dough one last time, and score the top with a sharp blade. Place into the preheated dish, cover, and rest for 15 minutes.
- 6 Bake covered for 40 minutes. Remove the lid and bake for an additional 15 minutes until golden and crisp.
- 7 Let the loaf cool for at least an hour. This allows the crumb to set and the flavours to deepen.



WILD & WELL

WHY SWAPPING BEEF FOR VENISON COULD BOOST YOUR HEALTH AND THE PLANET

BRITISH FOOD FORTNIGHT: 26TH SEPTEMBER - 12TH OCTOBER 2025
WORLD FOOD DAY: 16TH OCTOBER 2025

A game changer: how venison can benefit both you and the environment.

Beef has been a staple on British tables for centuries, but there's a quieter contender making its way onto menus. More than just a seasonal game meat, venison is being recognised for its impressive nutritional profile and its potential to lighten our environmental footprint.^{1,2}

Venison's low fat content and nutrient density make it a good choice for those who still want to include some red meat in their diet without overdoing saturated fat.¹ A 100 g serving of wild venison typically contains only around 2–3 g of fat and roughly 158 kcal, while an equivalent portion of minced beef can easily carry 8–15 g of fat and over 250 kcal, depending on the cut.^{3,4} Further nutritional benefits include high-quality protein, important for repair and recovery; rich levels of iron and B vitamins, both crucial for energy and healthy blood cells; and beneficial omega-3 fatty acids, which play a role in heart health. Furthermore, deer are not raised in intensive feedlot systems, and their meat usually comes without the routine antibiotics often used in large-scale livestock production.

In blind tastings, many consumers describe venison as having a rich, slightly sweet flavour and being less fatty than beef, making it popular in gourmet burgers, sausages and roasts.⁸

Venison and beef comparison of two similar cuts of meat

Nutrient (per 100 g)	Venison (grilled)	Beef Sirloin (grilled)
Energy (kcal)	133	184
Protein (g)	29.2	27.7
Total fat (g)	1.6	9.0
Saturated fat (g)	0.6	3.5
Iron (mg)	3.4	2.1
Zinc (mg)	3.2	4.0
Vitamin B12 (µg)	2.3	1.9

Better for the planet

Cattle farming is widely recognised as resource intensive, contributing significantly to methane emissions, high water consumption and, in some regions, deforestation. Beef production is one of the largest sources of greenhouse gases in the food system, with global averages around 27 kg of CO₂ equivalent per kilogram of beef and UK figures typically ranging from 19–30 kg CO₂e depending on the production system.^{5,6}

This substantial footprint stems from methane released during digestion, feed production, manure management and land use change. In contrast, venison in the UK is often sourced from wild deer populations, which are carefully managed to prevent overgrazing and woodland damage, or from small, low impact farms where herds graze more naturally in lower numbers.

Because deer are not intensively farmed and do not require concentrated feed, venison—particularly from wild deer management programmes—has a much smaller carbon footprint, with studies indicating emissions as low as 3–5 kg CO₂e per kilogram of meat, around 60–80% lower than beef.⁷

Even farmed venison generally produces lower emissions, estimated at 4–13 kg CO₂e per kilogram depending on the farming method. Choosing venison, especially when sourced through recognised game assurance schemes, not only helps manage deer populations sustainably but also offers consumers a meaningful way to reduce the environmental impact of their diets.

Venison is now appearing in mainstream UK supermarkets and restaurant menus, with some chains noting a year on year sales increase of 10–15% for game meat products.⁸

A 2022 survey by the British Game Alliance (now British Game Assurance) found 62% of respondents were willing to try venison as a lean, sustainable alternative to beef or lamb.⁸

1 British Nutrition Foundation. (2022). Meat in the diet. <https://www.nutrition.org.uk>

2 FAO. (2020). Livestock solutions for climate change. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

3 Public Health England. (2021). McCance and Widdowson's Composition of Foods Integrated Dataset.

4 USDA FoodData Central. (2020). Venison, raw and cooked nutrient profiles. United States Department of Agriculture.

5 Poore, J. and Nemecek, T. (2018) 'Reducing food's environmental impacts through producers and consumers', *Science*, 360(6392), pp. 987–992.

In the UK, wild deer populations have grown to over **2 million** animals, and culling is necessary to prevent overgrazing and woodland damage. Using this meat prevents waste and turns essential population control into a food resource.⁹



A rich flavour worth exploring

Venison isn't just healthier and more sustainable—it also tastes good. Its flavour is deeper and slightly more gamey than beef, making it a favourite for chefs who want to showcase seasonal British produce.

It pairs well with bold ingredients like juniper, garlic and red wine, and works beautifully in roasts, slow-cooked stews or even as a lean mince for cottage pie.

Buying and cooking tips

- **Source wisely:** Look for venison from estates or butchers that follow British Game Assurance standards.
- **Cook carefully:** Because it's low in fat, it can dry out quickly—marinating or slow cooking keeps it tender.
- **Enjoy in moderation:** It's still classed as red meat, so balance your meals with vegetables, wholegrains and pulses.

Making the switch from beef to venison, even for a few meals each month, can mean eating less saturated fat, supporting better land management and trying something new in the kitchen. In a time when we're all thinking more about what's on our plates and how it affects the planet, venison offers a flavourful and responsible alternative.

Where to buy

Look for sustainably sourced venison from:

- Local butchers
- Farmers' markets
- British Game Assurance certified suppliers
- Online ethical meat providers

Over 3,500 tonnes of wild venison enter the UK food chain annually, with demand rising as consumers seek sustainable alternatives.⁸

British Food 
Fortnight
 2025

26th September - 12th October

Emits 27% of the CO₂ emissions compared to beef.¹

Contains less fat and saturated fat per gram than beef.²

Provides more protein per gram than beef.²

6 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) (2020) Agriculture in the United Kingdom 2020. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/agriculture-in-the-united-kingdom-2020>

7 White, P. J. C., et al. (2014). "The environmental impact of wild venison compared to other red meats." *Journal of Environmental Management*, 146, 1–7.

8 British Game Assurance (2022). *Game meat market insights*.

9 British Deer Society (2023). *Deer in the UK*.

GAME- CHANGING FLAVOURS: AWARD-WINNING VENISON RECIPE



Simon Coulter,
Group Executive Chef
– ESS, World Tapas
UK Heats Winner

Simon Coulter impressed the judges with an outstanding venison-themed dish that earned him the top spot in the UK Heats of the World Tapas Competition. This November, he'll proudly represent the UK at the World Tapas Finals in Spain. In this feature, Simon shares the recipe that helped him secure his place on the international stage—showcasing creativity, precision and bold flavour.

Tartar of Smoked Roe Deer

With Picos Blue, Cep & Fermented Barley Croquettes, Black Garlic Aioli, Pickled Enoki Mushroom, Moscatel Raisin Gel, Hazelnut & Honey Praline.

Ingredients

Venison loin:

- 100g roe deer venison loin
- 5g Maldon flaked sea salt
- 1g coarse ground pepper
- 2g Chef William garlic powder
- 2g Chef William onion powder
- 1g dried rosemary
- 1g dried thyme
- 2g smoked paprika
- 5g muscovado sugar
- 1g celery seed

Croquettes:

- 150g raw pearl barley
- 10g butter
- 18g dried cep or porcini mushrooms
- 100g Cropwell Bishop cheese
- 5g thyme
- 10g chives
- 100g Wessex Mill rye flour
- 75ml Madeira or Muscat cooking wine
- 40g shallot
- 15g garlic
- 2 medium free-range eggs
- 50ml rapeseed oil
- 50g cornflakes

Black garlic aioli:

- 2 medium free-range egg yolks
- 10g Dijon mustard
- 50ml black truffle oil
- 30g black garlic paste
- 35ml Belazu Vinagre de Jerez
- 3g Maldon flaked sea salt
- 100ml rapeseed oil

Remaining garnish:

- 20g enoki mushroom
- 100g Belazu Vinagre de Jerez
- 100g sugar
- 10g salt
- 10g whole aromats (mustard seeds, coriander seeds, fennel seeds, peppercorns, star anise)
- 50g raisins
- 60g hazelnuts
- 25g wildflower honey
- 10g chives

Equipment

- Tabletop fryer or air fryer
- Smoker
- Bowls
- Spatula or spoons
- 2 saucepans
- Chopping board
- A sharp knife
- Small food processor

Advanced preparation

A week prior to cooking, soak the barley overnight, then rinse and place in a jar. Add 150 g pearl barley to 600 ml filtered water with 6 g salt. Transfer to a pop jar and leave to ferment in a relatively cool, ambient area.

12 hours prior or overnight:

- 1 Soak the dried ceps in boiling water. The following day, remove the mushrooms and reserve the stock.
- 2 Soak the raisins in 25 ml Muscat wine and 75 ml boiling water. Remove the plumped raisins, add to a small blender and blitz until smooth. Loosen with any remaining liquor until you have a gel.
- 3 Prepare the pickling liquor by combining 100 ml sherry vinegar, 50 g sugar, 10 g sea salt, and the mustard seeds, coriander seeds, fennel seeds, peppercorns and star anise in a pan. Cook on a medium heat until the sugar dissolves. Remove from heat and allow to chill and flavours to infuse. Strain into a bowl prior to use.

Black garlic aioli

- 1 Peel black garlic cloves and push through a sieve using the back of a spoon until you have a smooth paste.
- 2 In a small blender, add sherry vinegar, Dijon mustard and egg yolks, then blend. Slowly pour in the truffle oil, followed by the rapeseed oil.
- 3 Once emulsified, add the black garlic paste and salt, and then blend again.

Tartar

- 1 Trim any excess fat or sinew from the loin.
- 2 Mix the seasonings together and coat the loin evenly, reserving 1 tsp of seasoning for pane mix later in the recipe.
- 3 Set the smoker with your choice of wood chips, light the chips with a blow torch, and offset the heat as best as possible, allowing the smoke to begin to flow. Smoke the fillet intensely for 2 minutes, then remove the smoker from the heat without removing the lid. After a total of 5 minutes, remove the fillet and place on a cooling rack.

- 4 In a hot pan with a teaspoon of oil, quickly seal off the seasoned sides of the loin. Once sealed, place on a cooling rack to rest.
- 5 Once rested, dice the venison into tiny pieces no bigger than 3 mm. Finely chop the fresh chives.

