

Guidance Notes for The Brain Health Programme *ONLINE*

Welcome to The Brain Health Programme *ONLINE*. It is great that you have taken this first step to support the health of your brain!

The programme includes an introductory talk by Dr John Briffa, six online workshops and the accompanying handouts. We have called them workshops as there are some activities for you to do either during the recordings, or afterwards as homework. A summary of the content of each of the workshops is provided on pages two to six of this document and there are some frequently asked questions on pages eight to ten.

The workshops have been recorded by one of our in-house Nutritional Therapists, Clare Daley; you will see a series of slides and hear the accompanying audio. The workshops have been designed to be listened to once per week, so ideally set aside a time each week when you can regularly commit to listening. It would be a good idea to put the time in your calendar to make it easy to remember. If you prefer, you can listen to the workshops more frequently.

Nutrition Consultations

In addition to the audio recordings, as part of this package you will also have two one-hour nutrition consultations with a qualified Practitioner, which can either be face to face or via online video conferencing (this will in part depend on where you live in relation to the Practitioners offering this programme). You will have the first consultation prior to listening to the workshops. Your Practitioner will provide you with a pre-consultation health questionnaire to complete and return before the consultation. The second, follow-up consultation will be four to six weeks after the first consultation, or as agreed with your Practitioner.

Your Practitioner may recommend some functional tests (e.g. blood, urine, hair or stool) for you to undertake. If you do decide to have any recommended tests, these are organised through third parties and your Practitioner will be able to advise you of the relevant costs and explain the results to you.

In between the two consultations you can send email updates to your Practitioner to report on your progress. In particular we recommend that you send your Practitioner a copy of your menu plans for weeks one, two and three via email. However, please note that your Practitioner will not be able to engage in regular, lengthy email exchanges between the two consultations; she/he will be happy to answer any in-depth questions during the consultations.

Important notice: If you are taking any prescription medications it is important to continue with these. Prescription medications should not be stopped without the agreement of your G.P. It is also important that you tell your Practitioner about any medical diagnosis, medication, herbal medicine or food supplements you are taking as this may affect the nutritional programme.

Dr John Briffa’s Introductory Talk

Time: 47 mins

In this introductory talk, Dr John Briffa provides an overview of all the areas that are covered in more detail within the six workshops. Dr John Briffa is a practising doctor and international speaker. He is the author of nine books and practices at two hospitals in London. Dr Briffa is an expert in the impact of nutrition and other lifestyle factors on health and illness. He is dedicated to providing individuals with information and advice that they can use to take control of their health and optimise their wellbeing.

The Workshops

The table below provides a summary outline of the content within each of the workshops. This is followed by a more detailed outline including a note of anything you will need for each workshop. On pages eight to ten you will find some frequently asked questions.

Summary content of the six workshops:

1. Mind What You Eat	2. Mind What You Eat	3. Optimising Gut Health
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How diet and lifestyle is making us ill • The Nutrition Gap • Sugar & carbohydrates • Smoothies • Introduction to the Self Care Journey • Menu planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fats • Essential fatty acids • Vegetables • Dietary approaches • Increasing nutrient density • Menu planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The digestive system • Gut microflora • Poor gut health • How to optimise gut health • Fasting • Gluten • Menu planning
4. Stress Reduction	5. Getting a Good Night’s Sleep	6. Physical Activity and Brain Training
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stress & its effects • Fight or flight response • Stress triggers • Cortisol & stress • Ways to reduce your stress • Menu planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physiology of sleep • Bio-chemical factors • Common sleep disruptors • Impact of insufficient sleep • Ways to get good quality sleep 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity & cognitive function • Types of exercise • Staying motivated • Brain plasticity • How we can stimulate the brain • BrainHQ

Workshop 1 – Mind What You Eat

Time: 57 mins listening plus Self Care Journey activities and menu planning

You will need: Copy of the Well Formed Outcome template (see documents accompanying this workshop)

Good nutrition is the foundation for optimal brain health and yet many people today are not getting the nutrition they need. We refer to the difference between the nutrients that we need for health and the levels that we get from our diet, as the ‘nutrition gap’. There are many reasons for this nutrition gap – food choices are one reason, but there are others.

In relation to food choices, in the first two workshops you will learn about foods to reduce or avoid and foods to increase. This first workshop focusses on sugar and carbohydrates, how our body and brain responds to eating sugary foods and which carbohydrate foods to choose. It also talks about the benefits (and cautions) of making smoothies and the recipes handout includes some recipe ideas.

The second part of the workshop introduces the Self Care Journey – this is a workbook that accompanies the workshops with a number of activities for you to complete which will support your journey in making long-term changes to your diet and lifestyle. The Self Care Journey will be referred to each week and you should aim to complete the activities as soon after the workshop as possible (see page seven for a table summarising the Self Care Journey activities).

