

WELLNESS

WELLNESS

magazine

SUMMER 2026

WELLNESS

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HEALTHIER MIND

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Welcome to the latest issue of our Wellness Magazine!



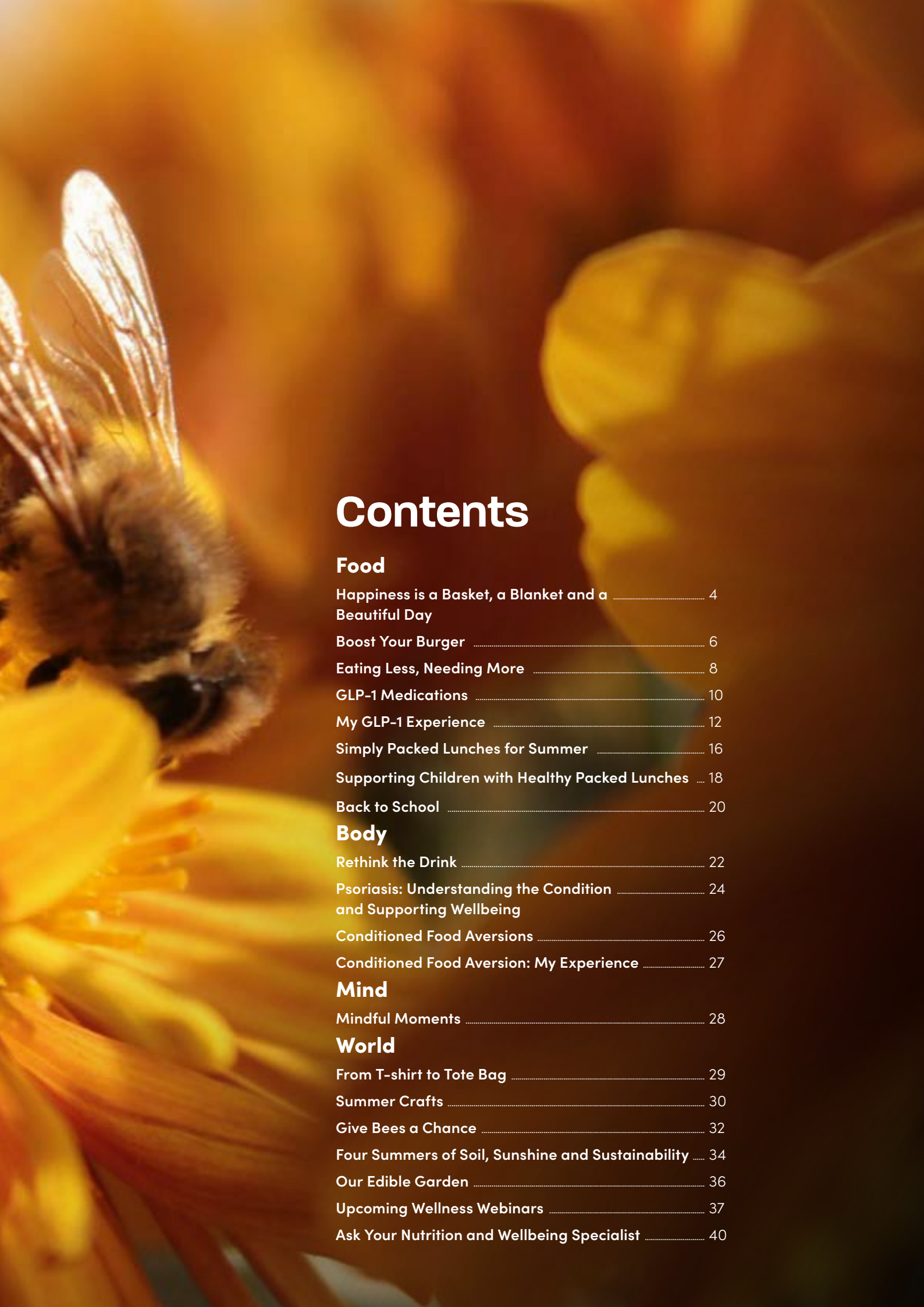
Welcome to our Summer Wellness Magazine, packed with practical tips, expert insights, and inspiring stories to support your health and wellbeing throughout the season.

In this edition, we explore topics ranging from healthy summer eating, balanced packed lunches, and GLP-1 medications, to hydration, psoriasis, and conditioned food aversions. You'll also find ideas to support mindfulness, connect with nature, get creative with summer crafts, and discover how small actions can make a positive impact on the environment.

Whether you're looking to improve your wellbeing, learn something new, or simply enjoy a summer read, we hope this edition provides plenty of inspiration. We encourage you to embrace the season, try something new, and take a few moments to invest in your wellbeing. Remember, health isn't about perfection; it's about small, positive choices that support us every day.

A stylized, handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Warren Clark'.

Warren Clark
Operations Director – ESS



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Happiness is a Basket, a Blanket and a Beautiful Day

NATIONAL PICNIC MONTH: JULY 2026



Jason Woollett
Head Chef - ESS

The origins of the picnic can be traced back to French society in the 1700s, where it began as a shared social occasion involving food and drink. Over time, it developed into the relaxed outdoor tradition we recognise today.

One of the best things about a picnic is its flexibility. There are no strict rules, and it can include almost anything you like, from homemade favourites to quick, easy snacks.

Coming from the South West originally, a traditional picnic I might prepare would include homemade Cornish pasties, Scotch eggs, pork pies, sausage rolls, and sandwiches such as ham, egg mayo, and cheese and pickle.

Alongside these might be salads, dips, and tortilla chips, finishing with fruit scones, strawberry jam, and clotted cream.

Drinks could include sparkling wine or homemade lemonade.

A family picnic is a great way to enjoy quality time together without spending a lot of money. Everyone can bring their favourite foods, making it easy to cater for all tastes.

If you are staying local, a bat and ball or a few outdoor games can turn a simple picnic into a full afternoon outdoors.





Simple Pasty Recipe

Below is a simple pasty recipe, perfect for sharing with family and friends.

Equipment

- Weighing scales
- Mixing bowl
- Chopping board
- Chopping knife
- Rolling pin
- Side plate or pastry cutter
- Pastry brush

Shortcrust pastry

Ingredients:

- 680g flour
- 450g margarine
- 225g water
- 1 tbsp pepper

Method:

Rub the flour and margarine together until they have a crumble-like texture. Slowly add the water and mix until a dough forms. Wrap in cling film and chill in the fridge to rest.

Filling

Ingredients:

- 1 finely diced swede
- 2 finely diced potatoes
- 2 finely diced medium onions
- 225g finely diced beef skirt
- Seasoning to taste (traditionally 1 tablespoon of pepper)
- Red wine (optional)
- Splash of Worcester Sauce
- 1 egg (for egg wash)

Method:

- 1 Preheat the oven to 180°C.
- 2 Mix all filling ingredients together and season with salt, pepper, a splash of Worcestershire sauce, and a splash of red wine if using.
- 3 Now take the chilled pastry from the fridge and roll out on a floured surface. Cut into circles using a side plate or cutter, depending on your preferred pasty size.

- 4 Take your cut pastry, brush the edges with egg wash, and place the filling in the centre. Fold the pastry over and crimp the edges to seal. To do this, place a finger on the pastry to flatten it, and using your other hand and two fingers, push the pastry up the side of the finger to seal.
- 5 Brush the top with egg wash and allow to rest briefly.
- 6 Bake for 20 minutes, then reduce the temperature to 160°C for a further 20 minutes, or until golden and cooked through.
- 7 Remove from oven and place on a cooling rack before serving.

Boost Your Burger

NATIONAL BURGER DAY: 27TH AUGUST 2026

Burgers are often labelled as an occasional treat, but with thoughtful choices, they can be part of a balanced and nourishing diet.



From swapping the protein source to upgrading the bun and fillings, small changes can significantly improve the nutritional quality of a burger meal without sacrificing flavour or satisfaction. The key factors to consider include the type of protein, fat quality, and what surrounds the patty.

Beef burgers are a good source of protein, iron, zinc, and vitamin B12, all of which play an important role in supporting muscle function, immunity, and energy levels. However, traditional beef burgers can be higher in total and saturated fat, which may contribute to raised cholesterol if eaten frequently. Choosing lean beef (around 90–95% lean) and keeping portion sizes moderate allows you to benefit from the nutrients while reducing saturated fat intake.



Chicken and turkey burgers are naturally lower in fat than beef when made from skinless, lean meat. They provide high-quality protein that supports muscle repair and helps keep you feeling full, but with fewer calories. Poultry burgers are often easier to digest and work well as a regular meal option. They are also easy to flavour using herbs, spices, lemon, or garlic rather than relying on added salt. Watch out for chicken burgers coated in breadcrumbs and deep-fried, as these will be high in fat and saturated fat.

Fish burgers are a great choice, particularly when made with oily fish like salmon. Oily fish contains omega-3 fats, which help protect the heart, reduce inflammation, and support brain function.¹ Fish burgers are generally lower in saturated fat than beef and also provide important nutrients such as vitamin D and selenium, making them a nourishing and balanced option.

Plant-based burgers made from beans, lentils, vegetables, soy, or peas can be a valuable part of a balanced diet. They often contain fibre, something many diets lack, which supports gut health and helps keep you feeling fuller for longer.² However, plant-based options can vary widely. Some highly processed meat-free burgers can be high in saturated fat or salt. Bean, lentil, and vegetable-based burgers are usually lower in fat and salt and offer the most nutritional benefits. Checking food labels can help you choose a healthier option.



Approximate values per cooked burger patty (≈100–113 g), without bun or toppings.³

Burger type	Total fat (g)	Saturated fat (g)
Beef (80/20 mince)	20–23 g	8–9 g
Chicken (skinless)	5–7 g	1–2 g
Turkey (lean)	6–8 g	1.5–2 g
Salmon	12–14 g	2–3 g
Plant Based (soy/pea based)	14–18 g	5–8 g
Bean & Vegetable Burger	3–6 g	<1 g



The bun is more than just something to hold the burger together. It's a significant source of carbohydrates and can impact the overall nutritional value of the meal. Choosing a wholemeal or wholegrain bun is a simple but effective upgrade. Wholemeal options are higher in fibre, which supports digestion and gut health, helps keep blood sugar levels more stable, and promotes a feeling of fullness that can reduce the urge to overeat.

