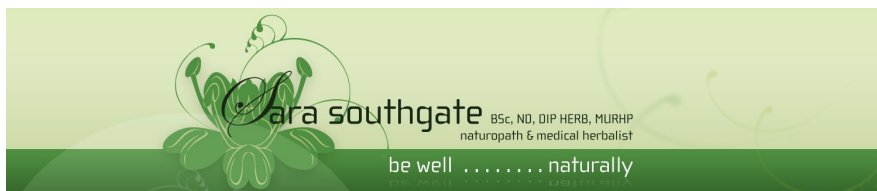


The Fundamentals of Natural Health

An A – Z Guide



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be well naturally

Dear Reader,

What you have before you is a collection of essential health knowledge. One of the most important roles of a Naturopath is to educate: I hope you find this philosophy interesting, informative and, above all, practical and useful in your everyday life.

I wish you good health.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Sara'.

Sara Southgate BSc, ND, Dip Herb, MURHP
Naturopath and Medical Herbalist

About Sara

Sara has been involved in natural healthcare since 1999 and now runs a busy practice in Leamington Spa, Warwickshire, treating a host of different conditions and people. She has a special interest in stress-related conditions and ME/ Chronic Fatigue Syndrome.

Sara's curiosity about natural healthcare grew out of her own illness; ME/ Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, from which she is fully recovered. Her healing was facilitated by dietary and lifestyle changes, herbal medicine, reiki and detoxification, all tools she now uses regularly in her own clinic at Neal's Yard Remedies in Leamington Spa.

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A

is for Antibacterial Products

As with anything in life, practice makes perfect, and that includes our immune systems. The British army is out on manoeuvres regularly, perfecting the ways it will defend our country. We would not feel safe if this did not happen: we would be unprepared. Avoiding the antibacterial products that are appearing on supermarket shelves everywhere gives our immune systems the chance to encounter normal germs and dirt in the environment i.e. practice. Living in a sterile world does not help our defences to develop – we need to encounter a fair amount of dirt and bugs so that when we encounter an illness, our ‘little army’ knows exactly what it is doing. This is especially important for children. There is a hypothesis that over-cleanliness is responsible for many common disorders such as asthma and eczema.

B

is for Bowels

Our bodies selectively process the food we ingest, taking the nutrients we need to function, and eliminating the rest. Faeces are not just waste from food, however, the brown colour actually comes from the breakdown of old red blood cells, so metabolic wastes are also excreted this way. If we are not regularly excreting this waste it remains inside the body, building up. The function of the large intestine, where the faeces wait to be eliminated is to absorb fluid. This means that toxic waste hanging around in the large intestine will be absorbed back into the blood stream, giving our immune system more to deal with. Full and daily elimination is of vital importance to our health.

If you suffer from constipation, adequate water intake is necessary, as is sufficient fibre in the diet – increase your vegetable and brown rice intake. Flax seeds also help with constipation: soak 1 tbs in a glass of water overnight, stir and drink, or add to porridge (after cooking).

During any acute illness, it is imperative to keep the bowels moving – so if you do get constipated while you're ill, using a natural laxative will mean your immune system can concentrate on fighting the infection, and won't get bogged down in extra toxins that the body has earmarked for elimination. This lightens the load the immune system has to deal with and shortens the duration of the disease.

C is for Chemicals

Unfortunately there are many chemicals present in our environment that we cannot get away from; they are in the air we breathe, the water we drink and on the food we eat. For this reason, regular detoxification is vital to continuing good health, as is reducing the toxic load as much as is possible on a day-to-day basis – our bodies are not designed to cope with these chemicals.

We can choose, however, what we put on our skin and have in our homes. There is no reason to have noxious chemicals in the house – there are many natural cleaning products on the market that do a great job. Chemicals should especially be avoided if you suffer from asthma, eczema or any allergic condition.