It would be useful to have a printed copy of the Well Formed Outcome handout available while you listen. You will also want to familiarise yourself with the Self Care Journey.

Documents accompanying Workshop 1:

- **Recipes** – 26 page recipe handout
- **Vegetarian Recipes** – vegetarian version of above
- **Self Care Journey** – this contains some activities to complete each week to support you with the change process
- **Sugar and Carbohydrates** – this is a summary of the key points in Workshop 1 in relation to sugar and carbohydrates
- **Menu Plan** – a weekly menu planner template for you to complete
- **Well Formed Outcome** – a series of questions for you to consider in order to develop a well formed outcome; this is similar to a goal but also considers barriers and beliefs that may hinder your progress. You will need to complete this activity after the recording. ***It would be useful to have a copy of this available when you listen to the recording.***

After Workshop 1 create a menu plan for the week. The aim this week is to focus on reducing sugary and refined foods. Send the menu plan to your Practitioner.

Workshop 2 – Mind What You Eat

Time: 50 mins listening plus Self Care Journey activities and menu planning

You will need: some highlighter pens (green, yellow, pink) for a workshop activity

In the 1970s low fat diets became popular as a result of, at that time, high fat diets being linked to cardiovascular disease. However, despite the fact that many people now eat a low fat diet, cardiovascular disease has continued to increase. Fat performs many important functions and the brain is 60% fat! Some types of fat should definitely be avoided, others should be eaten and enjoyed daily.

The importance of vegetables for brain function should not be overlooked. Vegetables have a number of benefits for overall health and this workshop discusses the importance of increasing both the diversity of vegetables eaten as well as the total number of portions per day.

In the final part of this session eating behaviours are discussed. Key to making changes to your diet and lifestyle is understanding your behaviours and habits, and the Self Care Journey activities this week will encourage you to expand this understanding.

Again, you will create a menu plan for the following week and also complete a seven-day food diary during the week. The difference between a menu plan and a food diary is that a menu plan is created in advance of the week and gives details of what you plan to eat at each meal. The food diary records what you actually ate along with your hunger, mood and where you were etc.

Documents accompanying Workshop 2:

- **Summary - Fats and Oils** – this is a summary of key points in Workshop 2 in relation to fats and oils
- **Mediterranean-style dietary guidelines** – a table giving foods to enjoy and foods to avoid if choosing a Mediterranean-style diet
- **Paleo-style dietary guidelines** – a table giving foods to enjoy and foods to avoid if choosing a Paleo-style diet
- **Menu Plan** – a weekly menu planner template for you to complete
- **Food Diary Activity** – table to record everything you ate and drank yesterday. Highlighter pens useful for this activity
- **Food & Mood Diary** – table for recording your food and drinks for one week
- **Self Care Journey** – this document can be found in Workshop 1

After Workshop 2 create a menu plan for the week. The aim this week is to focus on including healthy fats in your meals and increasing vegetables. Continue with the changes you incorporated last week. Send the menu plan to your Practitioner.

Workshop 3 – Optimising Gut Health

Time: 63 mins listening plus Self Care Journey activities and menu planning

You will need: 2 raisins (or sultanas) for a workshop activity

The gut has many functions central to health including digestion, absorption, immunity, detoxification and elimination, however, many factors of modern living adversely affect gut health. There is an intrinsic link between gut health and brain health. Poor gut health increases inflammation and this is one of the features of many chronic health conditions, including cognitive decline, low mood and depression. This talk is relevant to everyone – whether you have gut symptoms or not. Keeping your gut healthy is key for long-term good health. You will learn about factors that can affect the gut and how to optimise gut function. This week we suggest that you eliminate gluten from your diet for a minimum of four weeks. This will then give you an indication of whether foods containing gluten are contributing to any symptoms you may be experiencing. More information on how to do this and monitor/record your symptoms is included in the accompanying documents.

Documents accompanying Workshop 3:

- **Gluten trial elimination diet** – this lists foods where gluten is found, including some less obvious sources and explains how to do a trial elimination diet
- **Toxins** – lists sources of toxins so that you can try to reduce your exposure
- **Menu Plan** – a weekly menu planner template for you to complete
- **Self Care Journey** – this document can be found in Workshop 1

After Workshop 3 create a menu plan for the week. You may be reducing or eliminating gluten in your meals this week. Send the menu plan to your Practitioner.

Workshop 4 – Stress Reduction

Time: 39 mins listening plus Self Care Journey activities and menu planning

Cortisol is a stress hormone. When we are experiencing stress, or we have an infection, cortisol raises our blood pressure and blood sugar levels. These changes help us to survive short periods of stress but become harmful when they continue. Persistently elevated levels of cortisol can kill brain cells and negatively affect brain function increasing the risk of depression and cognitive decline. Stress can also contribute to a host of other pathological conditions within the body. In order to effectively manage stress, it is important to identify stress reduction activities that work for you. As part of this workshop you will identify your stress triggers and hear about some techniques that you can use right away to manage stress.