Adding salad to a burger isn't just a garnish; it can significantly improve the balance and nutritional quality of the meal. Filling your burger with ingredients such as lettuce, spinach, rocket, alongside tomato, cucumber, peppers, or grated carrot and red

cabbage, boosts fibre, vitamins, and minerals. Including sliced avocado can also add beneficial unsaturated fats. These additions increase volume without adding many calories, support heart and digestive health, and help make the meal more satisfying and well balanced. To keep things lighter, go easy on creamy sauces and choose yoghurt-based dressings, hummus, salsa, or mustard for flavour without excess fat.

Making the right choices can allow burgers to fit into a healthy diet. Choosing lean or plant-based proteins, opting for a wholemeal bun, and filling your plate with colourful salad can shift a burger from an occasional indulgence to a nourishing, balanced meal.



1. <https://www.bhf.org.uk/information-support/heart-matters-magazine/nutrition/omega-3s-and-your-heart>

2. <https://www.nutrition.org.uk/creating-a-healthy-diet/gut-health/>

3. McCance and Widdowson, 2021

Eating Less, Needing More

Nutrition in the Age of GLP-1



GLP-1, or glucagon-like peptide-1, medications have rapidly moved from specialist use in diabetes care to becoming central in conversations around weight loss. Often described as ‘game-changing’, they are increasingly used to support weight loss and improve health outcomes. However, while their effectiveness is clear, understanding how they work, and how to support the body alongside their use is essential for long-term wellbeing.

GLP-1 is a naturally occurring hormone in the body that helps regulate appetite, blood sugar, and digestion. GLP-1 medications mimic this hormone by activating the same receptors, which reduces appetite, slows the rate at which food leaves the stomach, and helps individuals feel fuller for longer. As a result, people tend to eat less, which drives weight loss. Research suggests that these medications can reduce calorie intake by between 16–39%, contributing to weight loss of around 5–18% of body weight, with even greater results seen in some longer-term studies.^{1,2}

This level of effectiveness has led to a significant rise in their use, particularly among individuals managing obesity or weight-related health conditions. For many, they offer a valuable tool, especially when traditional approaches such as diet and exercise alone have not produced the desired results. In addition to weight loss, GLP-1 medications can improve blood sugar control, reduce food cravings, and may also contribute to improved cardiovascular health.

Despite these benefits, there are important considerations, particularly around long-term sustainability and nutritional health. One of the key challenges is that reduced appetite often leads to lower overall food intake. While this supports weight loss, it can also result in individuals not consuming enough essential nutrients. Evidence suggests that up to 22% of people using GLP-1 medications may develop nutritional deficiencies within 12 months, with common shortfalls including iron, calcium, magnesium, zinc, and vitamins A, D, B12, and C.^{1,3} Over time, this can affect energy levels, recovery, immune function, and overall health.

There is also growing concern around the risk of malnutrition. This highlights an important point: it is possible to lose weight but still be undernourished. Emerging evidence suggests that malnutrition may be under-recognised in individuals using GLP-1 medications, particularly when food intake becomes significantly restricted.⁴ Alongside this, weight loss is not limited to body fat alone. Research indicates that around a quarter of weight lost may come from lean mass, including muscle.⁵ This is significant, as muscle plays a vital role in strength, metabolism, and maintaining long-term weight loss.

Another key consideration is sustainability. While GLP-1 medications can be highly effective during use, they do not automatically address underlying eating habits or lifestyle behaviours. Without broader support, there is a risk of weight regain once the medication is stopped. This reinforces the importance of combining medical approaches with nutrition and lifestyle strategies.

Nutrition becomes even more important in this context, particularly because appetite is reduced. When individuals are eating less, the quality of what they eat becomes critical. This is where understanding both energy-dense and nutrient-dense foods becomes essential.



Malnutrition in the context of

GLP-1 use refers to a state where the body is not receiving enough essential nutrients to function properly, despite weight loss or even excess body weight.



Energy-dense foods provide a high number of calories in a relatively small portion. Examples include oils, nuts, seeds, cheese, and full-fat dairy products, as well as more processed options that are high in fat and sugar. For individuals with reduced appetite, these foods can be helpful in maintaining adequate energy intake without needing to eat large volumes of food.

However, energy alone is not enough. In the context of GLP-1 use, there is an even greater need to prioritise nutrient-dense foods that provide a high concentration of vitamins, minerals, and other essential nutrients relative to their calorie content. When overall food intake is reduced, there is less opportunity to meet nutritional needs through diet alone.

Nutrient-dense foods provide high levels of essential nutrients such as protein, vitamins, and minerals, helping the body function, recover, and stay healthy, even when eating smaller portions.



Nutrient-dense choices include lean proteins, eggs, dairy, oily fish, whole grains, fruits, vegetables, nuts, and seeds. These foods help ensure the body still receives the nutrients it needs to function, recover, and maintain health, even when portion sizes are smaller. Protein is particularly important, as it supports the maintenance of muscle mass, which can otherwise be lost during weight reduction.

The key is finding a balance. Relying heavily on energy-dense but nutrient-poor foods, such as highly processed snacks or sugary foods, can increase the risk of deficiencies and contribute to poor health outcomes. This can lead to what is sometimes described as the 'double burden' of malnutrition, where calorie intake may be sufficient, but nutrient intake is inadequate.⁴

Energy-dense foods provide a high number of calories in a relatively small portion.



A more effective approach is to combine both concepts: choosing foods that are nutrient-rich and, where needed, energy-supportive. This ensures that even with a reduced appetite, individuals are fuelling their bodies in a way that supports both weight loss and overall wellbeing. Hydration, regular eating patterns where possible, and resistance-based exercise can further support health outcomes, particularly in preserving muscle mass.

Ultimately, GLP-1 medications can be a powerful and effective tool, but they are not a complete solution on their own. Long-term success depends on a combination of factors, including nutritional quality, lifestyle habits, and ongoing support. The key message is that weight loss should never come at the expense of overall health. By combining medical treatment with a thoughtful and balanced approach to nutrition, individuals can achieve outcomes that are not only effective but also sustainable.

GLP-1 Medications

Lifestyle, Occupational, and Wellbeing Considerations

Glucagon-like peptide-1 (GLP-1) is a naturally occurring hormone produced in the gut that helps regulate appetite and blood sugar levels after eating.



Medications such as semaglutide and tirzepatide mimic the action of this hormone and are increasingly being used to support weight loss. Strong evidence shows meaningful reductions in body weight and improvements in cardiometabolic health.^{1,2,3} Alongside these clinical benefits, it is important to recognise that they can also influence day-to-day routines, eating behaviours, and how people function at work and in social settings.

These medications work by reducing appetite, slowing gastric emptying, and increasing feelings of fullness. In practice, this often means people feel satisfied with smaller portions and may naturally eat less throughout the day.^{4,5} While this can support weight management, it can also require a period of adjustment as eating patterns change.

From a practical perspective, food is still central to social and working life. People may notice they are less hungry at usual mealtimes, leave food unfinished, or choose smaller portions. This is generally manageable, but it can help to plan ahead in certain situations. For example, it may help to choose lighter options when eating out or be mindful of longer gaps between meals during busy days.

Some individuals may also experience a reduced interest in food overall, particularly in the early stages. Planning ahead, such as reviewing menus in advance or focusing on nutrient-dense options, can help maintain both nutrition and social engagement.⁶

In occupational settings, particularly where access to food is limited or unpredictable (such as travel, field-based work, or long shifts), there is a risk of unintentionally under-eating. Simple strategies include planning energy-dense snacks, staying hydrated, and making use of predictable break times, which can help maintain steady energy levels across the day.

A few practical considerations include:

- **Planning for busy or long shifts:** keeping accessible snacks available where appropriate
- **Hydration:** ensuring regular fluid intake, especially in active or warm environments
- **Listening to early signals:** feelings of fatigue or light-headedness may indicate low energy intake
- **Flexible eating patterns:** adjusting meal timing rather than relying on traditional meal structures

Some people may experience mild gastrointestinal (GI) effects, particularly when starting treatment or increasing the dose. These can include nausea, early fullness, bloating, constipation, or occasional reflux.^{5,11} These symptoms are usually short-lived and tend to settle as the body adjusts.

1. Wilding JPH et al. N Engl J Med. 2021. STEP 1 semaglutide trial.
2. Garvey WT et al. Nat Med. 2022. STEP 5 long-term semaglutide outcomes.

3. Jastreboff AM et al. N Engl J Med. 2022. SURMOUNT-1 tirzepatide trial.
4. Lean MEJ et al. Diabetologia. 2023. Incretin therapies and obesity management review.

5. Davies M et al. Diabetes Obes Metab. 2023. GLP-1 gastrointestinal effects and tolerability.
6. Wharton S et al. Obesity Reviews. 2024. Nutritional management in pharmacological weight loss.

Simple ways to ease GI discomfort:

- **Go smaller**
Lighter meals and snacks are often better tolerated than large portions.
- **Take your time**
Eating more slowly can help reduce nausea and discomfort.
- **Keep it light**
Rich or high-fat foods can sometimes worsen symptoms.
- **Sip, don't gulp**
Regular hydration throughout the day can help digestion.
- **Don't skip meals entirely**
Long gaps can sometimes make nausea feel worse.
- **Gentle movement**
A short walk after eating may help things settle.

In work environments, where access to food is limited or schedules are unpredictable, it can help to plan simple, easy-to-tolerate foods and avoid long gaps without eating. This can reduce the likelihood of nausea and help maintain consistent energy levels.

Shift workers may need to be particularly mindful, as appetite and digestion are already affected by irregular schedules and circadian disruption (disruption of the body's internal clock).^{9,10} Reduced appetite, alongside limited eating windows, can make it more challenging to maintain consistent intake, so small, planned eating opportunities can be useful.