Sodium lauryl sulphate (SLS) is a surfactant (detergent) commonly used as a foaming agent (to clean and make bubbles) in a huge variety of commonly used products. It is found in 80-90% of shampoos, soaps and face and body washes. It is also commonly added to toothpastes, washing up and laundry detergents as well as industrial cleaning agents. There are

many derivatives of SLS such as sodium laureth sulphate, sodium laureth-3 sulphate, DEA or TEA sodium lauryl sulphate. The major concern about SLS is that it is a very small molecule, which means it passes easily through skin and mucus membranes, penetrating deep into the body and that it has the potential to react with other chemicals to form nitrosating agents, which in turn can form nitrosamines, which are known to be carcinogenic.

SLS is actually commonly used in research laboratories as the standard ingredient against which all other substances are compared for skin irritation and a solution of just 2% SLS can thicken skin, cause irritation and inflammation. Some shampoos contain up to 50% SLS. It can also lead to dryness, roughness and even flaking of the skin or scalp. SLS can also damage the mucosal membranes of the mouth and penetrate the cornea of the eye. Worryingly, it's effects become harsher with increasing temperature, which is important to note, as most people prefer to wash in warm water. Any good health shop will be able to provide you with SLS-free personal care products. Even Sainsbury's is now stocking a natural SLS-free range called Avalon.

D is for Deodorant

What we commonly call deodorant and use on a daily basis has a dual action: deodorant (de-odorises any smell) and anti-perspirant (prevents sweating).

We actually perspire for two reasons: for temperature regulation and to excrete toxins. Everything we put into our systems needs processing and sweat glands play just as important a role in elimination as the bowels, the kidneys, the lungs and the skin. Body odour is often a sign you are in bad shape; the body is shouting for a full cleansing program, combined with a break from using chemical products to control sweating. In Traditional

Chinese Medicine, the liver excretes its toxins via the armpits, so cleansing the liver is often beneficial where there is body odour.

Anti-perspirants are substances that inhibit perspiration and cause blocking of the skin's pores. The active ingredients, aluminium chlorohydrate or aluminium zirconium chlorohydrate react with proteins in the sweat to form a gel that partially blocks the glands and prevents perspiration from escaping. They do not prevent perspiration occurring, rather they block elimination, causing a build up of the very toxins your body has earmarked for excretion.

Aluminium-based compounds are also one of the leading causes of skin irritation. Inflammation may spread beyond the armpits to other areas of the body. Further, zirconium-based compounds can cause some people to develop extremely painful underarm granulomas (small nodules of chronically inflamed tissue).

Deodorants are products that mask the odour produced by the action of bacteria or sweat. Unlike an anti-perspirant, a deodorant does not interfere with the production of sweat. They contain germicides that kill bacteria and usually a perfume that masks the smell of the germicide.

Natural deodorants formulated with plant extracts such as Witch Hazel, which is astringent, anti-bacterial essential oils, or crystal deodorants based on alunite are preferable.

Changing Over to Aluminium-free Deodorants

You may experience a period where you seem to sweat more and that your sweat smells. This is a natural reaction from your body because it is being given the chance to excrete the toxins that have built up in the area. This is a temporary phase, however and can be combated by simply washing your armpits with soap and water and re-applying your natural deodorant. After a period of time (dependant on your toxicity levels), you will find the need to wash and reapply decreases, although you should be aware that natural deodorants do need more frequent application. You may find one brand works for a period and then becomes ineffective. This is

normal; you need to switch brands periodically until your body has returned to its natural balance, after which you will not need to swap and change so much.

When you are at home or exercising avoid deodorants completely, to give your armpits a chance to breathe and excrete toxins.

Effective brands include: Weleda, Pit-Rock, Mister Tom's, Dr. Hauschka or Avalon. Alternatively you can make up your own deodorant using the following recipe:

Vodka	10ml	Other suitable essential oils include:
Apple Cider Vinegar	100ml	Thyme
Spring Water	500ml	Clary Sage
Plus essential oils of:		Eucalyptus
Lavender	5 drops	Lime
Sage	5 drops	Geranium
Lemon	5 drops	Patchouli
Rosemary	5 drops	Lemongrass
Peppermint	5 drops	
Grapefruit	5 drops	

Combine all ingredients in a spray bottle and shake thoroughly before use. You can alter the formula to suits your taste, but always include sage, lemon, rosemary and peppermint.