Croquettes

- 1 Return to the fermented pearl barley 5 days later and strain.
- 2 Peel and crush the garlic. Finely chop the garlic, shallot, and de-leaf the thyme. In a pan, add the oil, butter, shallot, garlic and thyme.
- 3 Stir gently in the butter and cook until soft with no colour. Next, add the barley and stir well.
- 4 Pour in the Muscat wine and sherry vinegar and allow to cook out gently until the barley is just soft—about 2 minutes short of al dente. Decant onto a tray and cool.
- 5 In a pan, reduce the mushroom stock with the remaining Muscat wine until you have about 100 ml. Finely chop the mushrooms.
- 6 Add the barley mix to a bowl. Remove any rind from the blue cheese and crumble into the chilled barley mix. Add the mushrooms and stock, then mix well.
- 7 Weigh out 25 g balls of the mix. Using a 35 mm round pastry cutter, press each ball into the mould so that you have a small puck. Once done, put on a tray and chill.
- 8 Blend cornflakes to a crumb resembling panko breadcrumbs in size. Preheat the deep-fat fryer to 170°C.
- 9 Prepare three bowls: one with rye flour and seasoning, one with whisked egg, and one with the cornflake crumb. Pane the pucks in that order until evenly coated.
- 10 Carefully fry the croquette until crispy and golden brown, ensuring the core temperature reaches 75°C. Set aside on a piece of kitchen towel to soak up any remaining oil and leave to rest.

Praline

- 1 Add 50 g sugar to a pan and simmer until the sugar has dissolved.
- 2 Add the hazelnuts and simmer gently as the syrup reduces. Before the syrup becomes a caramel, remove the nuts using a slotted spoon. Set to the side on a tray to cool.
- 3 Preheat a deep-fat fryer with clean oil to 170°C. Fry the hazelnuts until golden brown, remove and strain the excess oil.
- 4 Once cool, blitz the hazelnuts to a crumb and set aside. In a pan, add the honey and remaining mushroom liquor. Bring quickly to the boil, add the nuts and stir through. This final step should be done a few minutes prior to plating.

Final assembly

- 1 Chop the enoki mushroom into 5 mm pieces and soak them in pickling liquor for 2 minutes.
- 2 In a bowl, add the diced venison, chives, 1 tsp raisin gel, 2 g sea salt and the strained mushrooms. Mix together well.
- 3 Use 2 teaspoons to shape a quenelle and place it on top of each croquette. Top with a good drop of the aioli, add another drop of raisin gel, and serve.



GRIEF

HOW IT MANIFESTS AND HOW WE CAN OFFER COMPASSIONATE SUPPORT ACROSS CULTURES

NATIONAL GRIEF AWARENESS WEEK: 2ND–8TH DECEMBER 2025

Grief is a deeply personal, yet universal human experience.

Whenever we lose someone or something significant—whether a loved one, a relationship or a way of life—we encounter grief’s complex emotional, physical and spiritual impact. Despite its inevitability, grief can feel isolating, especially in cultures that value resilience or ‘moving on’. Understanding how grief shows up in our bodies and minds, and how cultural traditions shape the mourning process, helps us better support ourselves and those we care about in times of loss.

Grief manifests in diverse and sometimes unexpected ways. Emotionally, people may feel waves of sadness, anger, guilt, relief, confusion or numbness—and these emotions can coexist. Some people describe feeling as though they are outside of themselves or disconnected from reality. Physically, grief can drain the body’s reserves. Common symptoms include fatigue, headaches, muscle tension, digestive upset and sleep disturbances. These physical signs are reminders that grief is not only an emotional experience but a whole-body one. Cognitive effects, such as difficulty concentrating, forgetfulness, or a sense of mental fog, are also common. Socially, grief may draw people inward; they might withdraw from friends or activities, not out of disinterest but because the world can feel overwhelming.^{1,2}

While modern models like Elisabeth Kübler-Ross’s stages of grief (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance) have helped many people frame their experience, grief is rarely linear. Most of us move through these emotional states in no set order and often revisit them at different times. Contemporary

research, including that by Shear et al,^{3,4} highlights that grief is an ongoing process, not a problem to be solved. In some cases, prolonged or complicated grief can persist beyond what’s typical, interfering significantly with daily life. When this happens, gentle encouragement toward professional support is vital.³

Culture plays a profound role in how grief is expressed, processed and supported. In the UK and other Western contexts, grief is often seen as a personal journey. Individuals might express sorrow through private rituals, memorial services or therapy, with an emphasis on processing emotions internally or in small groups. In contrast, many African and Caribbean cultures view grief as a collective responsibility. Mourning may involve days or even weeks of community gatherings, song, dance and shared meals, where loss is honoured openly and communally. In East Asian cultures, the expression of grief might be more restrained outwardly, with emphasis placed on respect, ritual precision and harmony—for instance, through offerings at family altars or carefully structured ceremonies. Indigenous traditions often weave grief into spiritual practices, seeing death not as an end but as a transition, and honouring ancestors through storytelling, art and community gatherings (see *Grief Practices Across Cultures* table for more examples).

Recognising these cultural differences is essential when supporting someone who is grieving. There is no single ‘right’ way to mourn, and what feels healing to one person might not resonate with another. What matters most is sensitivity, openness and presence. Often, simply being there—

listening without judgement, helping with daily tasks, and respecting the bereaved person’s pace and choices—provides more comfort than any well-intentioned words. Avoiding clichés like ‘they’re in a better place’ or ‘everything happens for a reason’, unless you’re certain it aligns with the person’s beliefs, is a small but powerful act of care.

Practical support can also make a significant difference. This might mean preparing food, helping with childcare, managing errands or simply checking in regularly—not just in the early days of loss but in the weeks and months that follow, when the initial outpouring of support may fade. Remembering anniversaries, birthdays or meaningful dates connected to the deceased can also provide comfort and remind the grieving person they are not alone.

In multicultural communities, showing awareness of different mourning traditions fosters inclusion and compassion. Whether attending a memorial, respecting periods of mourning, or simply asking, ‘Is there anything I can do that would be helpful for you right now?’, small gestures can bridge cultural differences and offer genuine support.

Ultimately, grief reminds us of our shared humanity. It calls on us to slow down, show kindness and walk alongside one another, no matter how unfamiliar the path of loss may feel.

How to support someone who is grieving

Be present and listen

Sometimes, the best thing you can do is simply be there. Offer a listening ear without trying to fix or rush their feelings. Let them share memories or feelings at their own pace.⁵

Acknowledge their loss

Avoid clichés or minimising their pain. Acknowledge that their grief is real and valid. Simple phrases like ‘I’m so sorry for your loss’ or ‘I’m here for you’ can be comforting.⁶

Offer practical help

Grieving people often struggle with day-to-day tasks. Offer to help with cooking, cleaning, or errands, or just spend time with them doing simple activities.⁷

Be patient

Grief doesn’t follow a timeline. Understand that they may have good days and bad days. Avoid pressuring them to ‘move on’ or ‘get over it’.⁸

Encourage professional help if needed

Sometimes grief can become overwhelming. Gently suggest counselling or support groups if you notice prolonged or intense distress.⁹

Remember important dates

Mark anniversaries, birthdays or holidays and check in with the person. These times can be especially difficult, and simply knowing someone remembers can mean a great deal.¹⁰

Respect their way of grieving

Everyone grieves differently. Some people want to talk, others prefer solitude. Respect their needs and don’t impose your expectations on them.¹¹

Grief practices across cultures

Culture / Region	Grieving Practices	Key Cultural Role / Meaning
Western (e.g., UK, USA)	Private mourning; somber funerals; emphasis on returning to normal life; some moving towards communal, open grief.	Emotional control and individual closure; evolving towards communal healing and open expression.
Hindu (India)	Elaborate rituals: cremation, 13-day mourning period, Shradha ceremonies.	Honors spiritual transition and karmic journey; rituals provide comfort and purpose.
Sub-Saharan Africa (e.g., Ghana, Nigeria)	Mourning with ceremony: drumming, singing, dancing, communal sharing; formal organisations (e.g., Edir in Ethiopia).	Community solidarity and shared burden; vibrant expression affirms life and supports the bereaved.
Native American (Lakota tribe)	Collective grief: ‘Mitakuye oyasin’ (we are all related); tribe mourns jointly.	Emphasises interconnectedness, unity, shared responsibility.
Japanese	Quiet, ritualised mourning: Buddhist ceremonies, wakes, memorials at 7, 49, 100 days, anniversaries.	Balances spiritual respect, ancestral connection, and remembrance through solemnity.
Indigenous Māori (New Zealand)	Tangihanga: multi-day rites with speeches, songs, mourning garb, communal feasting, house cleansing.	Community gathering in emotional expression, ancestral respect, and collective healing.
Toraja (Sulawesi, Indonesia)	Death celebrations months or years later; feasts, corpse exhumations (Ma’Nene), effigies, communal mourning.	Honors continuity between past and present; flexible timing for proper communal mourning.
Oppari (Tamil Nadu, S. India)	Women perform lamenting songs (oppari), some as professionals.	Shared lament through song allows collective emotional release and cultural continuity.
Assyrian (Middle East)	Open-house mourning, incense, dirges by women, black clothing for 40+ days; rituals at 3 days, 40 days, 1 year.	Supports collective mourning and spiritual preparation.
Hispanic Catholic	Prayer novenas, rosary beads, votive candles, Catholic funeral Masses; Day of the Dead altars, grave cleaning.	Worship and remembrance strengthen spiritual and familial connections.
African American (Homegoing)	‘Homegoing’ celebrations with gospel music, eulogies, open casket; communal sharing combining joy and mourning.	Ritual affirms life and faith; encourages communal emotional healing.
Native American (varied tribes)	Sacred ceremonies with ritual dancing, feasts, giveaways; strong nature connection.	Reinforces spiritual journey, ancestral connection, community solidarity.
Asian Traditions	White mourning clothes, cremation, ancestral rites, incense, chanting (in Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, East Asian cultures).	Respectful soul transition, family remembrance, ritual purification.
Jewish Traditions	Structured mourning: 7-day ‘Shiva’, 30-day ‘Shloshim’, year-long practices; burial with dignity.	Structured communal support, responsibility, gradual reintegration.
Islamic Traditions	Three days of intense family grieving with prayers, swift funeral, simple burial with prescribed roles.	Emphasises humility, spiritual preparation, communal faith support.
Buddhist Customs	Chanting, meditation, spiritual offerings; cremation, enshrinement, temple rituals.	Mental calm, karma-based transition; honours life and death as part of cycle.

5/23/2024

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THE HIGH STAKES OF THE MIND: UNDERSTANDING GAMBLING AND ITS GRIP ON MENTAL HEALTH

SAFER GAMBLING WEEK: 17TH-23RD NOVEMBER 2025

Gambling often begins innocently—a sweepstake on the Grand National, a few spins on an online slot or a night out at the casino.

