

No. 6: The Essential Bacon Sandwich (Essential/Luxury/Avoid foods)



1 serving as shown contains 2 ½ to 3 portions of fruit and veg.

Served here with scrambled egg

The eggs take the balance to less than half fruit and veg. so if I eat this I usually start with a large bowl of fresh fruit salad with soya yogurt. I would normally have mega-mix muesli or porridge with my fruit and yogurt but not if I know I'm having the rye bread later. That's what I mean about making active choices.

The **vegetarian option** is just to leave off the bacon. There's so much other tasty stuff on here anyway it doesn't really need it.

If the list of ingredients is a bit of a shock to the system (and/or your taste buds) and you think you don't like or are not familiar with more than one of them then go easy on yourself. Just **add/substitute one ingredient at a time into your regular bacon butty until you get used to them.** I know this works because it's exactly how I've developed this recipe over the last couple of years. I started by adding avocado into my normal bacon butty, then thought sundried tomatoes would taste good and they did, then finally a few months ago I switched breads and added the leaves. See the section later on learning to love your Essentials for more tips.

Ingredients (serves 1)

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 4 rashers of smoked streaky bacon | 2 handfuls of mixed leaves |
| 2 slices of dark rye bread | Good balsamic vinegar |
| Cream cheese | Salt & Pepper |
| 1 small or ½ a large avocado | |
| 4 sundried tomatoes in oil | |

Method

- 1. Grill the bacon and bread on both sides.**
- 2. Meanwhile slice the avocado thinly and chop the tomatoes.**
- 3. Spread the cheese on the rye toast, add the sliced avocado and sprinkle on the pieces of tomato.**
- 4. Drizzle a couple of teaspoons of the sundried tomato oil and balsamic vinegar over the open sandwiches and season to taste.**
- 5. Add the rashers of grilled bacon.**
- 6. Top with the mixed leaves or put them on the side and drizzle with more balsamic.**

The Science Bit

At the core of my nutritional philosophy is that food is to be enjoyed because life is to be enjoyed. It's not about cutting things out, denial and suffering. It's about finding healthier ways to enjoy the foods you love (even bacon sandwiches) so you can eat them without damaging your health, getting fat and feeling guilty. It's also about taking responsibility for your own health through taking responsibility for our own diet and learning to make active choices about everything we eat and do.

This approach is about challenging peoples thinking and changing their mindset towards food and then providing some simple ways to make it easier to make better choices. I'm going to ask you a really simple question and I'd like you to play the game and really think about your answer before you turn the page.

The question is:-

Why do we need to eat?

It's such a simple question and yet I've discovered it's one that people find surprisingly hard to answer. We're not programmed to think about why we eat; we're just told, almost from birth, what to eat. Which is why I'm asking you to think about it for a while.....

If we believe everything we hear and read and everything the conventional 'diet industry' throws at us before long we can actually start to believe that the ideal/optimum amount to eat is NOTHING.

Diet foods have a tendency to remove as much of the 'food' from food as possible and replace it with chemicals that taste a bit like food, water, some more chemicals that hold the water together to make it look like food and then probably some vitamins and minerals to replace the ones they stripped out when they took the food away. Oh and then lots of extra artificial sweeteners and flavours to give us a heightened 'taste' experience that numbs our taste buds and means that real food actually starts to taste rather bland. Also, diet foods can actually make us fat (see p11) so we think we need more diet food. Either way they've got us – physically and psychologically we've become 'diet food junkies' and we feed, or rather eat the machine that made us.

Here's the deal. We NEED to eat. We NEED to eat FOOD. We NEED to eat REAL FOOD. And we need to eat quite a lot. It's worth remembering why, so I repeat the question and make it personal.

Why do you need to eat?

I think there are three basic reasons. Most people, when I ask them can very quickly say **Energy** or **Calories** and then they get stuck. And I think this is our problem as a population. We think only of food in terms of how much Energy or Calories it contains. If we feel low in Energy we look for high Calorie food to give us a boost. Many people will tell me their diet has been "really good today" and when I probe further what they really mean is that "I've not eaten many Calories". My favourite example is someone who said "I've been really good today. All I've eaten is a pork pie for lunch".

Here's the news flash...

A low Calorie diet and a good diet are not necessarily one and the same thing.

That's because our bodies need to get much, much more than just Calorific Energy from our food.

Why we need to eat

1. Nutrition
2. Energy
3. Social and Psychological factors

Until we start to think about our diet in terms of all three and not just all about Calories I think we will still struggle.

This is how I make sense of it.....

Hunt for Nutrition and the Energy will find you

1. Nutrition

- Our bodies have an absolute requirement for **vitamins, minerals** (calcium, iron etc.) **essential fats** (Omega 3 and 6) and **essential amino acids** (building blocks of protein). **We can only get these from our food.** Studies with vitamin pills and supplements have shown that our bodies struggle to assimilate them in the same way as from our food and we pass most of it out in our urine – expensive urine.
- Much of the food we eat in **our modern diet has very little nutritional value** but carries lots of Calorific energy (most brown and white foods fall into this bracket including breads, pasta, rice, potatoes, baked goods etc. Also, tragically, pork pies).
- In a modern diet the nutrition we need is hard to find and we have to go hunting for it. If we hunt out vitamins, minerals and Omega 3 by **choosing colourful foods** (fruit and veg.) and **fish** we can pretty much

guarantee that enough Omega 6, essential proteins and Calorific energy will find us as there is no shortage of those in our modern diet.