E

is for Exercise

Exercise not only moves the body, it moves things around the body: blood, which brings oxygen and nutrients to the muscles and organs and removes the wastes. Our capillary beds are not always in use full - only when we exercise does the whole body get a good flood of new blood. Lymph is also linked with exercise. Lymph is a clear fluid that bathes every cell in the body – it is the same fluid that oozes from a cut once it has stopped bleeding. Its function is twofold: to transport the final products of digestion to the blood and to remove metabolic waste products from the blood and cells. It has it's own network of vessels, similar to the circulatory system through which our blood travels. The important difference is that where the circulatory system has the heart to pump blood around, the lymph has no pump: it relies on muscular contractions to squeeze the lymphatic fluid along. If we don't exercise, our lymph system will be sluggish and stagnate, not eliminating metabolic wastes or taking the final products of digestion to the blood for transport and use where needed. Regular exercise, then, affects not only our immune system, but also our nutritional status. When we are ill, our lymph nodes often swell up – they are an important part of our immune systems, so it pays to keep the system moving and clean. Dry skin brushing is extremely effective in moving the lymph.

It is balanced exercise that is important – too little leads to stagnation within the body and immuno-suppression, yet excessive exercise can also suppress the immune system, which is why elite athletes get sick easily, especially after an event.

Finally, exercise increases lung capacity and strength. The lungs actually age quite rapidly, relative to our other organs, mainly through lack of use, so deep breathing and exercise are very important. Try to fill the bottom of

your lungs when you breathe – not just the top. Your abdomen should move when you breathe, not your chest.

F

is for Free Radicals

Atoms like to go round in pairs – holding hands, if you like. If they are unpaired, their only concern is to pair off with anything and everything available – you could say they are pretty promiscuous. A free radical is an unpaired atom or a molecule containing one unpaired atom. Because it wants to do nothing but pair off, it will steal atoms from other molecules in the body. This can effect dramatic changes and a lot of damage to the cells of the body.

Free radicals are normally present in the body in small numbers because they are natural by-products of biochemical reactions. Normally the body keeps them in check – indeed, not all free radicals are bad – some kill viruses and bacteria, some are involved in producing hormones and activating enzymes and some are needed to produce energy. It is only if there is excessive free radical formation that damage to cells and tissues can occur. And worse, if there are large numbers of free radicals, their presence and activity stimulates the formation of still more, leading to even more damage. This damages the DNA, which not only burdens the immune system, but can also lead to degenerative disease. Free radicals can also destroy cell membranes, cause fluid retention in cells and upset calcium levels.

Factors that can lead to free radical formation include exposure to radiation, environmental pollutants – tobacco smoke and car fumes. But it is not only such obvious culprits – diet can also contribute because the body breaks down nutrients and combines them with oxygen to produce energy. In this process of oxidation, unpaired oxygen molecules are released. These oxygen free radicals can cause much damage if produced

in large amounts as does occur in high fat diets (oxidation occurs more readily in fat molecules than it does in carbohydrate or protein molecules). Cooking fats at high temperatures, particularly frying foods in oils, produces large numbers of free radicals (see U is for Unheated Oils). Inflammation and infection also cause free radicals to be produced in large amounts.

There is a group of vitamins, minerals and enzymes that protect the body from free radical formation and also destroy them in the body – antioxidants. This protective group includes Vitamin C and Beta-carotene, which mop up free radicals in the blood, Vitamin E, which is active against free radicals in the body tissues, and Selenium, which works within the body cells.

A high level of antioxidants has been shown to increase human lifespan. Some predict that blood-antioxidant levels will be measured along with blood-cholesterol and blood-sugar levels in the future.

Where do you get them? Brightly coloured fruit and vegetables: oranges, peppers, tomatoes, carrots, apricots, mangoes, spinach, alfalfa, asparagus and garlic and sprouts. Organic fruit and vegetables have been shown to contain much higher levels of these nutrients than conventionally grown crops. Taking a Superfood such as Barley Greens, GNB or Spirulina daily will ensure you have a more than sufficient antioxidants in your system.