For many, it is little more than a recreational pastime and a way to break up the monotony of daily life with a hint of excitement. Yet, beneath the flashing lights and hopeful thrill lies a darker truth: for some, what begins as harmless fun can quickly take a significant toll on mental health, with the descent from enjoyment to harm often coming faster than they ever anticipated.

According to the Gambling Commission's 2023 report, approximately 300,000 adults are classified as problem gamblers, while an additional 1.8 million are considered at risk.¹

At its core, gambling taps into fundamental mechanisms of the human brain. When someone places a bet, dopamine (a neurotransmitter associated with pleasure and reward) is released. You might expect your body to only produce this neurological response when you win, but in fact it happens when you lose too. This means individuals can have trouble recognising when it is time to stop playing. This pattern is not unlike those observed in substance addictions. The anticipation, the near-misses and the illusion of control all conspire to keep individuals coming back for more. Ongoing cycles of losses followed by wins create a powerful psychological trip. This reinforcement schedule, known as intermittent reinforcement, is the same principle that makes slot machines so addictive. You're rewarded just often enough to keep going, chasing the idea that a win is always just one more spin away.

Problem gambling rarely presents as a crisis from the outset. More often, it builds quietly and subtly. A person might start with modest stakes, believing they're in control, but as losses increase, they may fall into the trap of chasing losses in an

attempt to win back what was lost. This behaviour often results in further losses, leading to feelings of shame, anxiety and hopelessness. Mental health consequences can be profound. Problem gamblers are more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts. Those with gambling problems are more than twice as likely to report suicidal ideation compared with the general population.³ Gambling-related harm doesn't just affect the gambler: it also impacts those around them, including friends, family and colleagues.

For every person with a gambling disorder, up to six others can experience negative effects.²

One of the most deceptive aspects of gambling addiction is the deep denial that often accompanies it. Many problem gamblers don't recognise the severity of their situation until their finances, relationships or health are already in jeopardy. The secrecy, the minimising of losses and the justifications such as "I'm due a win," or "I can stop any time," are classic psychological defence mechanisms. What begins as a small issue, a bit of extra spending and a few white lies to cover losses, can snowball into something much more damaging. Some people only seek help after facing serious consequences: mounting debt, job loss, broken relationships or mental health crises.

Unlike drugs or alcohol, gambling doesn't leave a physical trace, so it can be harder to detect. However, the emotional and psychological damage can be just as severe.

The good news is that support is available, and recovery is possible. The NHS offers dedicated treatment for gambling addiction through the National Problem Gambling Clinic, while charities like GamCare and Gordon Moody provide free counselling and residential support. New digital interventions, such as blocking software and self-exclusion schemes like GAMSTOP are also helping people to take back control. However, experts argue that more must be done to tackle the root causes, particularly among vulnerable groups. Young men aged 18–24 are disproportionately affected, as are those living in economically deprived areas.

The rise of online gambling, which is accessible 24/7 on smartphones, has only exacerbated the problem. During Covid-19, all betting shops were closed, and as people were spending more time at home and online, this led to an increase in those playing online.⁴ Campaigners are calling for tighter regulations, including curbs on gambling advertising and stricter affordability checks by operators. As the UK government continues its review of the Gambling Act, many hope for meaningful change that prioritises public health over industry profits.

Gambling is often portrayed as glamorous, thrilling and harmless fun, but for a growing number of people in the UK, it's a dangerous psychological trap that can lead to severe mental health consequences. Like many addictions, it thrives in silence and shame. The key to breaking its grip lies not only in personal awareness but in creating a society that recognises gambling-related harm as a serious health issue and responds with compassion, education and robust support systems.

If you or someone you know is struggling with gambling, you can contact:

GamCare: 0808 8020 133 or www.gamcare.org.uk/

NHS National Problem Gambling Clinic (for people who are experiencing harm from gambling aged 13 to 18 years from anywhere in England, and 18 or over living in Greater London): www.cnwl.nhs.uk/services/addictions/national-gambling-clinic

GAMSTOP: www.gamstop.co.uk

Gordon Moody: gordonmoody.org.uk/

MINDFUL MOMENTS

KINDNESS

WORLD KINDNESS DAY: 13TH NOVEMBER 2025

INTRODUCTION

Kindness is a simple yet powerful act that can transform lives and communities.

Showing kindness not only fosters stronger connections but also promotes wellbeing, positivity and resilience during challenging times. Whether at home, at work or in your local community, kindness has the power to create a ripple effect of goodwill.



HOW CAN KINDNESS HAVE AN IMPACT ON MY WORK?

Sharing kindness within teams can strengthen trust and respect between colleagues, improving teamwork and collaboration. This in turn can boost morale and motivation, leading to a more productive workplace. Positive interactions ease workplace tension and create a happier environment.

Overall, being kind can open doors and encourage better listening and understanding, enhancing communication across teams.

HOW CAN KINDNESS HELP MYSELF?

Acts of kindness can produce oxytocin, which helps to lower blood pressure and supports heart health. Oxytocin also plays a role in social bonding, which can increase our self-esteem and optimism, building confidence within the workplace.

Even small acts of kindness can lift your mood, increase energy and create a sense of calm.

WAYS TO SHARE KINDNESS AND SUPPORT OTHERS

- **Offer a helping hand:** Assist a colleague, friends or neighbours when they need it.
- **Listen actively:** Give your full attention when someone shares their thoughts or problems with you.
- **Give compliments:** Genuine praise can brighten someone's day.
- **Volunteer locally:** Support charities or community projects in your area such as food banks, youth centres or homeless shelters.
- **Practise small acts:** Hold the door, share a smile or say thank you regularly.
- **Support mental health:** Encourage openness and check in on those who may be struggling.
- **Send a message:** Let someone know you're thinking of them by sending them a surprise voice note or text message.

SEEING THE UNSEEN

SUICIDE PREVENTION THROUGH AWARENESS AND ACTION

WORLD SUICIDE PREVENTION DAY: 10TH SEPTEMBER 2025

Every life lost to suicide is a tragedy—and a reminder of how vital it is to truly see one another.

In the UK, over 6,000 people died by suicide in 2023.¹ Behind each statistic is a person who may have felt overwhelmed, isolated or invisible. Suicide remains the leading cause of death for men under 50,² and women in high-pressure roles are also at increased risk.

But suicide is not inevitable. It is preventable. And prevention begins not in crisis, but in connection.

Why it's hard to see the signs

Mental distress doesn't always look how we expect it to. Many people who are struggling continue to show up, smile, and perform. They may even go out of their way to avoid burdening others. That's why awareness matters—because the signs can be subtle, and the silence can be loud.

Some indicators to watch for:

- Withdrawal from social interaction.
- Sudden mood changes or irritability.
- Neglect of personal care or appearance.
- Loss of interest in things they once enjoyed.
- Risk-taking behaviour or substance misuse.
- Expressions of hopelessness or feeling like a burden.

The power of everyday care

Suicide prevention isn't just about knowing what to do in a crisis — it's about building a culture where people feel safe to be vulnerable. Where asking for help is met with compassion, not judgement. Where wellbeing is woven into the fabric of daily life.

Here's how we can all help:

- **Be present:** A genuine 'how are you?' can open a door.
- **Listen without fixing:** Sometimes, people just need to be heard.
- **Check in regularly:** Especially with those who seem 'strong' or 'always okay.'
- **Share resources:** Let people know where help is available.
- **Model openness:** Talk about your own wellbeing—it gives others permission to do the same.

Supporting yourself is part of the solution

If you're struggling, know this: you are not alone. You are not weak. And you are not a burden. Reaching out is a sign of strength, not failure.

Ways to support your own wellbeing:

- Prioritise sleep, movement, and nutrition.
- Stay connected with people who uplift you.
- Set boundaries and protect your energy.
- Seek professional help when needed.
- Practice self-compassion—especially on hard days.

Hope lives in connection

We all have the power to make a difference. Whether it's a quiet moment of kindness, a supportive message or simply showing up—these small acts can be life-changing. In our homes, workplaces and communities, let's build spaces where people feel seen, heard, and valued.

Because suicide prevention isn't just about saving lives—it's about honouring them.

If you or someone you know is struggling, help is available:

- **Samaritans** – 116 123 (24/7)
- **CALM** (Campaign Against Living Miserably) – 0800 58 58 58
- **Hospitality Action** – 0808 802 0282
- **Combat Stress** (for veterans) – 0800 138 1619
- **Burnt Chef** – The Burnt Chef Project | Hospitality Mental Health Awareness

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WHEN THE PRESSURE BECOMES TOO MUCH: SUICIDE PREVENTION IN HOSPITALITY

By The Burnt Chef Project

In hospitality, the pressure can be relentless, long hours, high expectations, tough environments.



THE BURNT CHEF
PROJECT

But what we don't talk about enough is what happens when that pressure turns dangerous.

Every year, thousands of lives are lost to suicide, and hospitality workers remain at significantly higher risk than the general population. That's not a statistic we can ignore. It's a wake-up call.

These are more than statistics. These are people. People we care about. Our teammates. Our friends. Our industry family.

At The Burnt Chef Project, we're on a mission to break the silence and stigma around mental health in hospitality and that includes tackling suicide prevention head-on.

It starts with a conversation

Most people who are struggling don't want to die; they want the pain to stop. But too often, they feel isolated, ashamed, or unable to speak up.

That's why early conversation is so powerful. You don't need to be a therapist to make a difference. You just need to ask, listen, and make space for someone to feel seen.

"Are you OK?" is a good start.

"No, really, how are you?" can change everything.

Spot the signs

People won't always say they're struggling. But here are a few signs to look out for in your team:

- Withdrawing from colleagues or becoming unusually quiet
- Changes in mood, energy or performance
- Increased alcohol or substance use
- Talking about feeling hopeless or like a burden
- Saying things like 'everyone would be better off without me.'

If something doesn't feel right, don't ignore it.

What can you do as a manager or colleague?

- 1 **Create a culture where it's safe to talk**
Don't wait for someone to be in crisis. Normalise check-ins, mental health training and honest conversations. When people know it's OK to speak up, they're more likely to do so before reaching breaking point.
- 2 **Know where to signpost**
You don't have to fix it, but you can help them find support. At The Burnt Chef Project, we offer free, confidential support and access to professional help. Just visit www.theburntchefproject.com for tools, helplines and access to our global support service.
- 3 **Don't underestimate the power of kindness**
A quick text, a quiet word, a shift swap to give someone breathing space. It all counts. We all have the power to be someone's turning point.