In some cases, reduced appetite may lead to lower overall energy intake, particularly during early treatment or

dose adjustments.^{5,11} This can affect energy, concentration, or stamina if intake becomes too low. Focusing on simple, nutrient-dense foods and eating little and often can help maintain balance without needing large meals.

In regulated or safety-critical sectors, there may also be occupational health considerations where medication use is disclosed. While GLP-1 therapies are generally well tolerated, early dose stages can sometimes involve temporary side effects that may need to be considered in more demanding roles.

It is also worth noting that some GLP-1 treatments involve practical handling considerations, including the safe use and disposal of needles in line with standard sharps guidance.



A few practical tips to support this in the workplace:

- Check in with your HR or occupational health team to understand any relevant policies or procedures.
- Be aware of sector-specific requirements or regulations, particularly in safety-critical roles.
- Consider timing of doses, especially during the early stages, to minimise any impact on work or shifts.
- Allow time to adjust during dose increases, when side effects may be more noticeable.
- Keep open, appropriate communication if your role requires medication disclosure.
- Plan ahead for safe storage and disposal of sharps, particularly if working across different locations.
- Pay attention to how you feel at work, especially energy, concentration, and hydration levels.
- Seek advice early from a healthcare professional or occupational health team if anything feels difficult to manage alongside your role.

Importantly, these considerations are not about limiting access to treatment, but about supporting people to integrate it effectively into everyday life while maintaining wellbeing, performance, and safety.

Overall, GLP-1 therapies are highly effective tools for weight management, supported by strong clinical evidence. With some simple planning, awareness of appetite changes, and a few practical adjustments where needed, most people are able to adapt their routines and continue to feel well at work and at home.

7. Ranganathan R et al. Sports Medicine. 2023. Energy deficit and cognitive/physical performance.
8. Imray C et al. BMJ Military Health. 2022. Operational nutrition and fatigue in demanding roles.

9. Kecklund G & Axelsson J. Lancet Public Health. 2023. Shift work and circadian disruption.
10. McHill AW & Wright KP. Curr Biol. 2024. Circadian alignment and energy intake.

11. Nauck MA et al. Lancet Diabetes Endocrinol. 2023. Clinical considerations for GLP-1 therapies.
12. HSE. Managing medicines in the workplace guidance. 2023.

My Experience Using GLP-1s

Two Very Different Journeys with Mounjaro

Over the past couple of years, GLP-1 medications have become a prominent part of the conversation around weight loss and metabolic health.



Richard Thurman
General Manager - ESS

Like many others, I was curious but cautious. My own journey with GLP-1s, specifically Mounjaro, has been defined by two short but very different courses: one in the summer of 2025 and another in the winter of 2026. Although neither period of use was long term, the contrast between them taught me a great deal about preparation, listening to my body, and what it really means to build a healthier lifestyle.

The first course: learning the hard way

When I first started Mounjaro in the summer of 2025, I'll admit I wasn't as well prepared as I should have been. I understood the broad strokes: reduced appetite, slower digestion, and weight loss, but I underestimated how much my day-to-day habits would need to change alongside the medication.

Almost immediately, I struggled with eating. It wasn't just a lack of appetite; quite often it felt as though my body was rejecting anything I consumed. Nausea became a regular feature of my days, and deciding what to eat felt more like a gamble than a routine. Foods I'd normally tolerate seemed to trigger sickness, and meals became something I endured rather than enjoyed.

Energy was another major challenge. I play hockey regularly and I am used to a certain level of endurance and output on the pitch. During this period, however, I noticed a sharp decline in performance. Usually, my distance covered was roughly half of what I'd normally achieve. I felt flat, slow, and depleted in a way that was unfamiliar and frustrating, particularly in a sport that relies so heavily on stamina and mental sharpness.

Perhaps most unexpectedly, Mounjaro also affected me socially and emotionally. In the evenings, I found myself shutting down. Conversations felt like effort, not connection, and I often chose to go to bed early rather than engage with others. At the time, I didn't immediately connect this withdrawal to the medication, but in hindsight, it was clearly part of the wider picture of low energy and reduced overall capacity.

Despite these difficulties, the medication did what it was designed to do: I lost weight. But the experience left me with mixed feelings. While the physical results were visible, the cost to my energy levels, social life, and overall wellbeing made it clear that weight loss alone isn't the full story.

The second course: preparation changed everything

By the time I decided to use Mounjaro again in the winter of 2026, I approached it very differently. This time, I came prepared. I made a point of reading all the information provided by the supplier, understanding not just what the medication does, but how to work with it rather than against it.

Nutrition became a priority. I paid close attention to what I ate, when I ate, and how my body responded. Smaller, balanced meals at the right times made an enormous difference. Instead of forcing food or eating reactively, I fuelled myself deliberately, ensuring I was getting what I needed without overwhelming my system.

The result was night and day compared to my first experience. I didn't suffer the side effects that had plagued me the previous summer: no persistent sickness and no feeling that my body was pushing back against every bite. My energy levels were far more stable, and while I was mindful of my output during hockey, I no longer felt like I was operating at half capacity.

Mentally and socially, I felt far more like myself. Evenings didn't end in an early withdrawal, and conversation no longer felt like a burden. The medication was still present in the background, but it wasn't dominating my day-to-day life in the same way.

Looking ahead: beyond the medication

Both courses of Mounjaro were intentionally short-term and I don't see the medication itself as the end goal. Instead, these two experiences, especially the contrast between them, have reinforced the importance of lifestyle alongside any medical intervention.

What gives me optimism now is that the second course showed me what's possible when preparation, education, and healthy habits align. I'm hopeful that I can continue with the healthier lifestyle I've built and maintain my current weight without ongoing reliance on medication.

GLP-1s like Mounjaro are powerful tools, but they're not magic solutions. Used without understanding, they can be punishing. Used with care, knowledge, and intention, they can offer valuable support. My journey has been a reminder that sustainable change doesn't come from the drug alone; it comes from learning, adjusting, and ultimately taking responsibility for how you live once the injections stop.



My GLP-1 Journey



Tom Lannary
Marketing Director - ESS

I've always struggled with my weight. I used to blame it on quitting smoking, but the truth is I was still putting on weight when I smoked. I would go to the gym, lose weight, stop going, and put the weight back on. I would try different diets. They worked at first, but then my resolve would fail, and the weight would return, often with a vengeance. So I continued on my yo-yo dieting journey. By the autumn of 2025, I was at my heaviest. I was extremely unfit; even climbing several flights of stairs was becoming an effort.

Around this time, the press was full of stories of celebrities on Ozempic and other weight-loss drugs, and it was clear to see that many had undergone dramatic changes to their appearance. But was it the right route for me? The thought of needles terrified me.

What really changed my thinking was meeting up with an old friend of mine, who looked amazing. She had obviously lost a lot of weight since I had last seen her, and she was quite open about how she had done it on Mounjaro. She reassured me that the needles were ultra-fine and barely noticeable.

This spiked my curiosity. The first hurdle was that I wasn't eligible for NHS treatment, which required a BMI of 40. Although I was obese by any measure, at 36.8 my BMI was too low for NHS treatment.

However, the internet came to the rescue as I could buy it privately from lots of sources. Some of the cheaper

options seemed quite sketchy, and the reviews did little to ease this concern, so I decided to go with a major UK high-street chemist chain. It wasn't the cheapest option, but I wanted to feel secure that I was using a product that was safe.

After an online consultation, which highlighted some of the potential side effects of the drug, I was prescribed Mounjaro at the entry-level dose. I also sent some unflattering photos of my ever-expanding body.

I was nervous to take the first weekly jab. The needle was ultra-fine and I barely felt it, but there is definitely a psychological difference between having an injection and taking a pill.





My second jab at 10mg coincided with my scalp feeling quite tight and itchy. This continued for a week and worried me enough to go to the pharmacist for a quick check-up. Although I was given the all clear, once I mentioned Mounjaro, they suggested dropping down the dose. I did this and remained at the lower dose for a couple of months. The scalp symptoms abated, and no hair fell out.

I did then increase the dose with no adverse side effects. A lesson I learned was don't rush to increase the dosage. Looking back, I should have stayed on the lower doses from the outset.

After eight months on Mounjaro, I have lost four stone and moved my BMI from obese to overweight. I still have a bit to go before I reach the healthy weight category, but my relationship with food has improved. I'm now focusing on increasing my physical activity and reducing the dosage I'm on to reach a stable level, with the aim of coming off the injections completely.

For me, I've been lucky to experience very few side effects, and on the whole it's been a positive journey. It's taught me that slow, steady lifestyle changes are as important, if not more important, than quick fixes. It's not an inexpensive route, and there are other weight-loss drugs that cost less, including GLP-1 tablets as an alternative to injections. This may not be the right path for everyone, so it is important to speak to reputable pharmacists or your doctor before starting any course of medication.

That first day there was definitely a change. I just didn't feel hungry. I would go into the kitchen, open the fridge, and think, no, I don't really want anything. When dinner time came round, I still wasn't particularly hungry, but decided I would have something. I cooked a normal meal for myself and my partner, and we sat down to eat. Halfway through the meal, I thought, "This is odd, I just don't want any more." As someone brought up to finish what was on their plate, this was a novel experience. I put this down to just a first-day thing, but it continued. My appetite had definitely changed. I wasn't feeling hungry, and when I did eat, I wanted less.

This forced my first lifestyle change. I started trying to eat more often, but in smaller portions: a yoghurt for breakfast, a salad for lunch, and a smaller meal in the evening.

I didn't have any of the side effects that had been listed, and within the first month, I had seen the numbers on the scales start to go down. This spurred me on, and by the end of the first month, I was ready to increase the dose, as the higher doses were supposed to lead to greater weight loss, but also higher cost.