G

is for Germ Theory

As a rule, orthodox medicine is concerned with germs, bacteria and viruses, all of which are considered to be the cause of infections. This concept stems from the research of Louis Pasteur (1822-1895). However, on his deathbed, Pasteur renounced his work, proclaiming “the germ is nothing; the terrain is everything”. What he meant by this statement was that it is not the bacteria or virus in the external environment that matters – it is the environment within the body that either allows bacteria or viruses and hence infection to take hold, or which is inhospitable to such pathogens. A bacterium will only settle in an environment where the conditions are right for reproduction and life – such conditions are brought about by sluggish lymph, lack of exercise, improper diet and stress – in short, a suppressed immune system. A healthy body does not provide these conditions for bacteria – we only need to look around us when colds are going around and see that some people catch everything, while some remain well; all of us live with the fungus responsible for thrush, and the bacterium that causes pneumonia, but it only develops and causes ill-health in a few.

H

is for Healthy Habits

Habits are our ordinary behaviours – what we do on a day-to-day basis, without really thinking about it. Establishing healthy habits will make an enormous difference to your health. Take caffeine – it is dehydrating, toxic and traps you in the cycle of being tired and having to have a coffee to perk yourself up. The way caffeine and other stimulants work is by stimulating the adrenal glands to raise blood sugar levels, thus liberating energy for the

body in times of emergency. This is fine if it only happens once, but cumulatively, say 5-6 times a day, it leads to prolonged and excessive physical stress, and all stress lowers your immunity. Instead of caffeine, if you were to get into the routine of drinking fresh lemon and ginger tea you'd be filling up on antioxidants as well as detoxifying yourself with every cup. If you find the prospect of a coffee-free day too daunting, then enjoy one cup of quality filter coffee daily. Getting up and stretching for 5 minutes is also a healthy habit - look at animals - it gets the blood and lymph moving and with them toxins. Another valuable habit to get into is breathing properly, as mentioned before. It is these kinds of little things that go a long way to supporting a healthy and strong immune system, which is the basis of all health.



is for the Immune System

Your immune system is an intricate network of specialised tissues, organs, cells and chemicals, which work together to differentiate pathogens (disease-causing things) from 'self' and destroy or neutralise them. The system can be divided into two parts: innate and learned. The innate part is present from birth, and includes your skin, which forms a physical barrier to the outside world, as well as being slightly acidic, thus preventing fungal and bacterial infestation. Your nostril hairs also form a barrier – this time a filter, and your lungs are full of immune cells called *lymphocytes*, ready to multiply and fight, should a pathogen be inhaled. A large proportion of your immune system is in the digestive system, beginning in the mouth with saliva, which prevents bacterial colonisation of the mouth. The tonsils, located in the throat are intended to prevent infections going down to the chest; orthodoxy has since recognised that mass tonsillectomies was an erroneous policy. There are collections of lymphatic tissue throughout the intestines, including the appendix, which also plays an important part in immunity. Throughout the body, white blood cells, called *macrophages* (big eaters) are on patrol and can be present at an infected site within an hour

of infection occurring. They then multiply in-situ. They are pretty nasty little things, and their tactics for destroying pathogenic cells range from adhering to, ingesting and then digesting them to punching holes in them so their insides leak out!

The other part of the immune system is 'learned' by the body as it produces antibodies in response to viruses as it encounters them. Naturally acquired (via infection) 'learned' immunity is life-long, as the body will forever remember the antibodies it needed to produce to fight a given pathogen.

A strong, healthy immune system is your ticket to a long and healthy life. Following the advice contained in this leaflet will help to keep it that way.

J is for Juicing

Juices are a fantastic way to nourish your body, without putting any strain on your digestion. When we juice, we literally squeeze the life out of the vegetables and fruits we use, and in drinking it bring health and vitality into our lives. In terms of absorption, they are best drunk on an empty stomach. When you're juicing in winter, it is important to make sure you bring the vegetables to room temperature before you juice them, and always add ginger, as it is warming, and we need to add warmth during the colder months. Whenever you pass a juice bar, stop in and treat yourself. Celery is good for water retention, beetroot builds the blood and apple and carrot mobilise and eliminate toxins from your body cells.