THE BURNT CHEF
SUICIDE PREVENTION DAY
 September 10th

HOW CAN YOU MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

SPARK A CONVERSATION
 Don't be afraid to check in with your coworkers. A simple "How are you doing?" can go a long way.

LOOK OUT FOR SIGNS
 Signs can look like anything from social isolation to decreased reliability or mood swings. Don't assume poor performance and decreasing feelings of responsibility.

BE A LISTENING EAR
 Sometimes just being there to listen without judgment is the best support you can offer.

ENCOURAGE SEEKING HELP
 Encourage your colleagues to seek professional help or reach out to a mental health support service. There are many ways to seek help.

If you are experiencing suicidal thoughts, please seek guidance from your local healthcare professional or emergency services.

Find support here:

Want to learn more?

www.theburntchefproject.com
 You can do this. Really.

This World Suicide Prevention Day, Let's Be the Difference

Suicide is preventable. But only if we're willing to talk about it, challenge stigma, and support each other, inside and outside the kitchen.

Let's make space for the real conversations. Let's keep people in this industry alive, not just surviving, but thriving.

If you or someone you know is struggling, visit theburntchefproject.com/support for confidential help, any time.

THE BURNT CHEF
SUICIDE PREVENTION DAY
 September 10th

YOUR STORY ISN'T OVER, THERE IS HOPE AHEAD.

IF YOU'RE FEELING OVERWHELMED, REMEMBER THAT THIS MOMENT DOESN'T DEFINE YOU. REACHING OUT FOR SUPPORT IS A STEP TOWARDS HEALING, AND YOU DON'T HAVE TO GO THROUGH THIS ALONE.

If you are experiencing suicidal thoughts, please seek guidance from your local healthcare professional or emergency services.

Find support here:

Want to learn more?

www.theburntchefproject.com
 You can do this. Really.

MEN LEAK TOO

TALKING ABOUT MALE INCONTINENCE

UROLOGY AWARENESS MONTH: SEPTEMBER 2025



Dr Paul Litchfield CBE OSJ FRCP FFOM,
Independent Chief Medical Adviser to ITV &
Compass Group

If you watch an evening of commercial TV, you'll almost certainly see multiple adverts for incontinence products.

The storyline is always the same—two women talking about how discreet pads or pants can help overcome their distressing leakage of urine. The message is clear: incontinence is a women's issue.

The truth is very different! Yes, urinary incontinence is more common in women, but a huge number of men are affected too. The problem increases as you get older, so one in four men over 40 experience some bladder leakage, and by the time you reach age 70, around one in ten men experience daily incontinence. The impact on people's lives is substantial, from planning their day around 'loo stops' to embarrassing 'accidents' with staining and odour issues that can make men withdraw from everyday life. Yet it's an issue we hardly ever talk about and, probably as a result, the simple measures that could help make life easier for those affected are rarely in place.

There are various types of urinary incontinence that can affect men, and they relate to the underlying cause of the problem:

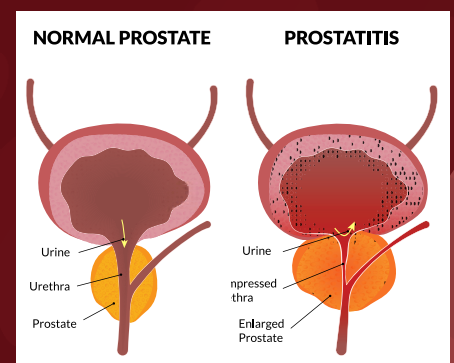
- **Urge incontinence** is the most prevalent type in men. It's a sign of an overactive bladder and refers to the leakage that often occurs when you experience a sudden and intense sensation of needing to pass water.
- **Stress incontinence** is leakage that occurs when the bladder is squeezed by pressure on the abdomen caused by activities like sneezing, coughing, laughing or lifting heavy objects. It's generally a sign of weak pelvic floor muscles or a side effect of surgery.
- **Overflow incontinence** is the dribbling that occurs when the bladder can't empty completely either because of an obstruction (usually an enlarged prostate gland) or nerve damage.
- **Functional incontinence** occurs when the plumbing is normal but the person can't reach the toilet in time because of a separate disabling condition.

Unfortunately, some men experience a combination of these types.

The most common underlying reason for male incontinence is a problem with the prostate gland. The prostate is the organ that produces seminal fluid, and it sits just below the bladder, surrounding the urethra (the tube that urine flows down through the penis).

The gland is about the size of a walnut in young men but gets larger with age—both compressing the urethra, which reduces urine flow, and pressing on the base of the bladder, which is the part that sends signals to the brain that you need to pee.

This benign prostatic enlargement means that as men get older, they generally need to pass urine more often and their urine stream is weaker. The enlargement can also cause both urge and overflow incontinence.





Most prostatic enlargement is of this benign type, but prostate cancer can also cause the gland to grow and cause symptoms such as urinary incontinence. Men with a family history of prostate cancer, those from Black ethnic backgrounds or those over 50 are at higher risk. If you have symptoms, you should speak to your GP. They will want to exclude the possibility of cancer as well as other serious remediable conditions.



Prostate cancer symptoms

Prostate cancer can cause changes to the way you pee, such as:

- Finding it difficult to start peeing or straining to pee
- Having a weak flow of urine
- Stop-start peeing
- Needing to pee urgently or often, or both
- Feeling like you still need to pee when you've just finished
- Peeing during the night

Other symptoms can include:

- Erectile dysfunction (being unable to get or keep an erection)
- Blood in your urine or blood in your semen
- Lower back pain and losing weight without trying to (these may be symptoms of advanced prostate cancer)

Source: Symptoms of prostate cancer - NHS



The treatment that people receive for prostate cancer can also have the side effect of causing incontinence. It's common to have some leakage after any intervention in this area (either surgery or catheterisation) because the muscles and nerves may be damaged and will take time to recover. Sometimes they never recover fully and that's most likely when men need to undergo a procedure called radical prostatectomy where the whole prostate gland is removed.

Other conditions can cause difficulties with urinary incontinence too. This may be temporary as a symptom of infection, especially of the bladder, or more permanent if the nerves that help control the urinary system are damaged. Nerve damage can be the result of trauma, like spinal cord damage or stroke, or may be related to a range of diseases, including diabetes, multiple sclerosis and Parkinson's disease. Just getting older increases the risk because bladder muscles weaken, as they do in other parts of the body. The bottom line is that if you're experiencing problems with your bladder or urine leakage, speak to your GP to find out the underlying cause.

Getting the medical stuff sorted out is important but it's not the end of the matter. There are lots of practical things that you can do for yourself to deal with ongoing leakage and make your life more pleasant.

Simple lifestyle changes can make an enormous difference:

- **Reduce caffeine and alcohol intake:** Both have a diuretic effect, which stimulates the body to produce more urine, so cutting back will reduce the need to pee as often and the chances of leakage. However, make sure you drink plenty of other fluids, as dehydration can cause many health problems, including increasing the risk of bladder infection, which will worsen incontinence.
- **Maintain a healthy weight and stop smoking:** Being overweight puts pressure on the bladder and the pelvic floor muscles, increasing the chances of leakage. Smoking stimulates coughing, which puts a sudden increased pressure on the bladder and can often lead to leaks.
- **Strengthen your pelvic floor:** We usually think of pelvic floor exercises as being for women, particularly after childbirth, but men have a pelvic floor too. You can find your pelvic floor muscles by tightening the ring around your back passage as if you are trying to stop yourself passing wind, then by imagining you are trying to stop mid-flow when urinating and then restarting it. Tightening and relaxing these muscles regularly (sometimes called Kegel exercises) will strengthen them and reduce the risk of incontinence over time.

How do I do pelvic floor exercises?

Learning how to do these exercises can take a little time but, with practice, you should be able to learn the technique:

- Tighten and draw in the muscles around the anus (back passage) and the urethra (water pipe) all at once. Lift them up inside you and hold this position as you count to five. Release the muscles slowly and relax for a few seconds.
- Repeat the contraction and relax again. Once you find it easy to hold the contraction for a count of five, try to hold it for longer (up to ten seconds).
- Repeat this for a maximum of eight to ten squeezes. Try to make each contraction strong, slow and controlled.
- Do the same thing again but, this time, using ten short, fast contractions, pulling up rapidly and immediately letting go.
- Repeat this whole exercise routine at least four to five times every day. You can do it in a variety of positions—lying, sitting, standing and walking.
- Try to avoid holding your breath, pushing down (instead of squeezing) and tightening your abdominal muscles, buttocks or thighs.
- The exercises can be performed standing, sitting or lying down but you may find it easier at first to do them sitting down.

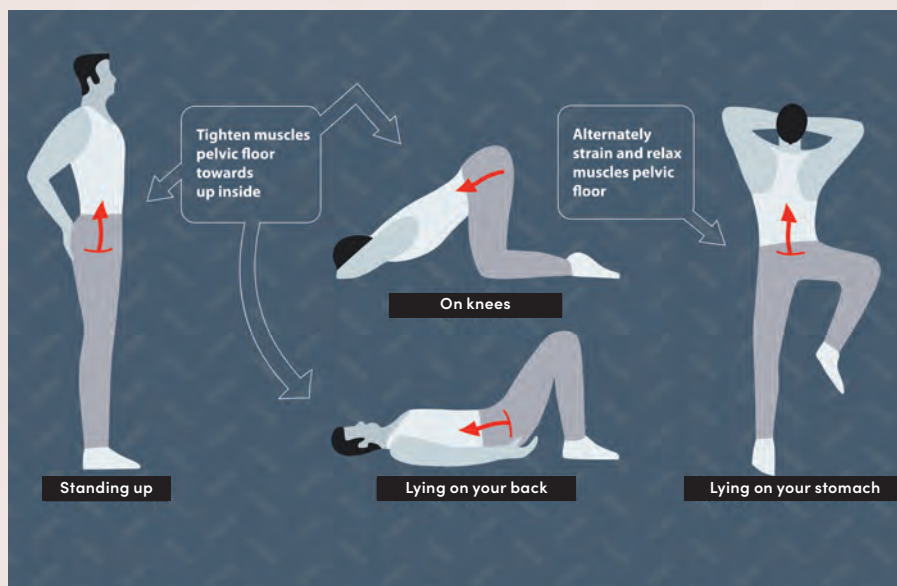
Source: [British Association of Urological Surgeons Pelvic floor XS male.pdf](#)

The products available for men to help manage incontinence are not as well publicised as they are for women but there is a wide range available. Absorbent products are the most commonly used and they're readily available in chemists, many supermarkets or online.