Documents accompanying Workshop 4:

- **Managing stress** – some ideas
- **Menu Plan** – a weekly menu planner template for you to complete (you do not need to send this to your Practitioner unless you have agreed to do so)
- **Self Care Journey** – this document can be found in Workshop 1

Workshop 5 – Getting a Good Night’s Sleep

Time: 31 mins listening plus Self Care Journey activities and menu planning

Sleep is vital for optimal brain health. During sleep our body cells detoxify and cleanse, and our brain cells are no exception. Statistics show we are getting less sleep and problems such as getting to sleep, or staying asleep, are common. You will learn how much sleep you should be aiming for, what factors may affect getting to sleep or staying asleep, and tips for a good night’s sleep.

Documents accompanying Workshop 5:

- **Healthy Sleep: good habits and tips**
- **Menu Plan** – a weekly menu planner template for you to complete (you do not need to send this to your Practitioner unless you have agreed to do so)

Workshop 6 – Physical Activity and Brain Training

Time: 41 mins listening plus Self Care Journey activities and menu planning

Physical activity increases blood flow to the brain and helps to produce brand new cells within the part of the brain responsible for memory and emotions. Brain training refers to challenging the brain as, given the right conditions, the brain can repair and adapt at any age. In this session you will learn about the benefits of physical activity and brain training for learning, memory and mood, as well as suggestions for activities you can engage in.

Documents accompanying Workshop 6:

- **Useful exercise websites**
- **Equipment**
- **How much exercise do I need to do?**
- **Self Care Journey** – this document can be found in Workshop 1

Self Care Journey

Print out the accompanying booklet in Workshop 1

This is designed to support you with the 'change process'. It contains a number of activities that you should complete each week after the workshop (ideally complete the activity as soon as you have finished listening to the workshop).

Self Care Journey – weekly key and optional activities:

Week 1	Week 2	Wee 3
<p>Key Activity:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Well formed outcome 2. Identifying barriers to change <p>Optional Activity: Whole person approach to health</p>	<p>Key Activities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Seven-day food & mood diary 2. Eating behaviour <p>Optional Activities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Self care questionnaire 2. 360 Self care assessment 	<p>Key Activity: Weekly self care planning</p> <p>Optional Activity: Mindfulness and mindful eating</p>
Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
<p>Key Activities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Addressing limiting beliefs 2. Weekly self care planning 	<p>Key Activities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review your weekly progress report 2. Weekly self care planning 	<p>Key Activities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review your weekly progress report 2. Weekly self care planning <p>Optional Activity: Building resilience</p>

Alongside this, you will create a menu plan each week (starting in week one). In Weeks 1-3 please send a copy to your Practitioner.

Good luck, enjoy and please let us have your feedback on the programme!

Frequently Asked Questions

Which starchy carbohydrates are best to choose?

The best starchy carbohydrates to choose are sweet potatoes, rice, oats, quinoa and buckwheat. Be careful with portion sizes of starchy carbohydrates – aim for a quarter of your plate or less at each meal. Fill up your plate with vegetables (for this purpose potatoes do not count as a vegetable). If you have chosen the Paleo dietary option then starchy vegetables (including sweet potatoes) or fruit will be the starchy or sugary carbohydrates you will eat, as a Paleo diet does not include grains.

Is it ok to eat artificial sweeteners?

Artificial sweeteners may be found in many low calorie or low sugar foods and drinks. Since the introduction of the sugar tax in 2018 the use of artificial sweeteners has increased. Artificial sweeteners have been linked to many health problems. Cytoplan has written a blog on this topic which you can read by following this link <https://blog.cytoplan.co.uk/the-truth-behind-artificial-sweeteners/>

There are also natural sweeteners e.g. stevia and xylitol. Whilst these are preferable to artificial sweeteners, there are concerns about their effects on gut or wider health, so they should be used minimally.

Why are soya and rice milks not recommended?

Soya eaten in small quantities and especially when fermented (as it is in Japan) can make a useful contribution to a healthy diet. However, in the West soya products are sometimes eaten in large quantities, they may be heavily processed, and because the soya has not been fermented, it contains large quantities of anti-nutrients (fermentation breaks down the anti-nutrients). It is therefore best consumed in small quantities only and in fermented forms such as natto and tempeh (tofu is also ok). There is also a concern in relation to soya milk as it is stored in aluminium vats.

Rice milk is very sweet so has a high glycaemic index (in other words it will raise blood sugar quickly). In addition, there is concern about arsenic contamination. This concern also extends to rice – see below.

There is no ideal 'milk'. The most preferable are almond and coconut (but check for added sugar and other ingredients).