K is for Kidneys

In Western medicine, the kidneys are responsible for filtering the blood and eliminating toxins, as well as absorbing amino acids and glucose. Approximately 180 litres of blood passes through them daily. In Chinese medicine, the kidneys are the source of all life, ruling the bones, the reproductive system and hearing. Between them burns the *Ming Men Fire*, the fire of life, that dies out only when the body does. It is therefore an important area to protect – it needs to be kept warm, especially in the winter. All-in-one underwear, or long vests are the order of the day, and short-waisted jumpers are best avoided. Keeping this area warm keeps your kidney energy, your source energy strong and you well. This is especially important if you are a cold person, and you'll notice the difference immediately.

L is for Light

Natural light is something we take for granted – it is certainly something we only really think about during the winter months, when the days are shorter and we get less of it. Light affects our immune system because it causes cells in the skin to produce a substance called Interleukin-1, which then in turn increases the number of a type of immune cell, called T cells, by encouraging them to reproduce, thus strengthening our immune systems. Make sure you go out and absorb some sunlight whenever possible in the winter.

Sunlight of course also stimulates the production of Vitamin D in our skin, which is responsible for strong bones. The flip side of the coin is that

excessive exposure to sunlight can be damaging to our immune systems because it generates free radicals (see F is for Free Radicals).

M

is for Mental Attitude

I am sure many of you have heard people mention the mind-body connection. There is no question that it exists and that what goes on in one affects the other. Your state of mind actually impacts upon your immunity – people who are prone to negative, distressing thoughts are generally prone to more mental and physical illness than the more positive souls among us. This is backed up by research from New York, which found that those who are frequently sick are more dissatisfied and discontented in general.

Anger, grief, pessimism, loneliness and job dissatisfaction are all bad for our immune systems, while being calm, caring and satisfied in ones' job are all good for immune function, as indeed are good relationships, music and laughter – it is said that 1 minute of laughter is equivalent to 45 minutes exercise, in terms of the good it does.

The way the connection works is that our immune cells respond to the very same neurotransmitters (communication chemicals in the brain) that are responsible for our thinking.

N

is for Nourishment

There are many different diets out there - every time you pick up a magazine, there seems to be a new way of eating with new and better benefits. Healthy eating is simple: it is important, especially in the cold months that food is warm. Eating cold salads and iced drinks in winter

makes you cold on the inside as well as on the outside! Eating cold food actually slows down your digestion – think about what your body does when it is cold – it cramps up. Cold stagnates – think of ice – the same happens in your stomach if you eat cold things. The stomach has to warm the food up before it can digest it, so eat warm, cooked foods with warming spices – dried or fresh ginger, garlic, turmeric, coriander seeds, cumin, basil, rosemary – they're all warming herbs and spices, which also aid digestion, so their benefit is two-fold. Use plenty of herbs in your cooking, especially when using them fresh.

As far as the balance of what to eat goes, different people need different things, but on a general basis, base your diet around vegetables and wholegrains. Protein should be the smallest portion on your plate - excessive protein intake, especially meat protein is linked to the formation of many degenerative diseases and it should not be eaten more than once a day. A decent vegetarian cookbook is a good investment – experiment with lentils and pulses, tofu and quorn (find it in the frozen section of the supermarket; it is a very tasty meat alternative). Wholegrains are important because the husk, which is removed in the refining process actually contains all the nutrients. Wholegrains give you slow-release, longer-lasting energy. Refined grains are not recommended.

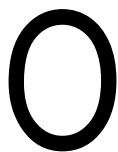
A predominantly vegetarian diet is high in fibre, antioxidant nutrients, and essential fatty acids whilst being low in saturated fat. A high fibre diet is beneficial because fibre binds to toxins in the gut, and because it also keeps you regular, this therefore guarantees their excretion. The importance of antioxidants and EFAs has already been explained (see F and O, respectively). Saturated fat and cholesterol have been linked in numerous research papers to heart disease, strokes and cancers. Plant foods are all low in fat, with the exception of nuts and seeds, which contain only unsaturated 'good' fats. Eating this way will provide you with a strong foundation for optimal health.