- For light leaks washable, protective pants may be the solution. The garments have a built-in protective gusset that absorbs the fluid to keep your skin dry and retains it to prevent leakage. They can be machine-washed with other clothing and hung out to dry.
- Disposable pants may be more appropriate for medium to heavy leakage. Male garments are designed to fit men's body shape better than the female equivalent would and the absorbent material is positioned up front where men need the protection most.
- Incontinence pads can cope with everything from light to very heavy leakage. They are also designed with men's anatomy in mind and fit into normal underwear.

Modern products are pretty good at retaining urine and they're discreet, so people are unlikely to know you're using them. Occasional leakage can't be ruled out, so you might feel more confident wearing dark-coloured trousers, where a leak is less likely to show than with light-coloured fabrics.

Alternatives to absorbent products include urinary sheaths, which fit over the penis like a condom and can be connected to a drainage bag or a catheter valve if leakage is very light. Penile clamps can be used for short periods during the day, for example while exercising, and may help with stress incontinence. They work by squeezing the urethra as it runs down the penis, so it's crucial to make sure that they are fitted properly and not used for more than about an hour to avoid the risk of impairing blood flow and causing tissue damage.





Incontinence at night is particularly common and both disposable and washable underpads for the bed are available. Some products are absorbent while others are simply waterproof. Disposable underpads are lightweight and tend to shift with body movement at night. They are not very absorbent and aren't generally considered to be adequate for managing incontinence on their own. Washable underpads tend to be even less absorbent than equivalent disposable products but can be useful for protecting beds against occasional leaks from other products, such as body-worn pads.

Impartial advice on the range of products and devices available in the UK can be found on the Continence Product Advisor website, a not-for-profit collaboration between the International Incontinence Society and a number of British Universities.

There are also medicines available that can help with some types of incontinence. Your GP will advise you if any might be suitable for you.

- Men who experience urge incontinence, often related to an overactive bladder, may benefit from anticholinergic drugs. These block nerve signals that cause the bladder to contract involuntarily. They are usually prescribed as tablets to be taken two or three times a day, but patches are also available. Possible side effects include dry mouth, constipation and tiredness. They can also cause pressure within the eye to build up, so they're not usually suitable for people with glaucoma.

- A newer treatment for urge incontinence is beta-3 agonists, which may be prescribed for people who don't suit anticholinergic drugs. These medicines cause the bladder muscle to relax, which helps the bladder fill up with and store urine. They usually come as a tablet or capsule that you swallow once a day. The main possible side effect is bowel upset.
- Overflow incontinence, often caused by an enlarged prostate partially blocking the bladder outlet, can be helped by alpha blocker medication. These preparations relax the muscles in the bladder neck and prostate, thereby improving bladder emptying. Possible side effects include dizziness when standing up and, paradoxically, additional leakage because the muscles are relaxed too much.

Some surgical treatments are also available but are generally seen as a last resort when other options have proved unsuitable or unsuccessful. Tissue covering the abdominal muscles can be used to create a sling that supports the neck of the bladder or an artificial sphincter can be fitted to control the flow of urine from the bladder into the urethra. Other surgical options include the insertion of a device to stimulate the nerves supplying the bladder and botox injections into the bladder wall, though the latter is only a temporary solution.

All of these medicines are prescription only, and surgery is a major step, so it's important to discuss with your GP what, if any, treatment option might be most appropriate for you.

Lifestyle changes, the use of incontinence products and, in some cases, medical treatment can help greatly in managing the urinary leakage that affects so many men. As well as that, 'Be Prepared,' as we were taught as Boy Scouts. If you often have to get up at night to pass water, use motion-sensor lights to help make sure you don't fall—they're cheap and highly effective. If you're going on a journey, plan breaks in places where you'll have access to public toilets. Pack a bag with what you might need (extra pads, underwear, wet wipes, disposal bags, etc.) and make sure you have it with you on journeys, and perhaps keep one in the office. There is a growing number of sanitary bins being placed in male toilets, largely because of the Boys need Bins campaign by the Prostate Cancer Charity, but provision is still haphazard, so don't feel shy about using a disabled toilet if you have pads that you need to change and dispose of.

Men are notoriously bad at talking about things. It can feel as if you're the only man in the world who has problems with bladder leakage, but be assured, you're not. There's a wealth of resources out there to help you manage better and to lead as full and active a life as you want.

Suggested resources:

- 1 Let's talk about incontinence | Prostate Cancer UK
- 2 Urinary incontinence - NHS
- 3 Types & Causes of Male Incontinence | TENA Men
- 4 Continence Product Advisor

DECEMBEARD: LET IT GROW! LET IT GROW! LET IT GROW!

DECEMBEARD: DECEMBER 2025

Each December, you might notice more men letting their beards grow and sharing photos of their progress.

It's not just a seasonal trend—it's Decembeard, a global campaign designed to raise awareness and funds for bowel cancer.

Behind every beard is a serious message: bowel cancer is one of the most common cancers in men, and early detection can save lives.^{1,2} Bowel cancer, also known as colorectal cancer, affects both men and women, but the statistics show a significant burden among men. In the UK alone, around 23,000 men are diagnosed with bowel cancer every year, and it remains the third most common cancer in men and the second biggest fatal cancer after lung cancer. While it is most often diagnosed in men over 50, cases are rising in younger men too.^{1,2}

One of the biggest challenges is that symptoms are often overlooked or mistaken for something minor. Many men feel embarrassed to speak about digestive or bowel issues, which can delay diagnosis and treatment. Typical warning signs include blood in the stool, bleeding from the back passage, a change in bowel habits that lasts for more than three weeks, unexplained weight loss, fatigue or persistent abdominal pain. Some men also report a feeling that their bowel is not emptying properly. The important message is that early detection makes a huge difference: more than 90% of bowel cancer cases can be successfully treated when caught at an early stage.³

Decembeard is about breaking that stigma and starting conversations. Growing a beard becomes more than just a fun challenge; it is a way to raise awareness, prompt mates to talk about symptoms, and encourage others to seek help when something feels wrong. It is a reminder that taking care of your health is nothing to be embarrassed about.⁴

Lifestyle also plays a part in prevention. While not all bowel cancers can be avoided, eating a fibre-rich diet with plenty of wholegrains, fruits and vegetables can reduce risk, as can limiting processed and red meats. Staying active and maintaining a healthy weight are also protective steps, and taking part in bowel cancer screening when you're invited—usually from age 60 in the UK, though this may vary—is crucial.⁵

So this December, if you see a friend, colleague or family member growing out their beard, know that there is an important cause behind it. Every beard tells a story about men looking after their health, encouraging each other to notice symptoms early, and helping to save lives. Whether you grow a beard, donate to the cause, or simply start a conversation, you are part of the effort to beat a disease that is far too common—but often treatable when caught in time.

Spotting the signs early

One reason bowel cancer claims so many lives is that symptoms are often ignored or mistaken for something minor.

Key signs to watch out for:

- Blood in your stool or bleeding from the back passage.
- A change in bowel habits lasting more than three weeks (looser stools, constipation or going more often).
- Unexplained weight loss, fatigue or persistent abdominal pain.
- A feeling that your bowel isn't emptying properly.
- Early detection is critical. When caught at an early stage, over 90% of bowel cancers can be successfully treated.^{1,2,3}

Why focus on men?

Bowel cancer affects both men and women, but statistics show a significant burden among men:

- In the UK, around 23,000 men are diagnosed with bowel cancer each year (Bowel Cancer UK, 2024).
- It is the third most common cancer in men and the second biggest fatal cancer after lung cancer.
- Most cases occur in men over 50, but rates are rising in younger age groups too.^{1,2,6}

1 Bowel Cancer UK. (2024). Bowel Cancer Statistics. Retrieved from <https://www.bowelcanceruk.org.uk/news-and-blogs/statistics/>

2 Cancer Research UK. (2023). Bowel cancer incidence statistics. Retrieved from <https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/health-professional/cancer-statistics/statistics-by-cancer-type/bowel-cancer/incidence>

3 NHS. (2024). Bowel cancer screening. Retrieved from <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/bowel-cancer-screening/>

4 Decembeard. (2024). About Decembeard. Retrieved from <https://decembeard.org/about/>

5 World Cancer Research Fund/American Institute for Cancer Research. (2018). Diet, nutrition, physical activity and colorectal cancer

6 NHS Digital. (2023). Bowel cancer: diagnosis and treatment data. Retrieved from <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/bowel-cancer-statistics>

FROM DESKBOUND TO BACK STRONG EVERYDAY HABITS HURTING YOUR SPINE—AND HOW TO FIX THEM

NATIONAL FITNESS DAY: 18TH SEPTEMBER 2025

BACK CARE AWARENESS WEEK: 14TH–20TH OCTOBER 2025

In our increasingly digital world, many of us spend hours each day glued to screens—whether at an office desk or working remotely from home.

While this shift has brought flexibility and convenience, it has also silently strained one of our most important assets: the spine. Poor posture, extended sitting and lack of movement don't just cause discomfort; they can lead to long-term spinal issues, chronic pain and reduced wellbeing.

The good news is there's plenty you can do to reverse the damage and support a strong, healthy back every day.

Why your spine is at risk

Our spines are designed to move, bend and support our bodies through a range of activities. However, extended periods of inactivity and screen time often lead to prolonged static postures, which research shows increase mechanical stress on spinal discs and weaken the muscles that keep our backs stable.¹

Slouching or leaning forward—common when staring at laptops or smartphones—adds strain to the neck and upper back, contributing to muscle imbalances and tension headaches.² Meanwhile, an ergonomically poor workspace may force awkward angles on your joints, exacerbating discomfort and fatigue.

The science behind movement and spinal health

Recent studies highlight that regular breaks and targeted exercises can significantly reduce back pain and improve posture. For example, a 2024 clinical trial showed that office workers who performed brief stretching and strengthening exercises every hour experienced a 40% reduction in lower back pain compared to controls.³

Core strength is especially important. Strong abdominal and back muscles provide essential support for the spine, distributing loads evenly and preventing overuse injuries.⁴ In contrast, weak core muscles increase the risk of chronic pain and spinal degeneration.

1. Shariat, A. et al. (2022). Sedentary behaviour and spinal disc health: Evidence from imaging studies. *Spine Journal*, 22(4), 600–608.