By month three, I had started to experience one of the side effects: constipation. A quick dose of laxative solved the problem at the time, but this wasn't something I wanted to rely on. This led to the next dietary change: increasing my fibre intake. I started adding chia seeds to yoghurts and added pulses like lentils and beans to stews, casseroles, and curries.

The weight continued to drop off, and in month four I moved up the dose ladder to 10mg.

This was the month I almost decided to stop the jabs. I knew that hair loss was a possible side effect and, to be honest, it was the one I was most dreading. However, since I had had so few adverse symptoms up to that point, I was quite blasé about the whole thing.

Simple Packed Lunches for Summer

When summer holidays slow the pace, packed lunches can be a simple, fresh and stress-free way to keep everyone fuelled on the go.



The good news is that creating lunches that are balanced, affordable, and more environmentally friendly doesn't have to be complicated or expensive. It's less about perfection and more about building simple habits that work for you and your family.

Start with balance, not perfection

A balanced packed lunch helps maintain steady energy levels, support concentration, and avoid those mid-afternoon energy dips. A simple way to think about it is including a mix of:

- **Carbohydrates** for energy (e.g. wholegrain bread, wraps, pasta, and rice)
- **Protein** for fullness and focus (e.g. eggs, beans, cheese, yoghurt, and lean meats).
- **Healthy fats** (e.g. seeds, nut butters, and hummus)
- **Fruit and vegetables** for vitamins, minerals, and fibre

You don't need to include everything every day, but aiming for balance across the week keeps things realistic and achievable.

What about portion sizes?

Portion sizes don't need to be exact, but it's helpful to consider age, appetite, and activity levels.

For younger children, smaller portions often work best, with foods that are easy to eat. For example:

- Half a sandwich or a small wrap
- A handful of chopped fruit or veg
- A small portion of yoghurt or a boiled egg

For older children and teens, appetites can vary considerably, especially during growth spurts, so they may need:

- A full sandwich or wrap
- An extra snack, like fruit, yoghurt, or crackers
- Slightly larger portions of protein-rich foods

For adults, portion sizes are typically larger again, particularly on days that are physically or mentally demanding.

A simple guide is to let hunger and fullness lead the way. If lunches are consistently coming home uneaten, portions may be too big. If energy dips quickly, a little more food or an extra snack might help.

Keep costs down with smart choices

Packed lunches can quickly add up, especially over the summer holidays or when preparing for multiple children. A few small tweaks can make a big difference:

- **Use what you already have:** leftovers like pasta, rice, or roasted vegetables can easily become the next day's lunch
- **Buy in bulk:** larger packs of staples like oats, rice cakes, or yoghurt are often better value
- **Choose seasonal produce:** fruit and vegetables in season are usually cheaper and taste better
- **Limit single-serve snacks:** individually wrapped items can be more expensive, portioning from larger packs is more cost-effective

Simple options like egg sandwiches, homemade pasta salads, or bean-based wraps are both affordable and filling.



Make it greener without stress

Packed lunches are also a great opportunity to reduce waste without adding extra effort.

- **Swap disposable for reusable:** lunchboxes, reusable bottles, and containers to reduce packaging waste
- **Use refillable pots:** for yoghurt, dips, or snacks instead of single-use packaging
- **Wrap smartly:** beeswax wraps or reusable sandwich bags can replace cling film or foil
- **Plan portions:** this helps reduce food and packaging waste together

Even small swaps, done consistently, can have a meaningful environmental impact over time.

Keep it practical for busy days out

Whether you're heading to the park, beach, or a day trip, practicality matters:

- Choose foods that travel well (e.g. wraps instead of soggy sandwiches).
- Include an ice pack for items like yoghurt or cheese.
- Opt for easy-to-eat foods, especially for younger children.
- Bring extra water, particularly on hot days.

Think simple, sturdy, and low-fuss.

Ideas to get you started

- Wholegrain wrap with hummus and grated veg, fruit, and yoghurt
- Pasta salad with beans, sweetcorn, and chopped veg
- Egg and spinach sandwich, carrot sticks, and apple
- Cheese, crackers, and cucumber with a handful of nuts or seeds (if appropriate)
- Leftover roasted veg and chicken in a wrap

Mix and match based on what you have. It doesn't need to look 'perfect' to be nutritious.

A gentle reminder

Packed lunches don't have to be Instagram-worthy. What matters most is that they support energy, mood, and enjoyment of the day. Some days will be more balanced than others, and that's completely normal.

By focusing on simple, repeatable habits, you can create lunches that are good for your family, your budget, and the environment, without adding extra pressure.

Supporting Children with Healthy Packed Lunches

A healthy packed lunch plays an important role in helping children stay focused, active, and ready to learn throughout the school day.



Adrian Roj
Function and Hospitality
Head Chef - ESS



Good nutrition supports children's growth, concentration, energy levels, and overall wellbeing. Teaching children to eat well from a young age helps build positive habits that can last a lifetime.

As parents, it is our responsibility to guide children towards healthier choices and show them the importance of good food. It becomes much easier when packed lunches are kept interesting, colourful, and full of flavour. Using the best possible ingredients, whether homemade, organic, or carefully chosen store-bought options, helps children enjoy healthy food rather than see it as a chore.

One of the simplest ways to improve lunchboxes is by reading food labels. Choosing products with clean, high-quality ingredients and shorter ingredient lists is often the best approach. This helps children become more aware of what they are eating and teaches them the value of making better food choices from a young age.

Here are some packed lunch ideas using a mix of organic, homemade, and store-bought ingredients:

- Full-fat natural yoghurt with homemade nutty granola, sliced banana, and a tablespoon of blackcurrant jam
- Wrap made with Crosta Mollica durum wheat flatbread, homemade sundried tomato falafel, homemade green lentil hummus, lettuce, and cucumber
- Homemade organic sourdough bread with ham, mature cheddar, and cucumber
- Fresh fruits
- Fresh vegetables
- Nuts
- Homemade Anzac biscuits
- Organic dried fruits such as prunes and dates
- Eat Real hummus chips with rich tomato and aromatic basil flavour

I understand that not everyone has time to make everything from scratch. Of course, store-bought options can work just as well when chosen carefully. The key is to read the label and look for the best quality ingredients. The shorter the ingredient list, the better.

Healthy lunches are not just about food; they are an investment in children's health, happiness, and future success.



Anzac Biscuits Recipe

Equipment:

- 2 baking trays
- Lining paper
- Weighing scales
- Mixing bowl
- Saucepan
- Mixing spoon
- Teaspoon
- Oven gloves

Ingredients:

- 150g plain flour (all-purpose flour)
- 100g rolled oats
- 80g desiccated coconut, unsweetened
- 100g brown sugar
- 150g/5oz unsalted butter
- 1 tbsp golden syrup
- 1 tsp baking soda (bicarbonate of soda)

Method:

- 1 Preheat** oven to 180°C (160°C fan).
- 2 Line 2 baking trays** with baking paper.
- 3 Mix dry ingredients:** mix flour, oats, coconut, and sugar in a bowl.
- 4 Melt butter and golden syrup:** place butter and golden syrup in a saucepan over medium-high heat and stir until butter has melted.
- 5 Baking soda:** add baking soda and stir to combine. It will fizz up, this is normal. Immediately remove from heat.
- 6 Biscuit dough:** pour butter mixture into flour and mix until just combined. The mixture will be crumbly but should stick when you press together.
- 7 Form patties:** scrunch or press 1 tablespoon of the mixture into balls, then flatten into patties. Thinner patties make crispier biscuits, thicker patties make chewier centres with crispy edges. Place balls 2.5 cm apart on prepared trays.
- 8 Bake** for 15 minutes, swapping trays halfway through cooking, or until deep golden brown. Bake for 12 minutes for chewy biscuits.
- 9 Cool to crisp:** stand on trays for 5 minutes before transferring to a wire rack to cool. They harden as they cool.

Back to School

The end of summer often acts as an unofficial new year, bringing packed calendars, early alarms and the return of school or workplace routines.



This shift can change your energy, mood and appetite, making it a perfect moment to realign your nutrition and wellbeing habits rather than coast on summer autopilot.



The rhythm of commuting, fixed start times, and increased social demands can feel jarring after a slower summer, so treating September as a gentle reset helps you avoid burnout and supports long term health.

When life picks up, convenience foods and skipped meals can creep in, yet stable energy and focus depend on regular, balanced eating. Aim for meals built around vegetables, wholegrains, lean protein, and healthy fats, and keep emergency snacks such as nuts, Greek yoghurt, or fruit to hand.

Starting the day with a breakfast that includes protein and fibre, such as eggs or oats, can sustain attention through the morning and reduce mid morning cravings.¹ Seasonal autumn produce like butternut squash, apples, root vegetables, and leafy greens, supports immunity and provides slow release energy, helping you feel steady through the day.

Mild dehydration and poor sleep worsen fatigue and irritability, and can impair concentration. These are common complaints as routines intensify. Most adults benefit from around 6 to 8 glasses of liquid daily and 7–9 hours of sleep, with earlier bedtimes helping to ease the transition from late summer evenings.²

Setting a 'digital wind down' 30–60 minutes before bed can reduce exposure to blue light and support natural melatonin release, while using a water bottle or a simple tracking method can help you stay hydrated, particularly if you are commuting or sitting through long meetings.



Physical activity is strongly linked to better mood, cardiovascular health, and blood sugar control, yet it is often the first habit to drop when schedules tighten. Even short bursts of movement, such as brisk 10-minute walks, climbing the stairs, or quick home stretches, can make a meaningful difference in stress and stamina.³ Anchoring movement to existing habits, like a 10-minute walk after lunch, a short stretch after logging off, or a family walk in the evening, can make it easier to sustain as the days get busier.

Many local studios and gyms offer short 'express' fitness or mindfulness sessions in September, which can fit around packed work or school schedules.

The return to school or work often coincides with decision fatigue, social pressure, and higher cognitive load. Structured routines, plus small mental health practices, can reduce overwhelm and protect motivation.