Why should rice be cooked in more water than it will absorb?

Traditionally we have cooked rice in two to three times its volume of water and during cooking the water is absorbed. However due to concerns about arsenic contamination, it is preferable to cook rice in four to five times its volume of water and then discard the excess water. During cooking some of the arsenic will leach into the cooking water.

Why is it important to soak nuts and seeds?

Nuts and seeds contain a number of anti-nutrients, including phytic acid, which can combine with minerals in the gut from foods and reduce their absorption. Soaking overnight and then discarding the soaking water reduces the phytic acid content. With regard to whole flaxseeds, these should be soaked overnight and then used with the soaking water – during soaking the seeds will have produced a mucilage which can support regular bowel movements.

What are trans fats and what foods contain them?

Oils found in vegetables and seeds are liquid at room temperature, however, processing and heating them at high temperatures (as may occur when margarines or other processed foods are produced) can create trans fats or altered fats. Trans fats have a different shape to normal fats and as a result they can affect the fluidity of cell membranes. A small increase in trans fat intake can have a significant impact on health and is linked to heart disease. Small amounts of trans fats do also occur naturally in some foods (e.g. animal products), however these are of less concern. Avoid processed foods that contain trans fats, these foods also often contain inflammatory omega-6 fats.

Many food manufacturers have changed their processes so that foods do not include trans fats, however if oils are being heated to high temperatures, there is still the concern that this may create other 'altered' undesirable fats.

What is the difference between the Mediterranean-style and Paleo-style way of eating?

The Mediterranean-style way of eating is based on including lots of vegetables, nuts, seeds, meat, fish, eggs, beans, pulses, olive oil, small amounts of dairy (especially fermented such as natural yoghurt), and small amounts of fruit and grains (rice, oats, buckwheat, quinoa). You may continue to eat gluten grains (e.g. wheat) in small quantities but we do suggest a trial elimination for four weeks.

The Paleo-style way of eating includes the above foods but excludes ALL grains and dairy. There is a handout that accompanies Workshop 2 which lists foods included in a Paleo-style diet. Your Practitioner will be able to give further advice and check that your menu plan reflects the guidelines and that you are eating a balanced diet.

When should I carry out a trial elimination of gluten? Is this necessary?

We recommend a trial elimination of gluten is carried out after Workshop 3 (gut health) and that the elimination is for at least four weeks. This is because gluten can contribute to brain health problems in many people (even if there are no gut symptoms). The only way to know if gluten is contributing to your symptoms is by removing it from your diet (and observing your symptoms) and then reintroducing it (although if you are significantly better you may decide you don't want to reintroduce it). You will find more information on how to do a trial elimination on the gluten handout that accompanies Workshop 3.

Where can I get advice on supplements?

Sometimes the workshops mention specific nutrients that are relevant, for example, for sleep or stress. These are mentioned for information only, rather than giving advice. Your Practitioner will discuss and recommend the most relevant supplements for you depending

on your specific symptoms, any diagnosed conditions and your health goals. Alternatively, we at Cytoplan are always happy to give advice and check that there are no contraindications with any prescription medications you are taking. You can email us at nutrition@cytoplan.co.uk or call us on 01684 310099 and select option three for nutrition advice.

What is the difference between a menu plan and a food diary?

A menu plan is where you write down in advance what you plan to eat for each meal during the week (and snacks). You can then shop accordingly. It is a good idea to do this in conjunction with your calendar for the week so you can plan for any meals where you will be time limited or away from home etc. Creating a meal plan is very important in the first few weeks and will play a significant role in your success.

A food diary is where you write down what you actually ate at each meal and you can also record other information like time, how hungry you were, information relating to eating behaviour, mood etc. It will help you gain a better understanding of your eating behaviour (e.g. cues to eating), whether your menu plan needs adjusting, and you may also get some insight into how you feel after eating particular foods. There is more information on this within the Self Care Journey. Hopefully your food diary will mostly reflect your menu plan - if not, you may need to reflect on why they are different.

Where can I get a vitamin D test?

A private, inexpensive home finger-prick test is available from www.vitamindtest.org.uk. Be aware that an adequate value is considered at above 50nmol/litre. However, this is not an optimal level which is considered to be between 100 and 150nmol/litre (or sometimes other units are used, in which case the optimal range is 40-60ng/ml). Your Practitioner will be able to advise further or email us at nutrition@cytoplan.co.uk with your test result.

I am taking a number of medications which I think may be contributing to my symptoms. What should I do?

Discuss any symptoms with your GP and if they could be as a result of your medication, he/she may be able to suggest an alternative. Please do not stop taking any prescribed medication without first consulting with your GP.

If you have any questions or feedback about the programme please email info@thebrainhealthprogramme.co.uk or contact your Practitioner.

