

What's New in Nutrition and Diet?

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“Don't ever give up trying to make other lives better.” Those words will always drive what I do. They were written by our daughter Becki, who has had ME from the age of 12. She wrote them shortly before she died in 2014, aged 23. They were addressed to medical and health professionals and, as a registered NHS dietitian, that included me. In my role as Honorary Dietetic Advisor to the MEA, I want Becki's legacy to live on through writing about diet and nutrition for ME/CFS and Long Covid.

For a number of years, I have contributed to ME Food Facts sheets for the British Dietetic Association (BDA). These were updated last year to include the nutrition recommendations from the latest NICE Guideline on ME/CFS. The NICE recommendations now include more about nutritional risk, including unwanted weight loss, and the need for assessment by a dietitian.

Many people are more vulnerable to poorer intakes, especially the more severely affected, because of symptoms of fatigue and exhaustion and the practical difficulties of eating well. NICE also highlights that anyone with IBS-type symptoms should be tested for Coeliac disease, prior to starting a gluten-free diet ideally, or they will need to reintroduce gluten containing food in more than one meal, for six weeks prior to the blood test.

Coeliac disease is a serious illness where the body's immune system attacks its own tissues when you eat gluten. This causes

damage to the lining of the gut and means the body can't properly absorb nutrients from food.

Another key point from NICE is that there is insufficient evidence to support the routine taking of specific vitamin and mineral supplements to cure, or manage, ME/CFS. People may be at risk of side effects if they take doses above the recommended daily amount. However, be aware that those with ME/CFS may risk Vitamin D deficiency, particularly if they are bedbound or do not go outside. It is recommended to take a daily vitamin D supplement, (10 micrograms or 400µ).

The full ME/CFS Food Facts, written by the Association of UK Dietitians (BDA.uk.com) and the ME Association's Hon. Dietetics Adviser, Sue Luscombe, covers advice on foods that can be helpful for those with ME/CFS:

<https://meassociation.org.uk/oasz>

Last April, the BDA launched its new Food Facts sheets on Long Covid and Diet. It took many months, working with leading dietitians in the Long Covid field, to produce up-to-date information, and clarify the



current consensus on diet for Long Covid.

It was interesting to see how some of the language around diet is changing. The starting point for optimising nutrition, used by the NICE Guideline on ME/CFS, is the Eatwell Guide. However, with post-Covid illness or Long Covid, the advice is to follow an anti-inflammatory diet, otherwise known as a Mediterranean-type diet, (shown as a pyramid).

An anti-inflammatory diet has even greater emphasis on being plant-rich and having higher fibre, with wholegrains, vegetables and fruit, nuts and seeds. It also mentions the inclusion of Omega 3-rich foods, such as salmon and oily fish.

Both the Eatwell Guide and the Mediterranean diet share similar advice of eating a wide variety and balance of foods, hydrating well, and limiting red meat and processed high sugar/fat foods. The sheet is free to download at:

<https://meassociation.org.uk/oasz>





Focus

Most recently, I was invited to contribute a chapter on food and nutrition for "Living with ME and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome", published by Penguin Life Expert last September. It is written by Dr. Gerald Coakley, a Consultant Physician and Rheumatologist, and Beverley Knops, a Specialist Occupational Therapist. Both have many years of experience and expertise in ME/CFS and now Long Covid. This was my first experience of using a ghost-writer. I was given a set of questions about nutrition and diet and interviewed by phone. Then began the hard work of writing in a consistent, easy-to-read, style, which was polished by the ghost-writer, then finally returned to me for approval.

Although the book is written for ME/CFS, our son found it very helpful and readable. He has had Long Covid for the past 18 months. It gave him insight in different ways of managing symptoms he had not considered, and explained about anxiety, which is commonly experienced. As well as a chapter on nutrition the book explores the causes and management options for ME/CFS: the impact of the condition on work, education and emotional wellbeing; and advice for carers and questions to ask your doctors. ■



HON. DIETETICS ADVISER: SUE LUSCOMBE

Sue is a Registered Dietitian, who has a wealth of experience improving people's health and treating illness through diet changes. Her NHS career has spanned over 44 years.

She has been especially interested in ME/CFS after her daughter, Becki, was diagnosed in 2002, at the age of 12. For many years, the family lived with the debilitating fatigue and practical consequences of ME/CFS.

She has been in demand as a speaker, and workshop leader, including conferences for NHS Medical and Health Professionals at Birmingham

NEC (2014) and CFS Research conference (CMRC), Bristol 2018.

For many years, she was the Dietetic representative on the executive council for the British Association of Clinicians in ME/CFS (BACME). She is the ME Association's Honorary Dietetic Advisor and regarded as a leading authority on diet and ME/CFS, and Long Covid.

Sue works with those recovering from Long Covid and has written the British Dietetic Association's 'Food facts: Diet and Long Covid', in addition to contributing to 'Food facts: Diet and ME/CFS'.

Sue's daughter, Becki, died in 2014, following severe mental health issues, and she dedicates her work to Becki's legacy. ■

MEDITERANEAN SALMON TRAYBAKE (FOR 4 PEOPLE)

PREP: 20 MIN; COOK 30 MIN

4 salmon fillets
1 fennel bulb
2 red onions
2 bell peppers
2 Courgettes
160g stoned kalamata olives
1 garlic bulb
1 tablespoon oregano
½ lemon
1 handful basil leaves
Salt and pepper

INSTRUCTIONS

Preheat the oven to 180C/Gas 4.

Roughly chop the fennel bulb, red onion, bell peppers and slice the courgette.

Throw the chopped ingredients into the tray along with the olives and whole garlic bulb.

Drizzle some olive oil over the top of the vegetables and season with salt, pepper, and

the oregano. Give it a mix and place in the oven for 30 minutes.

Meanwhile, lay 4 salmon fillets on a tray and squeeze over the juice of the lemon over the top.

Place into the oven 10 minutes after you put in the vegetable tray and leave to cook for 20 minutes, (so both tray ingredients will be ready to take out at the same time).

Once done, remove both the tray bake and the salmon fillets from the oven.

Sprinkle the basil leaves over the vegetable tray.

Serve a salmon fillet on each plate along with the vegetables and enjoy!

Recipe from the MEA's **Four Seasons Cookbook**, by Lauren Windas (laurenwindas.com)

Purchase the **Four Seasons Cookbook** here: <https://meassociation.org.uk/4vjc>