Creating a simple evening 'reset' ritual, such as reviewing the next day's schedule, laying out clothes, or jotting down three things you are grateful for, can help you end the day more calmly. Using short breathing exercises, for example inhaling for four seconds, holding for seven, and exhaling for eight, or taking a brief mindfulness app break during transitions, can help ground you and support emotional resilience.

Rather than drastic new year-style overhauls, use September as a chance to layer in sustainable habits that can last through the cooler months. Consistent small changes, like planning meals, scheduling movement, and protecting sleep, build into better energy, mood, and long term health. This kind of gentle, gradual approach is more likely to stick than extreme restrictions or rigid rules, and it allows you to adapt to the demands of returning to school or work without feeling deprived or overwhelmed.

By viewing September as a reset rather than a punishment, you can step back into routine with a nourished body and a calmer mind.

1. <https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/wholegrains.html>
 2. <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/food-guidelines-and-food-labels/water-drinks-nutrition/>

3. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a82d70f40f0b62305b94a00/Health_benefits_of_10_mins_brisk_walking_evidence_summary.pdf

Rethink the Drink

ALCOHOL AWARENESS WEEK: 6TH–12TH JULY 2026

Alcohol awareness is about understanding how drinking affects your health, mood, relationships, and nutrition.

It also involves learning how small changes in consumption can significantly improve your wellbeing. For many people, alcohol becomes a habit rather than a conscious choice, so bringing it into the light with awareness, self-assessment and supportive nutrition can be a powerful step toward a healthier life.

Alcohol is a depressant that acts on the brain, liver, heart, and immune system. Its effects can begin even with occasional use and increase with higher or more frequent intake. Regular heavy drinking is linked to raised blood pressure, liver disease (including cirrhosis and liver cancer), pancreatitis, heart disease, stroke, and weakened bones. It is also associated with higher risks for several cancers, including breast, mouth, head and neck, and bowel cancers.¹

On top of physical harm, excessive use is associated with depression, anxiety, sleep disruption, memory problems, and cognitive decline over time.² Because alcohol can also impair judgement and coordination, it increases the risk of accidents, falls, and injuries.

Alcohol itself is calorie-dense but 'empty' of essential nutrients, meaning it provides energy while crowding out healthier foods and impairing nutrient absorption. Regular heavy drinking can lead to deficiencies in B vitamins (especially thiamine/B1 and folate), vitamin C, vitamin D, and minerals such as iron and zinc, with knock-on effects on energy, immunity and brain function.³

Poor appetite, gut irritation, and disrupted metabolism in heavy drinkers mean that even if some calories are eaten, they may not be handled efficiently.⁴ That is why people recovering from alcohol misuse often see rapid improvements in skin, hair, and energy when they



switch to balanced meals rich in wholegrains, protein, vegetables, fruit, and healthy fats.

Public health bodies emphasise that the safest level of alcohol for many people is 'no drinking at all' or very low intake, especially for younger adults and those with certain health conditions. Moderate drinking has been associated with a slightly lower risk of heart disease in some studies, but these benefits are modest and highly dependent on pattern, genetics, and overall lifestyle; they are outweighed for many people by higher cancer and injury risks.

For women in particular, each additional drink per day is linked to an increased risk of breast cancer, although adequate folate intake may partially offset that risk.⁵ Because the risk-benefit balance is complex and individual, healthcare professionals often recommend limiting alcohol or choosing to avoid it, especially if there is a family history of alcohol use disorder, liver disease, or cancer.

When you do drink, pairing it with better nutrition can help protect your body and reduce harm. Helpful approaches include:

- Eating a balanced meal rich in protein, fibre, and healthy fats before or while drinking can help slow alcohol absorption and stabilise blood sugar and mood.
- Choosing nutrient-dense foods after heavy drinking episodes, including fruit and vegetables, wholegrains, lean protein, and foods that support gut health, such as fermented or probiotic-rich foods, can help recovery.
- Prioritising hydration through water and non-alcoholic drinks and limiting sugary mixers can reduce dehydration and help you feel more alert.

For people reducing or stopping alcohol, structured guidance such as on the Better Health section of the NHS website or specialist alcohol support services often includes dietary advice to correct deficiencies and support liver and brain recovery. Alcohol Awareness Week and similar campaigns encourage people to pause, reflect, and set small, realistic goals. Helpful steps include:

- Keeping a brief drink diary for a week to see how much you actually consume and when.
- Switching to lower-strength or alcohol-free options and gradually extending 'dry' days.
- Building alternative rituals around food, movement, connection, and relaxation so that socialising does not automatically mean drinking.

These changes, even if modest, can lead to higher energy, better sleep, improved mood, easier weight management, and lower long-term disease risk.

It is recommended that we only consume 14 units of alcohol a week, spread out over three or more drinking days.⁶

14 units of alcohol is approximately 6 pints of 4% beer or



6 glasses (175 ml) of 12% wine.



Alcohol-free doesn't have to mean sugary mocktails.

Why not give these alcohol-free and lower sugar drinks a try this summer:



Frozen Cucumber Mojito Mocktail

(serves 2)

Equipment:

- Chopping board
- Knife
- Cup
- Citrus juicer
- Blender

Ingredients:

- 1 cucumber (sliced)
- 10 mint leaves
- 1/3 cup lime juice
- ½ cup soda water
- 2 cups crushed ice

Method:

- 1 Place 2 cups of crushed ice in a blender along with sliced cucumber, mint, lime juice, and soda water.
- 2 Serve over ice and garnish with a mint leaf.



Summer Cup (Alcohol-free Pimms alternative)

(serves 4)

Equipment:

- Chopping board
- Knife
- Measuring jug
- Saucepan
- Spoon
- Sieve

Ingredients:

- 1cm thick slice of cucumber
- 1 sprig of mint
- Handful of frozen berries
- 120ml sugar-free lemonade
- Ice

Method:

- 1 Chop cucumber and mint sprig. Bring 200 ml water to the boil and add cucumber and mint. Turn off heat and leave for 2 minutes.
- 2 Add a handful of berries, allow them to defrost slightly and crush lightly with the back of a spoon. Strain the mixture. It will keep in the fridge for 24 hours and be enough for 4 drinks.
- 3 Pour 40 ml of strained mixture into a glass, add ice, and top up with 120 ml sugar-free lemonade. Garnish with whatever fruit you like.



Homemade Lemonade

Equipment:

- Measuring jug
- Citrus juicer
- Tablespoon
- Pitcher or large bowl

Ingredients:

- 240ml lemon juice (6–7 lemons)
- 960ml cold water
- 1 tbsp stevia (plant-based sweetener)

Method:

- 1 Add the ingredients to a pitcher or large bowl and stir until the stevia has completely dissolved.
- 2 Serve immediately or cover and chill until ready to serve.

1: <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohol-effects-health/alcohol-effects-body>
2: <https://www.ias.org.uk/report/the-physical-and-mental-health-effects-of-alcohol/>

3: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/3544907/>
4: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6668875/>
5: <https://www.bcrf.org/about-breast-cancer/alcohol-breast-cancer-risk/>

6: <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/facts/information-about-alcohol/alcohol-and-the-facts/low-risk-drinking-guidelines>
<https://alcoholchange.org.uk/get-involved/campaigns/alcohol-awareness-week-1>

Psoriasis

Understanding the Condition and Supporting Wellbeing

PSORIASIS AWARENESS MONTH: AUGUST 2026

Psoriasis is a common, long-term condition that affects the skin, but its impact often goes much deeper.



While it is usually recognised by visible changes to the skin, such as dry, scaly patches, psoriasis is actually driven by the immune system and can affect both physical comfort and emotional wellbeing.

At its core, psoriasis is a chronic inflammatory condition. The immune system becomes overactive, speeding up the production of skin cells. Normally, skin renews itself over a few weeks, but in psoriasis this process happens in just a few days. As a result, skin cells build up on the surface, forming raised, flaky patches that may feel itchy, sore, or uncomfortable.¹ These patches can appear red or darker depending on skin tone, and often come and go in cycles, with periods of flare-ups followed by times when symptoms improve.

One important point to highlight is that psoriasis is not contagious and cannot be passed from one person to another.² Despite this, visible symptoms can sometimes lead to misunderstanding or stigma, which can add to the emotional impact for those living with the condition.

Psoriasis is relatively common in the UK, affecting around 2–3% of the population, equivalent to up to 1.8 million people (around 1 in 50 individuals).^{1,3} It can develop at any age, although it is often diagnosed in early adulthood or later in life.

There isn't just one type of psoriasis. The most common form, plaque psoriasis, accounts for around 90% of cases and is typically seen on areas such as the elbows, knees, scalp, and lower back.³ Other forms include guttate psoriasis, which often appears as small, drop-like spots and can be triggered by infections, and flexural psoriasis, which occurs in skin folds and may be smoother but still uncomfortable. Rarer forms, such as pustular or erythrodermic psoriasis, can be more severe and may require urgent medical attention.² Some people also experience changes to their nails, such as pitting or thickening.

Living with psoriasis can affect individuals in different ways. Physically, symptoms such as itching, discomfort, or cracked skin can interfere with daily activities, and around one in four people may also develop psoriatic arthritis, which affects the joints and can cause pain and stiffness.² Beyond the physical symptoms, there can be a significant emotional and social impact. Because psoriasis is often

visible, it may affect confidence, influence clothing choices, or make social situations feel more challenging. Some people report feeling self-conscious or concerned about how others perceive their skin, particularly during flare-ups.³

Psoriasis is also increasingly understood as a whole-body inflammatory condition. This means it may be linked to other aspects of health, including cardiovascular disease, metabolic conditions, and mental health challenges such as anxiety and depression.³ This highlights the importance of taking a holistic approach to wellbeing.

The exact cause of psoriasis is not fully understood, but it is thought to involve a combination of genetics, immune system activity, and environmental triggers. Factors such as stress, infections, certain medications, smoking, alcohol, and changes in weather can all play a role in triggering or worsening symptoms.²

From a wellbeing perspective, it's important to take a balanced and compassionate view. Psoriasis is a long-term condition with no single cause or quick fix, and experiences can vary widely from person to person. While medical treatment plays a key role, lifestyle factors can also support overall health and resilience.