2. Chen, Y. et al. (2023). Effects of postural correction on musculoskeletal pain among office workers: A randomized controlled trial. *Journal of Occupational Health*, 65(2), e12345.

3. Johnson, R. et al. (2024). Impact of hourly stretching breaks on low back pain in sedentary workers: A clinical trial. *Ergonomics*, 67(3), 327–335.

Easy fixes to transform your spine health

Move every hour

Set reminders to stand, stretch or walk for 3–5 minutes every hour. Even light activity boosts circulation, reduces muscle stiffness and relieves pressure on spinal discs.¹

Perfect your posture

Aim for a neutral spine position: ears aligned over shoulders, shoulder blades gently pulled back, and feet flat on the floor. Avoid craning your neck forward or slumping your shoulders.²

Ergonomic workspace setup

Adjust your chair and screen height so your eyes look straight ahead, and your elbows form a right angle at the keyboard. Support your lower back with a lumbar cushion if needed.³

Core-strengthening exercises

Incorporate exercises like planks, bird dogs and pelvic tilts into your routine 3–4 times a week to build spinal support and stability.⁴

Desk stretching routines

Try simple stretches such as neck tilts, shoulder rolls, chest openers and seated spinal twists during your breaks to ease tension and improve mobility.¹

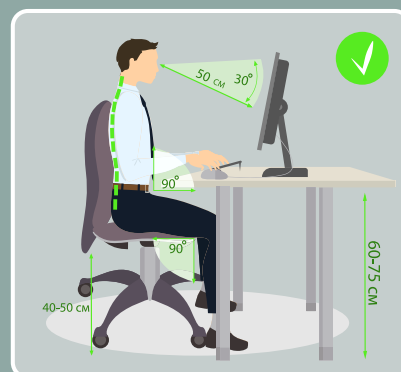
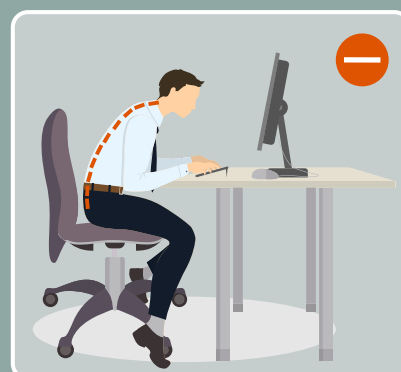
Incorporate low-impact activities

Yoga, Pilates and swimming have all been shown to improve spinal alignment, flexibility and muscle balance, contributing to long-term back health.⁵

Small habits, big impact

Back pain isn't inevitable. By becoming mindful of your posture, integrating movement and strengthening your core, you can dramatically improve your spinal health—and your overall wellbeing.

As the science grows clearer, it's evident that a proactive approach to spine care is essential in our deskbound era. So, stand tall, stretch often and give your back the attention it deserves.



4. Lee, S., & Park, J. (2023). Core muscle strengthening and prevention of lower back pain: A meta-analysis. *Physical Therapy Reviews*, 28(1), 14–22.

5. Garcia, M., & Smith, L. (2023). Yoga and spinal health: A systematic review. *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice*, 51, 101700.

THE MENOPAUSE MINEFIELD CAN HOLISTIC APPROACHES HELP?

WORLD MENOPAUSE DAY: 18TH OCTOBER 2025

Any woman who has or is experiencing perimenopause or menopause will know the rollercoaster journey it can be! It is generally unforgiving and completely indiscriminate.



Stephanie Wright,
Sales and Promotions Manager - ESS

It can be mild or full-on, and no woman knows exactly what symptoms they will have to deal with.

Well, it very unexpectedly and suddenly hit me like a train! I had all the textbook symptoms of night sweats, hot flashes, weight gain, bloating, extreme irritability, brain fog, headaches and crying at the drop of a hat at the smallest thing. All of that, combined with not knowing what on earth was happening or what to do, is a real struggle in itself!

It is a very individual and personal process, with no one-size-fits-all solutions—changing hormone replacement gels, tablets and dosages to try and get the best combo to ‘level you out’. Whilst medication helped massively, I still did not feel like myself in any way—my head was mush, gym sessions were not working and there was no magic fix.



Let battle commence...

I decided, to take back my body and mind, I would try exploring some alternative holistic therapies in conjunction with my medication to try and lift my sense of wellbeing both mentally and physically - it certainly couldn't do any harm. With an open mind, I explored a couple of mind and body therapy routes. Here is how I found them:

Yoga (hot or not)

Now, I'm no 'Bendy Wendy', I've practised yoga on and off for years, so returning to it took a little bit of self-persuasion. Yoga can be done anywhere and is steeped in ancient Hindu traditions, tapping into spirituality and gratitude to self. Whether it's slower Hatha yoga or dynamic Ashtanga yoga, there are all shapes, sizes, ages and abilities in any class, all without judgement.

I personally prefer hot dynamic yoga as I get more of a cardio workout, as well as a good stretch in the 35-degree heat (a bit mad given the hot flashes, but I decided to fight fire with fire!). I start 'getting in the zone' with breath work before moving into postures and stretches, which are good for your bones and useful in combating osteoporosis as we get older. To finish, the class closed with relaxation.

No matter what yoga style class I do, I come out feeling revitalised yet relaxed, cleansed—and boy, do I sleep better that night! Taking the opportunity to have an hour for myself a few times a week in the quiet of the studio has really helped to calm my mind, body and soul—namaste!

Sound baths

To a lot of people this one may feel a bit 'out there', but sound baths are more technical than you realise. The sounds of the specially made gongs and instruments are designed to tap into and mirror the electrical waves your brain resonates with to relax and send you into a deep meditative state.

Up until last year, I was a 'sound bath virgin', but now I'm hooked. You don't need to do anything and it's a bit like getting ready for a nap. You lie on a mat (or in a hammock—which is a totally weightless cocooned experience), eye mask on, head on pillow, snuggled under a blanket in comfy clothes, and let the sound bath begin.

Lasting an hour, you don't realise how much you have zoned out until you come round, but that hour is the deepest state of relaxation I've been in, and for me who is constantly on the go, it's invaluable.

Give it a go—it's the best rest you'll have had in a long time!

Reiki

The Japanese practice of energy work that channels life-force to promote healing and wellbeing—without the practitioner laying hands on or touching you.

I have experienced reiki once before after a fall caused permanent front knee pain. I was sceptical but willing to try anything for the pain. I felt an intense heat during the session, which came from the space between my front knee and their hands which were in full view. After three sessions, the pain had gone—and I have never had trouble since.

Nutritional supplements

There are lots of nutritional supplements on the market and, like medication, it's not a one-size-fits-all solution. Here are a few supplements I can recommend trying that have made a difference to me are:

- **Lion's Mane mushroom:** Available in powder or tablet format, it aids focus and regulates the nervous system and cognitive functions.
- **And Breathe... Ashwagandha:** Usually in a tablet form, this aids calmness during the day or before bed.
- **Collagen Glow Up:** I prefer powder mixed into coffee first thing, but gels, tablets or gummies are readily available too. Collagen depletes as we get older and is essential for maintaining strong hair, nails and skin.
- **Magnesium Glycinate 3-in-1:** This is my favourite supplement that I couldn't do without now. I am an exceptionally light sleeper, which got worsened during perimenopause, but this little gem has been a revelation. I now drift off easier and enjoy deeper sleep.



Other alternative therapies

You may want to research and explore:

- Acupuncture
- Meditation and mindfulness
- Cognitive behavioural therapy
- Homeopathy and aromatherapy

Final thoughts

Granted, alternative and holistic therapies might not be everybody's 'bag', but before you dismiss it completely, what I would say is... do your research—see if there is an alternative approach there that may resonate with you or appeal to you.

In this hugely transitional part of female life, reclaim your midlife, give it a go, and don't knock it till you've tried it. What have you got to lose?



MY EXPERIENCE QUITTING SMOKING

STOPTOBER: OCTOBER 2025



Kelly Neal,
Chef - ESS

After 37 years as a chef, working in and out of various kitchens, I've seen and experienced the full spectrum of stress, intensity and lifestyle that comes with the job, including smoking. I started when I was 17 and this is my third attempt at quitting. I'm currently six weeks smoke-free.

This time feels different. The ever-increasing cost of cigarettes and the impact on my health, especially as I get older, finally pushed me to take it seriously. I signed up for the NHS Quit Smoking programme, which sent me patches and nicotine alternatives. That support system helped me realise just how much I was spending not just financially, but physically and mentally.

One of the biggest changes I've noticed since quitting is my sense of smell and taste returning. It's been a revelation. After decades of dulled senses, herbs and spices now taste vibrant again. It's reignited my passion for cooking, and I'm experimenting more in the kitchen than I have in years. Flavours I've worked with my whole career now feel new.

Taste bud regeneration:
Smoking dulls taste perception by damaging taste buds and reducing blood flow to the mouth. After quitting, taste buds begin to regenerate within 2–3 weeks, improving sensitivity to flavours.²

Of course, quitting hasn't been easy. The hospitality industry is high-pressure, fast-paced and full of smokers. In the past, cigarettes were a way to take the edge off during breaks. Now, just stepping outside for some fresh air gives me that same moment of calm, without the downsides. I've also found that talking openly with the team about quitting helps. They're less likely to invite me out for a smoke—and that support makes a difference.

The withdrawal symptoms have been tough, especially with ongoing health issues. I have ulcerative colitis, and the drop in nicotine did cause some flare-ups. But I've been working closely with doctors to manage it.

Improved smell: Since aroma contributes to around 80% of flavour perception, improved olfactory function (sense of smell) plays a major role in enhancing food enjoyment.³

If you're dealing with a chronic condition, speak to your healthcare provider before quitting—it makes all the difference.

This journey has reminded me how much our habits affect our craft. For chefs, taste is everything, and reclaiming that has been one of the most surprising and rewarding parts of quitting.

Taste and smell begin to improve	Within 48 hours	According to the NHS, taste and smell begin returning rapidly after quitting.
Enhanced flavour sensitivity	Within 2–3 weeks	Taste buds regenerate, allowing for clearer distinctions in sweet, sour, salty, bitter and umami flavours. ³
Improved enjoyment of food	Over 70% of former smokers	Report improved food enjoyment within a month. ⁴
Reduced craving for salty and sweet foods	After 1–3 months	Taste normalisation can lead to more balanced food choices. ⁵
Increased sensitivity to bitterness	After 3+ weeks	Smokers typically have a dulled ability to detect bitter compounds, which improves after cessation. ⁶



1. NHS. (2023). Stop Smoking Timeline. <https://www.nhs.uk>
2. American Cancer Society. (2023). What Happens When You Quit Smoking?