When cooking, try to avoid microwaved food wherever possible. Studies from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology and the University Institute for Biochemistry have shown that microwaved food causes pathological

(disease-causing) changes in the blood. The Journal of Natural Science reported in 1998 that a woman was killed by a blood transfusion because it had been warmed in a microwave and the journal Paediatrics advised parents against warming infant's milk in a microwave in 1992. If you must microwave, leave the meal to stand for five minutes before consumption. This allows the molecules to return to a more normal state.

One of the most nutritious foods available is sprouted seeds. They contain the life force and nutrients to grow into an entire plant, as well as enzymes and plenty of antioxidants. They can be purchased sprouted or you can do it yourself, as described below.

Sprouting method: purchase alfalfa seeds or sprouting mix from your health shop. Soak a handful of seeds overnight in a bowl of water. Drain and cover with a saucer. The seeds will germinate. They will start to sprout and should be ready in 4-5 days, depending on the temperature. Soak them in water for a couple of minutes once daily (at least). On day 4, remove the cover to allow some light in to make chlorophyll. Store in the fridge and eat daily. Green lentils and mung beans are also easy to sprout.



is for Omega Oils

Contrary to popular opinion, not all oils and fats are bad for us. The oils Omega 3 and 6 are called Essential Fatty Acids (EFAs). In nutrition the term 'essential' means that a substance is necessary for optimum function but cannot be manufactured by the body. It is therefore deemed essential that it be included in the diet either as food or as a dietary supplement. There are many different Fatty Acids that the body uses and all but two of them can be synthesised: Omega 3 and Omega 6, thus, EFAs. Over the last century, consumption has declined dramatically due in the main part to their delicacy; they are easily damaged and become rancid when exposed to heat or light. Therefore food manufacturers choose not to use them, and even extract them from food products because they shorten shelf life.

EFA's can be found in flax, pumpkin, sunflower and sesame oils, among others. They are useful for many things, including forming the building blocks of every cell's membrane; helping the body fight allergies; relieving dry skin – moisturising from the inside out; controlling IQ and behaviour – studies have shown that those with learning difficulties and behavioural problems are deficient in EFA's; forming the brain and spinal cord of a growing baby - your body will automatically give your EFA's to the baby, which may then leave you deficient, so for women planning to start a family in the next few years, they are extremely important; producing prostaglandins (hormone-like substances necessary for energy metabolism, cardio-vascular and immune health).

Incorporating Essential Fats into your Diet

- Mix into porridge and stews (**once off the heat**)
- Make into a salad dressing (Higher Nature's Garlic and Chilli oil is especially good with some apple cider vinegar and a small amount of mustard)
- Pour over rice or cooked vegetables
- Use as the 'sauce' for your pasta – a very quick meal is steamed broccoli or peas with toasted pumpkin seeds with the Garlic and Chilli Oil over pasta or rice
- Blend in a 'health cocktail' with apple juice, a banana and your superfood
- Stir into a juice with your Superfood – cranberry or apple work well
- Do not heat these oils. Store them in the fridge and do not cook with them

EFA's may be taken in tablet or liquid form. Liquids are preferable, as they can be added to foods and drinks easily. Some brands require you to take up to 8 tablets in order to get the adequate dose (1 tsb). Higher Nature does a butterscotch flavoured oil for children.

P

is for Probiotics

Probiotics, are 'good bacteria' that colonise the gut. There are over 100 strains in the average person, amounting to approximately 1.5kg! They reinforce the body's natural defences. They achieve this by aiding the digestion and absorption of nutrients in the digestive tract, and by detoxifying carcinogenic chemicals. They also produce natural antibiotics, enzymes and B vitamins. If you have low immunity or have had antibiotics, it is extremely important that you take a course of Probiotics lasting for a minimum of one month. The best are the room temperature-stable variety, as they will not be damaged by lack of refrigeration in transport.