1. Psoriasis Association UK (2023). About Psoriasis. Available at: <https://www.psoriasis-association.org.uk>
2. British Skin Foundation (2022). Psoriasis Overview. Available at: <https://www.britishskinfoundation.org.uk>

3. Psoriasis and Psoriatic Arthritis Alliance (PAPAA) / PSORT UK (2021). Psoriasis Statistics and Impact. Available at: <https://www.papaa.org/> <https://www.psoriasis.org.uk>

4. National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) (2017, updated 2023). Psoriasis: Assessment and Management (CG153).
5. NHS (2023). Psoriasis. Available at: <https://www.nhs.uk>

Nutrition and lifestyle-tips

Think of this as gentle support – not a cure, but a helpful foundation.

- **Aim for a balanced diet:** a variety of whole foods (fruit, vegetables, wholegrains, healthy fats, and protein) supports overall health and helps maintain a healthy inflammatory balance
- **Include omega-3 fats:** found in oily fish (such as salmon and mackerel), walnuts, and flaxseeds, omega-3 fats may support inflammatory processes
- **Maintain a healthy weight:** where appropriate, this may help reduce symptom severity and support joint health
- **Stay active:** regular movement supports both physical and mental wellbeing
- **Manage stress:** stress is a common trigger. Techniques such as walking, breathing exercises, or mindfulness can help
- **Prioritise sleep:** good-quality sleep supports immune function and recovery
- **Limit smoking and alcohol:** both are known to potentially worsen symptoms
- **Notice your triggers:** everyone is different. Tracking flare-ups can help identify patterns over time

Myths vs facts

MYTH

Psoriasis is just a skin condition.

FACT

It is an immune-related inflammatory condition that can affect overall health.

MYTH

Diet alone can cure psoriasis.

FACT

There is no cure; nutrition supports wellbeing but isn't a standalone treatment.

MYTH

It's contagious.

FACT

You cannot catch psoriasis from someone else.

MYTH

Only severe cases matter.

FACT

Even mild psoriasis can impact confidence, comfort, and quality of life.

Living with Psoriasis

A Personal Journey



Chris Simmonds
General Manager – ESS

Psoriasis is something I've lived with since childhood, and it's shaped much of my daily life. I still remember the first time someone pointed out the patches on my eyelids, and how self-conscious it made me feel. Although it's a common condition, many people don't understand just how much it can affect someone, both physically and emotionally.

My own journey began when I was very young, with psoriasis spreading across my arms, legs, scalp, torso, and even my eyelids. The constant itchiness and discomfort made everyday activities more difficult, and I often dreaded swimming

lessons, as the pool water would make my skin turn bright red, which felt deeply embarrassing.

Middle school was particularly tough. Some classmates teased me about the visible patches, calling me names and leaving me feeling isolated. The bullying made me want to hide away.

Managing psoriasis meant trying different treatments. Steroid creams and medicated shampoos became part of my daily routine, but they weren't always pleasant. The creams could sting and leave my skin feeling greasy, while the shampoos sometimes irritated my scalp even more. It was frustrating, but they helped to keep the worst symptoms at bay.

As I got older, my psoriasis improved in some ways. The patches on my arms and legs faded to an extent, and I felt less self-conscious.

However, the condition never fully disappeared. Nowadays, it mostly affects my elbows, eyelids, and ears, which can still be sore and uncomfortable at times.

Psoriasis is still a part of my life, but I've learned to manage it. I use gentle skincare products and avoid triggers where possible. There are tough days, especially when the soreness flares up, but I hope sharing my story helps someone feel less alone and encourages others to talk.

Conditioned Food Aversions

How the Brain Learns to Protect Us

Most people can think of a food they once enjoyed but now avoid completely.

Often, this change can be traced back to a single experience, perhaps a meal before a stomach bug or a time when food was linked with feeling unwell. Even years later, the reaction can be surprisingly strong. This phenomenon is known as conditioned food aversion and reflects a powerful interaction between the brain, the body, and emotional memory.

Conditioned food aversion is a form of associative learning, where the brain links a particular food with an unpleasant physical response, most commonly nausea or illness.¹ What makes this learning unusual is its efficiency. Unlike many behaviours that require repetition, food aversions can develop after just one experience, and the brain is able to form this connection even when there is a delay of several hours between eating and feeling unwell.¹ From a biological perspective, this is highly adaptive; it allows us to quickly avoid foods that might pose a risk to health.



Recent neuroscience research has deepened our understanding of how this process works. Studies show that conditioned food aversion involves key brain regions responsible for emotion, memory, and bodily awareness. These include the amygdala, insula, and gustatory cortex.² The insula plays a central role in processing taste and internal bodily signals, while the amygdala attaches emotional significance, such as discomfort or disgust, to the experience. New research has also demonstrated that neural coding within the gustatory cortex (how the brain encodes and interprets taste signals) can change following a negative food experience, effectively altering how that food is perceived in the future.³ This means the brain doesn't just remember the event; it can actually reshape how the food tastes or feels.

At a deeper level, conditioned food aversion reflects changes in neural plasticity, the brain's ability to adapt based on experience. For example, recent studies have shown that aversive food learning is associated with changes in neurotransmitter activity (chemical signalling between brain cells) and synaptic connections (connections between neurons that strengthen or weaken with experience). This includes involvement of GABA signalling, a neurotransmitter system that helps regulate brain activity, as well as brain-derived neurotrophic

factor (BDNF), a protein involved in learning and memory formation.^{4,5} These biological changes help explain why food aversions can feel so immediate and long-lasting.

Psychologically, this process is closely linked to how the brain prioritises threat detection and emotional learning. When the body experiences illness, the brain rapidly tries to identify a cause. Rather than precisely identifying the source, it often associates the most recent food consumed with the negative experience. This is not always accurate, but it is effective from a survival perspective. The result is a strong emotional memory that can trigger avoidance, discomfort, or nausea when the food is encountered again.

This connection between food, memory, and emotion also highlights an important link to mental wellbeing. Food aversions are not just about taste; they are shaped by experience, context, and emotional state. During periods of stress, illness, or heightened anxiety, the brain may be more sensitive to forming these associations. This means that individuals already experiencing physical or emotional strain may be more likely to develop stronger or more persistent aversions. In some cases, this can influence eating behaviours more broadly, reducing food variety or creating anxiety around certain foods or situations.

Research also suggests that conditioned aversions can become generalised, meaning the avoidance may extend beyond one specific food to similar tastes or textures.⁶ This can have implications for dietary balance, particularly if key food groups are affected. However, it's important to recognise that for most people, food aversions are a normal, adaptive response rather than a cause for concern.

Encouragingly, the brain's ability to learn also means it can relearn. While conditioned food aversions can be strong, they are not always permanent. Over time, and with repeated neutral or positive experiences, the brain can form new associations that weaken the original response. Research in both neuroscience and psychology highlights that gradual exposure, positive context, and cognitive reframing can support this process.⁴

Approaching this gently is key. Small steps, such as trying a food in a different setting, changing how it is prepared, or gradually reintroducing it, can help the brain build new, safer associations. Importantly, forcing the process too quickly can reinforce the original aversion, as the brain may interpret this as another negative experience.

From a wellbeing perspective, conditioned food aversion offers a valuable insight into how closely nutrition, brain function, and emotional health are connected. Food is not just fuel; it is also deeply tied to memory, experience, and perception. Understanding this can help shift the narrative from frustration to curiosity, and from avoidance to gradual, supported change.

Ultimately, conditioned food aversion is a reflection of the brain doing its job, protecting us from potential harm. While this response can sometimes feel limiting, it is rooted in a highly sophisticated system designed for survival.

With time, awareness, and a compassionate approach, most people can rebuild a flexible and balanced relationship with food that supports both physical and mental wellbeing.



Conditioned Food Aversion

My Experience

Anonymous
ESS Employee

A few years ago, I contracted viral meningitis. My last meal before becoming seriously unwell was a meat curry. I vividly remember being offered food during recovery and instantly feeling unable to eat anything containing meat.

The consultant explained that after a severe illness like viral meningitis, the body can develop a strong conditioned taste aversion.

This is a survival mechanism: if the brain associates a food with feeling gravely ill, it can create a strong dislike or nausea towards that food in the future. In my case, the meat

curry became the trigger, and my brain now 'flags' meat as unsafe. This is considered a conditioned response linked to psychological trauma, where the brain links sensory experiences, such as taste or smell, to a traumatic event, much like someone might avoid a place or smell associated with a frightening experience.

Fascinating, isn't it?

Another interesting effect was that I temporarily lost my sense of humour and even the ability to perform simple tasks, such as making a cup of tea. Mood,



memory and sensory perception are closely linked in the brain. The insula, a brain region involved in taste perception, emotional processing and bodily awareness, can be affected by stress, inflammation, or trauma. This can temporarily alter responses to everyday things like humour, food and routine tasks, helping explain why making tea, laughing, or eating meat all felt impossible for a time.

The power of the brain is truly incredible.

1. Current Biology (2025). Associative learning: A mechanism for conditioned taste aversion.

2. Frontiers in Psychology (2026). Taste-related learning and conditioned responses in humans and animals.

3. Frontiers in Systems Neuroscience (2026). Neural coding in gustatory cortex reflects consumption decisions.

4. Journal of Neuroscience (2025). GABAergic plasticity in conditioned taste aversion.

5. Neurobiology of Learning and Memory (2025). Environmental modulation and BDNF in taste aversion learning.

6. Frontiers in Cellular Neuroscience (2022). Generalisation and long-lasting aversive conditioning.

MINDFUL MOMENTS

Suicide

SAMARITANS AWARENESS DAY: 24TH JULY 2026

Introduction

Suicide is the act of intentionally taking your own life.

Suicidal feelings can mean having thoughts about ending your life or feeling that people would be better off without you. You might feel unable to cope or like you can't go on living as you are.

Often, people who take their own life do not necessarily want to die. Instead, they may feel overwhelmed by emotional pain and see death as the only way for the suffering to end.