3. Yoshida, R. et al. (2018). Recovery of Olfactory Function After Smoking Cessation. *Clinical Otolaryngology*.
4. CDC. (2020). Smoking and the Brain: Taste and Smell Recovery.

5. WHO. (2019). Tobacco: Health Effects and Cessation.
6. Pangborn, R. & Simone, M. (2004). Sensory Effects of Smoking on Bitter Taste Perception.

PRIORITISING WASTE PREVENTION

ZERO WASTE WEEK: 2ND-6TH SEPTEMBER 2025

Every year, millions across the UK throw away perfectly good food and mountains of single-use packaging.



Rees Bramwell,
Sustainability Director -
Compass One



What if the solution wasn't just recycling more, but wasting less in the first place?

This Zero Waste Week, we're shifting the spotlight to prevention—a powerful and often overlooked principle in the waste hierarchy. It's not just about what you throw away; it's about rethinking your choices from the beginning. Our everyday food and drink habits are an impactful place to start.

The problem

- More than 9.5 million tonnes of edible food waste and scraps are sent to landfill in the UK each year, with approximately 70% coming from households.
- Total packaging waste in the UK reaches around 12 million tonnes annually, including roughly 2 million tonnes of plastic packaging, most of which still ends up in landfill.
- Each week, UK households discard nearly 1.7 billion individual pieces of plastic packaging, and over 83% of that is from food and drink.



Rethink packaging: choose reusables first

- **Invest in reusables:** A sturdy reusable coffee cup, water bottle and lunchbox can drastically cut down your personal packaging footprint. Keep them handy in your bag or car.
- **Shop smart:** Look for zero-waste shops, local markets or supermarkets offering refill stations for dry goods, oils and cleaning products.
- **Bring your own containers:** Many delis, butchers and takeaways now allow customers to bring their own clean containers. It's worth asking—they might say yes!

Tip:

Join or support refill campaigns in your area like Refill UK, which connects consumers with businesses offering water bottle refills and packaging-free options.



Buy what you need, eat what you buy

- **Plan ahead:** Make a weekly meal plan and shopping list or use the 'click and collect' service. Stick to it to avoid impulse buys that go off before you eat them.
- **Understand 'use by' vs. 'best before':** 'Best before' is about quality, not safety. Many foods are still perfectly fine to eat after this date.
- **Love your leftovers:** Today's roast can be tomorrow's sandwich or soup. Get creative in the kitchen and waste less.

Tip:

Apps like Too Good To Go and Olio can help rescue surplus food in your area, whether from neighbours or local businesses.

Compost the rest

Even with the best intentions, some scraps are inevitable. However, they don't have to go to landfill.

- **Home composting is easier than you think:** Veg peels, tea bags, coffee grounds and even eggshells can be turned into rich compost for your garden or balcony plants.
- **Use council food waste bins:** If you're not composting at home, make sure food waste goes into your local authority's collection, not your general rubbish.

Why prevention matters

Prevention doesn't just reduce the waste in your bin—it addresses the problem upstream, cutting out waste before it's even created. It saves energy, water and money, and helps conserve resources and fight climate change.

This Zero Waste Week, let's choose to prevent rather than react. By rethinking the way we shop, store, and consume food and drink, we can make a meaningful impact—starting in our own kitchens.

1 WRAP- https://www.wrap.ngo/resources/report/uk-plastics-pact-annual-report-2023-24?utm_source=social&utm_medium=LinkedIn&utm_campaign=UKPP&utm_content=Annual_Report&Campaign+ID=WRAP

2 Business Waste- <https://www.businesswaste.co.uk/your-waste/packaging-waste-recycling/packaging-waste-facts-and-statistics/>

3 UK Parliament- <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/food-waste-in-the-uk/#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20most%20recent,this%20waste%20was%20comprised%20of:>

SMART RECYCLING AT HOME AND ON THE GO

RECYCLE WEEK: 14TH-20TH OCTOBER 2025

Recycling in the UK has come a long way—yet there’s still room for improvement.



Rees Bramwell,
Sustainability Director -
Compass One



1. References Recycle Now - <https://www.recyclenow.com/how-to-recycle/recycling-symbols> Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) (2020) Agriculture in the United Kingdom 2020. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/agriculture-in-the-united-kingdom-2020>

2. WRAP (2022) Household food and drink waste in the UK 2022. <https://www.wrap.ngo/resources/report/household-food-and-drink-waste-uk-2022>

3. Recycle Now (n.d.) Recycling symbols. <https://www.recyclenow.com/how-to-recycle/recycling-symbols>

UK households recycled 44.1% of their waste in 2022, with the government aiming for 65% by 2035. Achieving that means taking recycling beyond the kitchen bin.¹

At home

Start with the basics: separate paper, cardboard, tins, plastics and glass and rinse them clean. Flatten boxes to save space, and avoid bagging recyclables unless your local authority asks for it.

Confused about what goes where? Check your council's website—recycling guidelines vary by region or council across the UK.

Most supermarkets run in-store recycling schemes for hard-to-recycle items like beauty packaging, batteries and medicine blister packs. TerraCycle collection points for soft plastics are common at supermarkets and are even being trialled by some councils in homes too.

Soft plastics are now largely indicated stating, 'Recycle with bags at large supermarket', and are a great way to ensure packaging from common household staples, like breads, cereals, biscuits and crisps, don't end up in general waste. Find a suitable cupboard to collect these in and simply return on your next supermarket visit.

Food waste is another opportunity. In 2021, the UK threw away 6.6 million tonnes of food — much of it avoidable.² Compost at home or use food waste bins if you have them available.

On the go

Recycling while out and about can be tricky, but small changes help. Carry a reusable water bottle or coffee cup to cut down on single-use plastic. Look for recycling bins at train stations, shopping centres and fast-food outlets—and take an extra few seconds to read signage and dispose correctly. Throwing general waste items into recycling bins can do more harm than good, as contamination can lead to the whole batch being rejected.

Disposable coffee cups look recyclable, but most aren't due to their plastic lining. The UK uses around 2.5 billion of them each year, but fewer than 1 in 400 are recycled (0.25%).³ However, chains like Costa, Starbucks and Pret offer in-store cup recycling bins. Be sure to use them, or better yet, bring your own reusable cup. Many cafes offer discounts and loyalty schemes as an incentive.

Top tips for celebrations

With annual events like Halloween coming up, the consumption of sweets, carving of pumpkins and wearing of costumes can drive more waste.

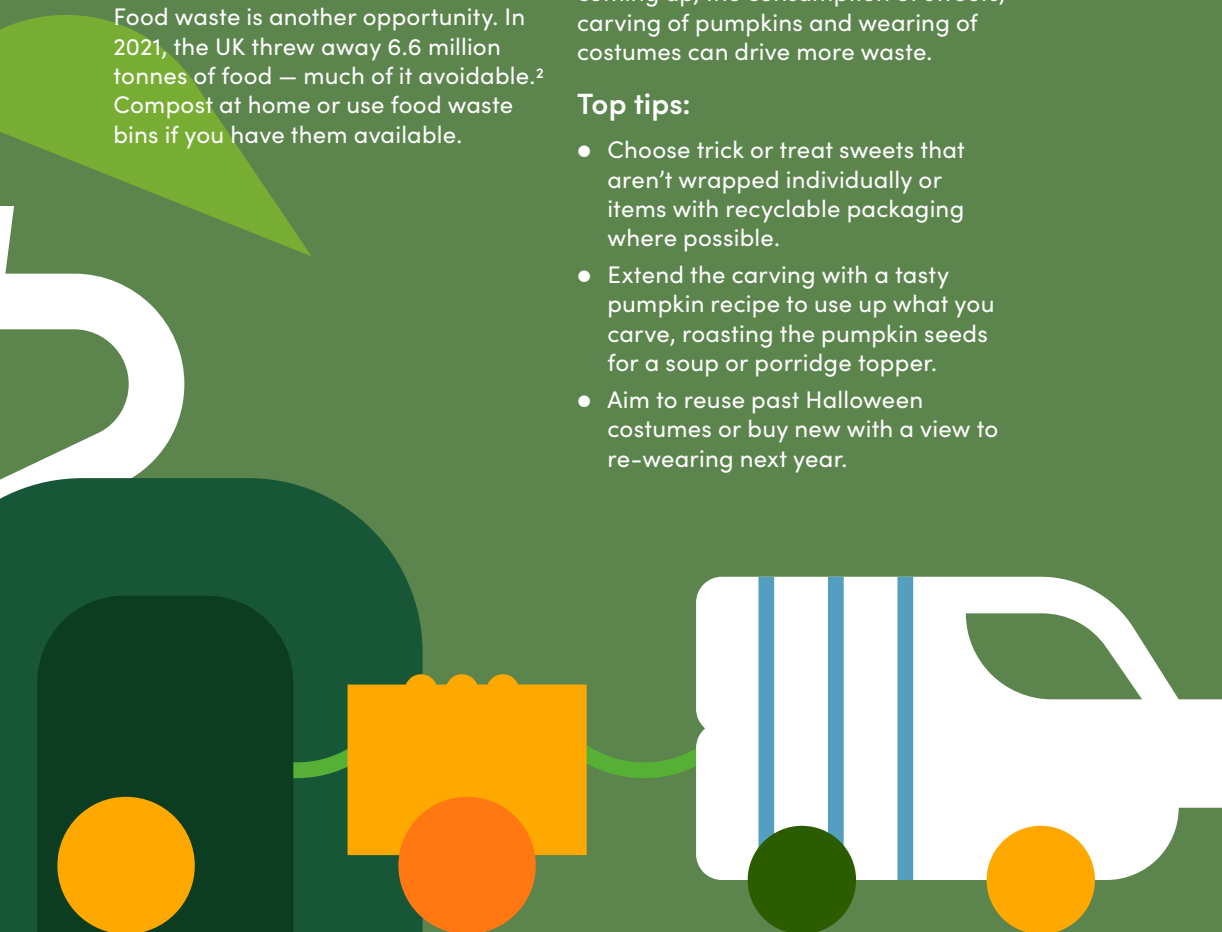
Top tips:

- Choose trick or treat sweets that aren't wrapped individually or items with recyclable packaging where possible.
- Extend the carving with a tasty pumpkin recipe to use up what you carve, roasting the pumpkin seeds for a soup or porridge topper.
- Aim to reuse past Halloween costumes or buy new with a view to re-wearing next year.

Final tip

Always ask: Can this be reused, recycled or avoided altogether?