Q

is for Quality Sleep

Getting enough sleep is vital for proper body function and the immune system. Many scientific studies have demonstrated a profound decline in immunity after either a night without sleep, or a continuous period of not getting enough. What these studies show is that the number of circulating *lymphocytes* decreases, which means the coordinators and effectors of your immune response are reduced in number and also your *natural killer* cells (another part of the immune system) actually decrease in number by 30%. The relationship between sleep and immunity is harmonious, so you need to make sure you're getting a good 8 hours a night. If you've got an infection, though, you'll need more – your body needs more energy to divert towards fighting it, so sufficient rest is called for.

R

is for Relaxation

We often carry a lot of tension in our muscles – especially in the shoulders and neck and the gluteal (bottom) muscles. It is easier to qualify if you think about how you feel after a massage – wonderfully relaxed. But prior to the massage, every single cell in all those tight muscle was holding tension – that actually requires quite a lot of energy and nutrients, including the B vitamins, vitamin C as well as the minerals calcium and magnesium. Those nutrients and that energy would be better spent elsewhere – like on repair and regeneration within the body and feeding the immune system – keeping you healthy. There are many ways to relax, some of which I've touched upon already – stretching, deep breathing, exercise. You need to find a method that suits you and practice it regularly. You can start right now, however, by just being aware of how you hold your body – are you tense – are your shoulders right up round your neck? Is your jaw clenched? Think about how your body is while you're watching TV – all tensed up or comfortably reclining? Like all habits, becoming aware of small things like this can contribute enormously to your wellbeing.

S

is for Sugar

The average westerner eats between 150-200lb per year of refined sugar. It is an anti-nutrient i.e. it holds no nutritional value itself, and actually requires energy in order to metabolise it, so it takes energy from elsewhere in the body. Sugar increases free radical damage, cross-links proteins (which means it gives you wrinkles) and interferes with the transport of vitamin C. Sugar also suppresses the immune system and any excess is actually converted to fat, increasing blood fat and cholesterol levels.

T

is for Tequila

Yes, you guessed it – although **you** may, your body does not like tequila, or any alcohol, for that matter. Alcohol is the most powerful immune suppressor, more so than cigarettes, coffee, negative attitude and lack of light. When you drink alcohol, two things happen: firstly the number of circulating lymphocytes decreases, and secondly, the number of immunoglobulins increases – this means the number of antibodies those lymphocytes are producing goes up. What these two factors together really mean is that the immune system is simultaneously suppressed and stressed. The more you drink, and the more often you drink, the greater the effect. So, when you are feeling run-down, lacking in sleep or very stressed out, cut down, or, preferably cut out the tequilas.

It is important to ensure that you take good care of your liver, the organ responsible for breaking alcohol down. As with most things, enjoy it in moderation.

U

is for Unheated oils

It is a common misconception that cooking with oils is the healthier option. Indeed it is correct that we should reduce our saturated fat intake for the good of our health. However, as has already been explained in the section under Omega oils, many oils are damaged by heat i.e. by cooking. Raising the temperature of oils such as olive oil, sunflower oil and other vegetable oils actually changes the molecular configuration, causing it to do us more harm than good, and producing free radicals. For this very reason, it is better to use butter than margarine as a spread. During manufacture, the

unsaturated vegetable oils used to make margarine are heated to extremely high temperatures in order to change the molecular structure, making them solidify. The heating process burns the oils and causes them to turn grey; the mixture is then dyed yellow for aesthetic reasons. If you do cook with oils, olive oil is less easily damaged than sunflower oil. Ensure you do not heat any oil until it smokes.

One way to avoid cooking with oils is to 'steam-fry' your vegetables: instead of using oil, simply add a small amount of stock or water to the pan, and cook as normal. If you are making a stir-fry, cover the pan between stirrings. When cooking with spices, which do need some fat, use ghee (clarified butter). It is an esteemed carrier for herbs in Ayurvedic medicine, helping transport them into the body.