Signs that you or someone you know might be struggling to cope

- Lacking energy or feeling tired
- Feeling exhausted most or all of the time
- Experiencing brain fog or difficulty thinking
- Finding it hard to concentrate
- Feeling restless or agitated
- Not wanting to socialise or go out
- Losing interest in things you usually enjoy
- Using food, alcohol, or drugs to cope with feelings
- Finding it hard to cope with everyday tasks
- Experiencing burnout
- Feeling tearful or needing to cry frequently

Suicide statistics

- 1 in 4 people will experience suicidal thoughts at some point in our lives.
- 1 in 13 people in England attempt suicide.
- 1 in 100 deaths worldwide are due to suicide.
- Men are 3 times more likely to take their own life than women.
- 1 in 10 people self-harm.

Tips to support someone who may be struggling

- Listen without judgement and respond with open questions rather than advice or opinions.
- Offer to call the Samaritans or a GP on their behalf.
- Help create a safety plan, which can help someone navigate suicidal feelings and urges, while also providing a way for the two of you to communicate and check in with each other.
- Try to build a support network involving friends, family, and trusted people.
- If someone is in immediate danger, call 999 for an ambulance.

Support available

- Contact your GP, who can provide support options and referrals.
- Reach out to the Samaritans to talk through difficult feelings with a trained volunteer. Call Samaritans for free, 24/7, on **116 123**.
- For written support when struggling to cope, text **SHOUT** to **85258**.
- Join an online community for peer support such as Clic or Side by Side:
 - mentalhealth-uk.org/partnerships/projects/clic
 - www.mind.org.uk/information-support/side-by-side-our-online-community

Practical ways to help yourself cope

Make small steps to look after yourself each day

This could be making sure you brush your teeth, go for a walk, or prioritise going to bed at a good time. Maybe you can only do one of these a day right now, and that's okay.

Relaxation exercises

Controlled breathing can be a useful tool to help us feel calmer and reduce feelings of stress.

Talk to someone

Whether it's through a helpline, a peer-support online community, or with a friend or family member. Make sure you have at least one place where you feel safe to open up.

Be the driver, not the passenger

Feeling this way can be overwhelming. Try to focus your energy on the things you can control and change, rather than the things you can't. This can help you feel more in control of your life.

Don't forget, you can contact your 'Ask Your ESS Nutrition and Wellbeing' specialist:
ESS.Wellness@compass-group.co.uk

From T-shirt to Tote Bag

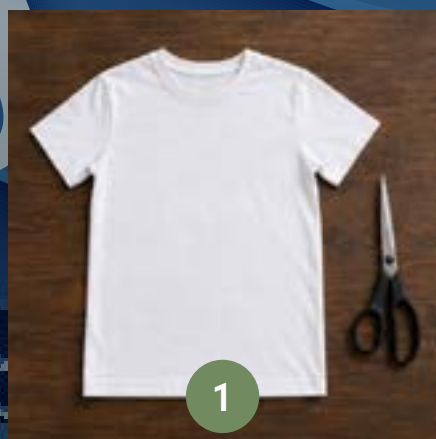
PLASTIC FREE JULY: JULY 2026

In the UK, consumers use hundreds of millions of single-use plastic bags annually. Why not make your own reusable tote bag out of an old t-shirt which was heading to the bin?

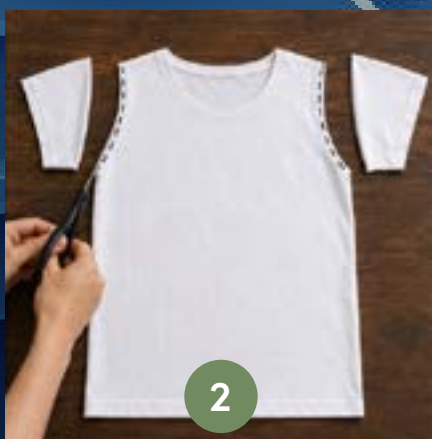
Only about 6% of plastic bags are recycled.¹

You will need:

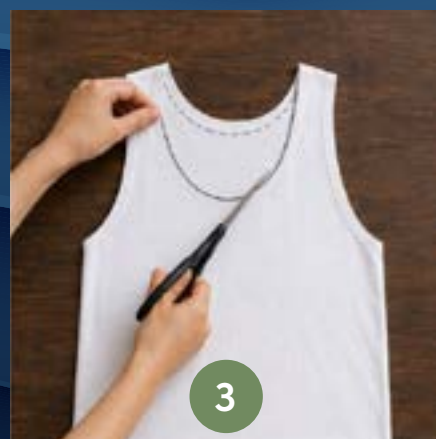
- An old t-shirt (short or long sleeved)
- A pair of scissors



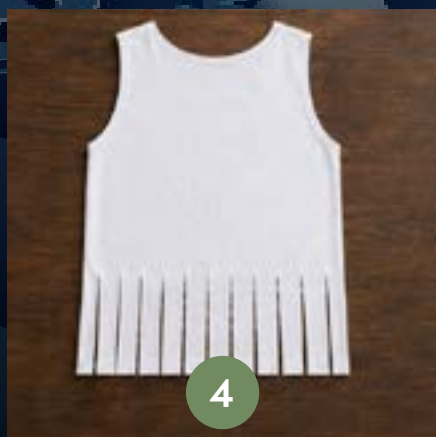
Grab an old t-shirt and scissors. Lay the t-shirt on a flat table.



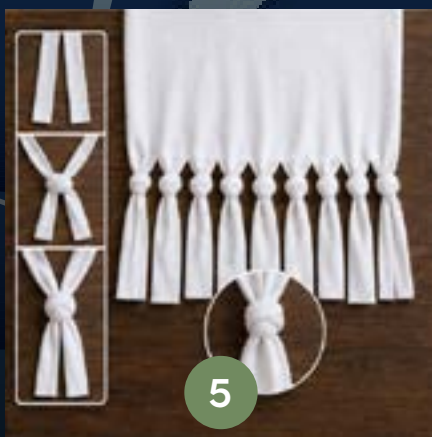
Cut off the sleeves.



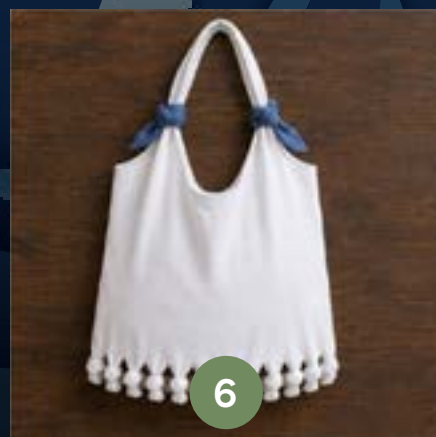
Cut the neck out of the top. You can use a large bowl and draw around it or just cut it.



Cut the slits. Cut even slits an inch apart at the bottom of the t-shirt. They need to be long enough to tie them twice.



Tie knots. Keep the slits lined up and tie the front and back aligning pieces together in double knots.



You can add ties to the handles with other scrap material.

¹ <https://www.wrap.ngo/taking-action/plastic-packaging/actions/plastic-bags-and-wrapping>

Summer Crafts

Turning Everyday Waste into Something Wonderful

Summer is the perfect time to get creative, and you don't need to buy anything new to do it. In fact, some of the best craft materials are probably already in your recycling bin. Repurposing everyday items not only saves money; it's also a simple way to reduce waste and do something positive for the environment.

Think about all the things you'd usually throw away: cardboard boxes, glass jars, plastic bottles, old magazines, or tin cans. With a bit of imagination, these can be transformed into fun and useful creations. A glass jar can become a lantern for warm summer evenings, a cardboard box can turn into a playhouse or organiser, and plastic bottles can be cut and decorated into plant pots or bird feeders.

Summer crafts are especially great for getting outside. You could create wind chimes from old tins, decorate stones for the garden, or make a mini herb planter from leftover containers. These activities are not only enjoyable but also a great way to involve children and encourage creativity without relying on screens.

Repurposing is really about seeing potential where you might not have before. Instead of throwing something away, pause and ask: could this be turned into something new?

It doesn't have to be perfect. The goal is to have fun, experiment, and make something that feels personal.

By using what you already have, you're taking small steps towards more sustainable habits. And often, those simple, homemade creations end up being the most meaningful.

Bird feeder

It's likely that you have an empty loo roll or two lying around your house, so rather than putting it in the bin, why not turn it into something useful, like a bird feeder?

Bird feeders help support local wildlife by providing an additional food source, especially when natural food is limited. They can encourage a variety of birds into gardens and outdoor spaces, support biodiversity, and contribute to natural pest control.

Simply cover a cardboard tube in peanut butter or lard, roll it in birdseed, and hang it on a tree branch.



Growing What We've Got

My Experience



Jess Payne
Social Value Director
- Compass One

This year, I've discovered that 'crafting' doesn't always involve glue guns and glitter. Sometimes it looks like a polytunnel, a slightly wonky growing bench, and a collection of containers that definitely didn't start life as plant pots.

Together with my mum (now officially promoted to CGO, Chief Growth Officer), I've been setting up a small growing space in my new garden. Yoghurt tubs, oat milk cartons, passata boxes, and even old filing cabinets have all found a surprising second career as growing homes for seedlings. It turns out plants are far less judgemental about aesthetics than we are.



There's something quietly joyful about giving everyday items a new purpose. Filing cabinets make brilliant raised beds. Cardboard tubes become biodegradable starter pots. Plastic containers get one last, very leafy hurrah before recycling. It's sustainable crafting in its simplest form: using what you already have, getting your hands in the soil, and watching things grow.

Growing with family is a lot of fun, and we're learning a lot together. Not everything works, but that's half the fun.



So if summer is calling you to try something new, consider having a rummage before a shop. Get crafty, get growing, and don't worry about perfection. Sustainability doesn't have to be polished; it just has to be thoughtful. And if you need a CGO to keep things on track, I highly recommend appointing one.