Conscious choices—both at home and on the go—are key to reducing landfill, plastic production using fossil fuels and protecting the planet.



WHAT'S IN YOUR CUP?

MACMILLAN: WORLD'S BIGGEST COFFEE MORNING: 27TH SEPTEMBER 2025

In the UK and Ireland, we consume over 98 million cups of coffee every day, making it a regular part of life for many.¹



Kieran Mills,
Sustainability Coordinator -
Compass One

Coffee isn't just about what's in the cup—it's about the experience. For many, it's a comforting part of their daily routine, bringing familiarity, structure and a sense of connection to others that supports a healthier body and mind, as well as a stronger sense of community.¹ Whether it's morning comfort, an afternoon pick-me-up or a well-earned moment to catch up with friends, our coffee drinking habits continue to grow. Perhaps it's time we pause and consider what's really in our cup?²

Hidden in that simple habit is a vast and complex chain of people, places and environmental costs that are easy to overlook. Coffee is no longer just a drink; it's a global culture. From the farmers who cultivate the beans to the barista at your local café, every cup carries a far-reaching story. Every choice you make—beans, brewing method, takeaway cup—sends ripples through that story.

Coffee not only brings us together, but also connects us to a vast global industry with significant environmental consequences. Over 125 million people globally depend on coffee for their livelihoods.³ But the journey from farm to cup places pressure on the environment. The land used for coffee cultivation often comes at the cost of rainforests and ecosystems. Increased demand has driven deforestation and biodiversity loss in several coffee-producing countries.⁴

In fact, the agricultural phase of coffee farming is responsible for 55.4% of total global greenhouse gas emissions released from coffee production. Over the past 15 years, studies have shown that in many regions, coffee farming has caused large areas of forest to be cleared, fragmented habitats and the discharge of wastewater containing organic waste such as pulp, husk and parchment. These by-products have adverse effects on aquatic ecosystems and local biodiversity in coffee-producing countries.⁴

While the human story begins on distant farms, the environmental impact is felt everywhere. Coffee cultivation itself can lead to deforestation when land is cleared for new plantations. Despite these challenges, there are ways we can reduce our footprint and support



a more sustainable coffee future. Alternatively, shade-grown coffee preserves habitats for birds and wildlife, while also improving soil health and biodiversity.⁵

Perhaps the most visible environmental cost lies in how we drink our coffee. Takeaway culture has become an ingrained habit. 500 billion disposable cups⁶ are used globally each year; many are lined with polyethylene, making them almost impossible to recycle in standard facilities. Compostable cups often require specialised processing plants, which are scarce in many countries. Then there are plastic lids, stirrers and sleeves—small items that collectively contribute to a massive waste problem. These single-use items often end up in landfill, or worse, in waterways and oceans, breaking down into microplastics.



What can we do?

The good news is that change doesn't require giving up your daily brew. It starts with small, conscious decisions:

- Choose ethically sourced coffee:** Look for certifications like Rainforest Alliance, Fairtrade or Organic, which support sustainable farming, fair wages and environmental protection. Another option is to ask your local coffee shop if they purchase ethically sourced coffee beans.
- Use a reusable cup:** Billions of disposable cups end up in landfills each year, many of which aren't recyclable. Bringing your own cup can reduce waste and even earn you a discount at some commercial coffee shops.
- Support sustainable farms:** Purchase beans from environmentally responsible producers and keep an eye out for the certifications.
- Recycle properly:** If you're using takeaway cups, dispose of them in the appropriate waste streams; many aren't accepted in household recycling due to plastic linings.
- Alternative milks:** Opting for alternatives such as oat milk can also contribute to a more sustainable brew compared to using cow's milk.^{3,4}

It is clear that coffee is here to stay, so next time you purchase your daily coffee, consider cutting the pumps of syrup, asking the barista if the beans they use are certified or bringing a friend for that much needed catch up.



FAIRTRADE



AT LEAST 30% OF OUR COFFEE COMES FROM RAINFOREST

1. <https://www.lavazzapro.co.uk/blog/2024-uk-coffee-statistics/> - (Lavazza)

2. <https://britishcoffeeassociation.org/coffee-consumption/> - (British Coffee Association)

3. <https://www.fairtrade.org.uk/buying-fairtrade/coffee/> - (Fairtrade)

4. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2352550921001160> - (Cibelli M)

5. <https://www.rainforest-alliance.org/> (Rainforest Alliance)

6. [UNEP_LCA-Beverage-Cups-Report_Web.pdf](#)

GREETINGS FROM THE ESS ORGANIC MARKET GARDEN

As summer comes to a close, we reflect on a season of growth, learning and sustainability in the garden



Janet Thomas
Head Gardener - ESS

The mild spring allowed us to get an early start with our summer

seedlings, and the endless sunshine has seen almost everything growing in abundance. It has been very different to last year, where we waited and waited through a dismal September for the summer crops to ripen—but I guess that's just how it goes.

This year, many of these same crops are almost over in August. I'm hoping that the few I took a chance on and sowed later in the season (dreaming of an endless summer) will have time to come to fruition.

Challenges of drought

As with everything though, there are always downsides. Alongside all the sunshine, we've had a lack of rain and we are very short of water. Here in Oxfordshire, we are several weeks into a hose pipe ban—the second ban since the garden was started in 2022, and it is unlikely to be the last.

While we are exempt from the ban as a commercial food producer, our organic garden, with an ethos firmly rooted in sustainability, still likes to do its bit!

Collecting and storing water

Here are some of the ways we've been storing and collecting water to make the garden more drought resilient. Many of these methods are easy to implement in your home garden or allotment.

One of the simplest solutions is to collect rainwater. We are lucky to have two huge polytunnels and can collect thousands of litres of rainwater from them. Water butts are easy to install on the down pipes from your house roof to collect the rain runoff. One of my winter projects this year will be looking into and implementing a better overwinter storage system, enabling us to collect and store even more rainwater for when we need it.

We also use a soaker pipe drip irrigation system in the large poly tunnel, which means that mains water is slowly drip fed directly on to the soil at the plant's roots. The result is less runoff and waste through water



evaporating from the soil. If you do have a big poly tunnel or greenhouse, these are straightforward to install.

There are lots of other ways you can prepare for and manage water shortage in your garden. Many of these practices are already in place in our garden, but they can be applied even more easily in a home garden or allotment than on a larger-scale site.

Improving soil for water retention

One of the first things to consider is your soil quality. This is important for several reasons. Firstly, our plants take their nutrition from the soil, so it is essential to keep it rich with organic matter through regular applications of fresh compost, manure or leaf mulch.

Along with providing nutrition, soil also acts as the medium that holds the water for your plants. Gardeners with sandy, loose soil will know that it does not retain water well. In times of drought, we want every drop of water we put on our plants to stay put and reach the roots. Soil enriched with organic matter is more sponge-like, helping it to retain more water effectively.



Once we have adjusted our soil to allow it to better retain the water, we need to make sure the water stays available for the plant and isn't evaporated immediately back into the atmosphere. The simplest way to avoid this is to water directly at the roots, either first thing in the morning or last thing in the evening when the sun is at its weakest.



Mulching your beds is also a good method of keeping the moisture in the soil longer. We mulch our beds every year as a matter of course before winter. The mulch we used last year didn't mix in well with the existing soil over winter, mostly due to it being so mild and dry. This actually turned out to be an unexpected blessing as the layer of mulch sitting on top protected the soil underneath from the sun and allowed it to stay damper for longer.

To do this at home, we can simply add a layer of fresh compost to our

beds as a mulch—a couple of inches is adequate. Decomposed leaves stored over winter also do the job well, as does a thin layer of grass cuttings spread around the roots of the plant. I've also known people to use straw and sheep's fleece, if that's available to you.



Planting for drought

We can also think about what we plant and how we plant it—this can make a big difference when water is short. Many vegetables are naturally drought-tolerant, particularly those from Mediterranean climates such as tomatoes, courgettes, aubergines and chillies. Every year, I cut back drastically on watering my tomatoes once they have set fruit, as it intensifies their flavour and sweetness, regardless of the water situation. Root vegetables like carrots, beetroot and parsnips also cope well, as do corn, squash and many of the Mediterranean herbs including rosemary, thyme, oregano, sage and marjoram.

Sowing seeds early to get them going can be helpful. Most plants need most water while they're establishing in the early part of the year—when the weather is often wetter and our water butts are usually full.

Advanced water-saving techniques

Using a Hugelkultur system when designing our beds can help to retain more water. Wood and branches are layered on the ground, then covered with organic matter such as leaf mulch and cuttings, before being topped with compost to decompose. Constructing the bed like this means that water is retained longer in the decomposing material and there is less runoff when it is watered.



Another method to retain water in the ground for longer is to utilise an olla. This is a terracotta vessel sunk into the soil and filled with water. The terracotta allows the water to seep slowly into the ground and keeps the plant next to it hydrated longer.

Companion planting is also useful in times of drought. Larger plants like sweetcorn or Jerusalem artichokes can be grown in front of crops that do not tolerate full sun to offer shade.

Crops can also be grown in between other crops to provide ground cover and shade the soil, which prevents loss of moisture through condensation. Squashes, sweetcorn or leeks are a good example of this, as well as under sowing with small crops like radish. The same result can also be achieved using shade cloth, which can be draped over crops like lettuce that don't cope well in the heat.

Always make sure you keep the beds weed free. While the weeds do provide some ground cover, they also take up the water. It's far better to use something that can be eaten or a green manure that will add nutrition to the soil.



Household water re-use

Lastly, we can utilise the water we use in the house better. We can re-use water that we have washed vegetable in, collect the cold water in the shower before the hot comes through. If you prefer baths, the water can be used in moderation to water flowers (but not vegetables), though it's worth bearing in mind that soap residue can build up in the soil—so don't use too much.

I hope these tips inspire you. Here's to keeping your garden thriving, even as the leaves start to fall.

Keep on growing!

Janet

UPCOMING WELLNESS WEBINARS

Looking to increase your nutrition and wellbeing knowledge?

Attending our wellness webinars can help improve your knowledge and awareness of lots of different health and wellbeing topics. Previous topics covered include: mindfulness, heart health and hydration.

Please join us for the below webinars coming up over the next few months:

CHOLESTEROL

Wednesday 1st OCTOBER:
2pm – 2.30pm



HEALTHY EATING AS YOU GET OLDER

Wednesday 5th NOVEMBER:
2pm – 2.30pm



Scan the QR code or send us an email at ess.wellness@compass-group.co.uk if you wish to get the links to the webinar directly in your inbox each month.

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