Olive oil is a good thing to add to a tomato sauce **after** the pan has been removed from the heat; fat is indeed needed for the absorption of lycopene (the antioxidant pigment that causes tomatoes to be red). It also makes the sauce richer and adds more goodness! You can add your EFAs to any dish after you have cooked it and removed it from the heat – a good way to give them to children!

V

is for Visualisation

Visualisation is a powerful means of positively reinforcing your health. The power of the mind is not to be underestimated in the path to health. What is really great about visualisation is that you use your own imagery – and harness your own power. A good example is a man with cancer, who visualised the cancer as little orange carrots, and his immune system as bunnies, hopping around eating those carrots. Eventually, with time, positivity and application, there were no carrots left to eat. He healed himself.

You can choose any visual image or scenario you relate to your health, happiness, wellbeing or current situation. Just make it strong and positive and in the present tense and take some time to sit quietly and just visualise (Tube journeys are perfect for this).

W is for *Wei Qi*

According traditional Chinese medicine, we are condensed *Qi* (chi): it is the most basic substance from which everything is derived, the essence of life. Among its' many functions, *Qi* is responsible for warming the body, for moving blood and body fluids within the body, and for defending the body from what the Chinese call External Pernicious Influences and western medicine calls infections. *Wei Qi* is the name given to this protective *Qi*. It circulates between the skin and the muscles, opening and closing the pores and defending the body from extreme climates and micro-organisms.

Wei Qi is derived from essential substances in food, and from inhaled air. This fits perfectly with the orthodox concept as both models maintain that the ability to absorb nutrients and utilise oxygen is critical to immune function.

Excessive salt intake also affects the *Wei Qi*, because salt has a strong inward-directed energy, whereas the *Wei Qi*, as its location at the skin suggests, has an outward energy. From a western perspective, it is desirable to eliminate salt from the diet – or at least to use only a minimum. Banish the habit of putting salt on your food before you have even tasted it. Once you have cooked for some time without salt, your taste buds will adapt and you will find foods taste much better.

Salt is often the one of the main ingredients in processed foods – especially those that claim to be low in fat. Believe it or not, salt and sugar are actually the principle ingredients in a popular hot chocolate drink – the

chocolate content is practically non-existent! When you do use salt, make sure it is unrefined sea salt – it contains the 85 minerals the body needs. Interestingly, the mineral content of the sea and of seaweeds, and the proportions of those minerals are very similar to that required by the body for optimum function – unsurprising when we think of the origins of life!

X

is for X-ray

If you ever have to have an X-ray, which is a mild blast of radiation, make sure you eat plenty of miso during the week before and the week afterwards. Miso is a fermented product, common in the diets of the Japanese. A study has shown that those people in Hiroshima who consumed miso regularly did not suffer radiation poisoning when the city was bombed. A simple and tasty recipe for miso soup is: chop an onion and a carrot (and any other vegetables you desire) and place in a pan. Add fresh vegetable stock (enough for a bowl of soup) and simmer until the vegetables are soft. Remove from heat and stir in one teaspoon of fresh miso. Serve sprinkled with fresh herbs of your choice, sesame seeds and seaweed. Rice noodles can be added to make a more substantial soup.

Miso is available from health shops – you can buy it in sachets, as cup-a-soups, or fresh from the fridge. Needless to say the fresh variety tastes better. It can be added to anything once off the heat. Use small amounts only, as it tastes quite strong.

Y

is for Yoga

Yoga has been shown to increase immunity by increasing T-cell counts, as well as general calmness and contentment with life. It is exercise for the body, stretching muscles and releasing tension while stilling the mind, allowing it to rest and recuperate. If you're into yoga, the shoulder stand is particularly good for the immune system, as is the Lion, the neck roll and the Head of a Cow. If you haven't tried yoga, the best way to start is to enrol in a ten-week class, that way you will get a good understanding and a proper feel for it.

Z

is for Zen

Zen is about meditation and self-mastery. Meditation has been proven to boost T-cell counts and improve the immune cell ratios. Regular practice will leave you more energised, more grounded and more in control of yourself and your life. It cannot be recommended highly enough.