Give Bees a Chance

DON'T STEP ON A BEE DAY: 10TH JULY 2026

This day isn't just about protecting our feet. It highlights the important role bees play and how they are at risk of becoming extinct.

Bees play a critical role in both our ecosystem and food production. They are important pollinators that carry pollen between flowers, helping plants produce fruits, nuts, seeds, and vegetables. Without bees, many of the foods we rely on for survival and nutrition would become scarce or disappear altogether.

In addition to their role in producing food, bees also help to maintain the biodiversity and health of ecosystems by pollinating wild plants and supporting the habitats of other animals. They play a key role in the overall health and stability of our natural systems.

Unfortunately, bee populations are currently under threat due to habitat loss, climate change, pesticide use, and other factors. The need for action is urgent, with 35 bee species facing extinction. We must take steps to protect and conserve these important creatures, both for their own sake and for the sake of our food systems and the wider world. This could involve supporting bee-friendly gardening practices, reducing pesticide use, and advocating for policies that protect bee habitats and populations.

Bees contribute to a third of the food we put on our tables.¹

Insect pollination is worth £690 million to UK crops each year.²

75% of global crops depend on insect pollination.^{2,3}

Causes of reduced bees	Cause of decline
Bee-specific diseases and parasites that weaken and kill them	The Varroa mite (<i>Varroa destructor</i>) swept across the UK in the 1980s and is still present today. This mite lives up to its name by reducing the lifespan of adult bees, suppressing their immune system, and transmitting viruses as it moves from bee to bee, feeding on their blood. Sick bees are also more susceptible to the effects of poor nutrition and pesticide poisoning.
Flowers, nest sites, and nesting materials contaminated by pesticides	Bees pick up insecticides, herbicides, and fungicides applied to gardens, roadsides, and crops. These pesticides, alone and in combination, can be toxic.
The loss of natural habitats	Fewer wildflower meadows, hedgerows, fenlands, and ancient woodlands have caused a decline in all our insect pollinators, including moths, butterflies, hoverflies, bumblebees and honeybees. There are not enough blooming flowers throughout the growing season in our agricultural and urban landscapes to support bees. Fortunately, councils and other large organisations across the UK have recognised this serious problem and have now started a policy of limited grass cutting on verges, roundabouts, parks, and gardens. The general public are also being encouraged to plant flowers that support pollinators in their gardens.

ESS is supporting bee populations!



Katie Leeder
Group Manager - ESS

I've had the absolute pleasure of managing two social value projects in our region. These involved the introduction of beehives across our RAF sites in the East of England.

The projects aim to establish and maintain bee colonies on site to support local biodiversity, protect pollinators, and encourage greater awareness of environmental sustainability. It has been a fantastic opportunity to deliver something that is both practical and visible, while also making a positive environmental impact.

At both RAF sites, I worked closely with the client to bring the projects to life, with ESS providing the funding to establish a one-hive colony at each location. We began by completing basic beekeeping training to ensure everyone involved had the knowledge and understanding needed to safely manage the hives. Suitable locations were then identified on site, and we constructed dedicated sheds nearby to securely store all the equipment needed to maintain the colonies.

The bees were introduced at RAF Marham in April 2024 and in late spring this year at RAF Honington.

It has been a genuinely rewarding project to deliver, both in terms of its environmental benefits and the way it has helped engage people across the site, while also raising awareness of sustainability in a practical, hands-on way.



We have also had the pleasure of naming the honey produced. At RAF Marham, it was named 'Buzz Lightning,' inspired by the F-35 Lightning aircraft based there. At RAF Honington, if we are successful this year, the honey will be called 'Honeyington Honey,' which has added a bit of character and fun to the project.

One of my greatest achievements so far has been the opportunity to present a pot of our honey to His Majesty King Charles over Christmas. If you ever have the chance to get involved in a social value project, I would highly recommend it. It's a fantastic way to develop new skills, connect with nature, and be part of something meaningful.



How can we help our bees?

- Plant flowering plants if you have outdoor space.
- Don't mow the lawn as frequently.
- Don't use pesticides.
- Support organic produce. There are around 75% more wild bees on organic farms.²
- Purchase bee products.



Bee facts

The average hive produces about 24 jars (11kg) of honey per season.²

Bees must fly about 55,000 miles just to make almost 500g of honey.²

Four Summers of Soil, Sunshine, and Sustainability!

Greetings from the Defence Academy Organic Market Garden.



Janet Thomas
Head Gardener - ESS

Greetings from the Defence Academy Organic Market Garden. It's hard to believe that the garden has been set up now for four years, and we are about to enter our fifth summer of growing. I like to think that, through the visitors we welcome to the garden, our social media, and my regular article in the Wellness Magazine, the garden and I have inspired at least a few people to have a go at growing their own produce. Hopefully, those people have enjoyed lots of success and plenty of fresh, seasonal produce.

We get lots of visitors to the garden seeking advice about what to grow and when, as well as how to set up the perfect veg plot. While there is no right or wrong way of doing things, and everyone's circumstances are different, I thought I'd share a few hints and tips for anyone thinking about creating a productive plot in their garden or an allotment.

What do you want to grow?

The first important thing to decide is what you actually want to grow, and a common-sense approach is to grow what you like eating. However, this may also mean that you need to buy certain equipment, and it may dictate how you set out your plot.

For example, if you want to grow strawberries, which are perennial, it would be helpful to have a permanent bed just for them that is easy to cover with mesh or chicken wire to stop the birds and squirrels from stealing the fruit. If you want to grow tomatoes, peas, cucumbers, or mangetout, you will also need some sort of support for them to grow up.



How much space do you have?

Another important factor is space. If you have limited space, you may want to avoid perennial crops like rhubarb, globe artichokes, Jerusalem artichokes, asparagus, and fruit bushes or plants. You may also want to avoid winter vegetables like Brussels sprouts, leeks, and celeriac, which can take up lots of space for long periods of time.

If you don't have much space, is it worth growing potatoes? They take up a lot of room, and good-quality spuds are relatively cheap to buy.



What are your circumstances and availability?

I personally like a mixture of rows and open beds at ground level. However, if you have mobility or movement issues, you may be better with raised beds, although these do come with the added cost of building them and filling them with compost.

If you do not think you will be able to get to your plot regularly in summer, you may prefer not to plant 'thirsty' crops, especially if there is no access to water and you have to transport it there. Many summer crops like courgettes, sweetcorn, and tomatoes require lots of water, whereas carrots, parsnips, beetroot, chard, and French beans (once they are established) can tolerate a little drought.



What style of gardener do you want to be?

Will you go no-dig, or do you like to rotavate? I'm a huge advocate of no-dig growing, disturbing the soil as little as possible. However, even I have to dig sometimes, especially when I am sowing root veg and the ground has become very compacted.

On the whole, I prefer to add a fresh layer of compost (a couple of inches will do) at the start of the growing season, ready to transplant our veg seedlings into. We are also organically certified, and all our seeds need to be organic too, but seeds from reputable suppliers are also a safe bet.

Will you grow from seed? If so, you may need to be a bit more organised. Or will you buy seedlings? The latter might be a good idea to start with, and once you get the hang of growing, you can start to grow your own from seed, which is far more economical and gives a much wider choice of varieties.

This article includes pictures of rows, a hoop bed, a trellis for climbers, a herb bed, and a strawberry bed with

cover. I generally like my rows to be about 60 centimetres across and roughly 30 to 40 centimetres for the path. I like to be able to step across a row easily and reach the middle with ease from the path. This is also a good distance for hoops if you need to cover crops like brassicas to protect them from pests. Things I always cover include broccoli, cabbage, leeks, Brussels sprouts, and cauliflower.

I like to pop things like courgette plants at the end of a row, and I prefer to grow root crops in an open bed so they don't make a mess of my lovely rows when I dig them up.

If you do want to have a go, I really recommend reading some books: I love anything by Charles Dowding, 'Allotment Month by Month' and 'Allotments for Dummies' are good places to start. You can also follow him on social media.

It's also helpful to remember that, like most things, the more you do it, the better you'll get at it.

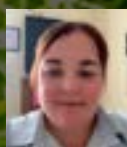


It all might sound a bit complicated, and sometimes it can be, but the most important thing to remember is that you will not grow anything if you don't actually plant something. Even if you grow some tomatoes in pots and some courgettes and squash in a patch of soil, you'll feel a tremendous sense of achievement when you get to eat what you grew.

Happy gardening!

Our Edible Garden

NATIONAL ALLOTMENTS WEEK: 10TH–16TH AUGUST 2026



Laura Ward
Catering Manager - ESS

Here at RAF Coningsby, we have wormeries that are fed daily. The worms process our food waste, including carrot peelings, leftover potatoes, fruit, and even our old coffee grounds from our café. The worms break this down to produce fresh compost, which is then used in our Edible Garden.

We grow a range of produce, including chives, chillies, potatoes, and sprouts. These are then used in dishes at high-profile functions.



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 healthy eating as we get older.

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

Portion Control & Portion Distribution

Wednesday 1st JULY: 2pm – 2.30pm



Benefits of Physical Activity

Wednesday 5th AUGUST: 2pm – 2.30pm

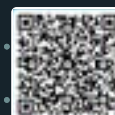


Nutrient Dense Dining

Wednesday 2nd SEPTEMBER: 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.



If you've missed any of our webinars and want to watch them back, check out our YouTube channel @WeAreESS.

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WELLNESS



ASK YOUR NUTRITION & WELLBEING SPECIALIST

WELLNESS

Ask anything to do
with nutrition, health
and wellbeing.



Leanne King
BSc (Hons), PGCE, RNutr
ESS Head of Nutrition
and Wellbeing

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we will get back to you
as soon as possible.

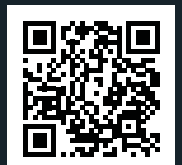


Lottie Jones
BSc (Hons), MSc, RNutr
ESS Nutrition and
Wellbeing Officer

If you have any queries, email and ask your ESS Nutrition and Wellbeing specialist
at: ess.wellness@compass-group.co.uk

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