2. Energy

o In a purely scientific sense the energy value of food is just the number of Calories it contains. Therefore **all food can give us energy** because all food contains Calories. Fruit and vegetables are actually a very valuable source of energy in the form of carbohydrate (fructose sugar and starch). When we eat these **'colourful carbs'** we also get essential nutrition (vitamins and minerals) that you don't get from brown and white carbs. A large apple provides approximately the same quantity of carbohydrate/ Calories/ energy as a thin slice of bread (about 80 Calories) but I read somewhere that **there are at least 120 things in an apple that can do you good**. There are really very few in bread, even wholemeal bread.

o I think we confuse ourselves because often we use the word 'energy' as in "I'm low in energy", or "I need an energy boost" when we really mean we are lacking in 'vitality' or 'get up and go'. **Vitality comes from nutrition rich foods** *not* from energy rich foods. Energy rich foods tend to give us a temporary 'high' then drop us down again after just a short while leaving us feeling even worse – ever felt that? **My Top Tip for increased vitality and a real energy boost is to choose colourful carbs over brown/white carbs.**

o Unless you are exercising hard you only need **1500-2000 Calories of energy a day**. It takes approximately 3500 Calories to make 1 pound of body fat. Therefore if you are just 1 pound overweight you already have, stored in your body, nearly two days worth of Calorific energy. If you are a stone overweight you've got about an extra month stored up. This could come in pretty useful if you find yourself marooned on a desert island or are about to haul a sledge to the North Pole, but otherwise..... **Are you lacking Energy or Vitality?**

o If we **hunt for Nutrition** the Calories we need will find us, we will have more vitality and feel and be healthier. If we hunt for Energy we will tend to eat too many Calories, yo-yo our blood sugar, put on weight, be lacking in the nutrients we need to keep our body going and feel rubbish.

3. Social and Psychological factors

o These include cultural norms, how we were brought up to eat and of course addictions.

o They are hard to ignore as they **affect our ability to listen to our bodies and make active choices** about what we eat.

o Plus food is just nice. It's great stuff and for most of us (myself included) a big part of what makes life so enjoyable. We shouldn't lose that

but it's all about balance. If in your heart of hearts you know social and psychological factors around food are causing you (or will end up causing you) more pain than pleasure **it may be time to stop kidding yourself, stop making excuses, face up to it and start making changes.** That's usually easier said than done I know. I hope these pages help you make a start but if you need more help, go and find it.

Getting the Nutrition/Energy Balance right

- I think the simplest way to think about what we eat is to look at everything in terms of its Nutrition/Energy balance.
- If we chose more foods that are high in Nutrition and low in Energy we will be healthier, find it easier to manage our weight and (ironically) feel more energetic.
- The easy way to get a better Nutrition/Energy balance is to choose colourful carbs (fruit & vegetables) over brown/white carbs and eat more fish.
- A colourful plate is generally a well balanced plate.

Become your own Nutritionalist – Part I

Using just the above information and thinking about the Nutrition/Energy balance it's possible to analyze your own diet without having to see an expert or spend hours trying to make sense of the nutritional information on the back of food packaging.

Have a go...

Write a list of everything you ate and drank yesterday.

Now really write it down rather than go run through it in your head. It really does help to write it down and see it in print and you are going to need it again later.

What do you notice about the Nutrition/Energy balance of your diet?

What advice would you already give yourself?

What excuses have already made for yourself? If you think yesterday was a 'bad' atypical day then that's fine but it's still worth thinking about what you need to do tomorrow (and can still do today) to make them 'good' days. You can let yourself off because you were really busy or there was nothing healthy available or someone else cooked all your meals or..... but unfortunately your body doesn't go "Oh! Ok sorry, I understand now, I can make do without those vitamins I need for your immune system and you know what I won't store those extra calories as fat I'll just make them magically disappear. You just carry on, you won't notice the difference." It's a tragic shame and I know we all wish it were different – including myself, but really.....it is what it is.

Rather than thinking about good and bad foods (which activates unhelpful and unnecessary psychological factors) I tend to think of most food as either **Essentials** or **Luxuries** (treats).

Essential/Luxury/Avoid Foods

ESSENTIAL foods are ones that our bodies have evolved with and were present in our original hunter/gatherer diet around 2 million years ago. These foods tend to be **high in Nutrition and low in Energy**.

LUXURY (or treat) foods are the ones that have come into our diet since humans became farmers and eventually shoppers just a few thousand years ago (the very oldest agricultural practices date back just 10,000 years). These foods tend to be increasingly **low in Nutrition and high in Energy** the closer we get to the present day. Our bodies are not evolved to cope with this 'new' diet.

The only foods I try and **AVOID** are ones that contain man made chemicals that were never present in our evolutionary hunter/gatherer diet (or at least not in such artificial concentrations). These foods may look from the labels like they have a high nutrition/energy balance because they have added vitamins or have had fat or sugar stripped away but it's actually irrelevant since they can **alter our body chemistry** and make self-regulation more difficult. Several may also be quite toxic.

On the next page is a table I use to categorise food into these three groups. Again, because this approach works best if you really think it through for yourself, please have a go at filling it in based on what you already know before you turn to 'the answers' on page 10.

Which foods do you think go in which box?

| 1. Essential - We can't get the nutrition from anywhere else. Our bodies need them to operate normally. The Hunter/gatherer diet | 2. Luxury - We don't need them but they are nice. If we eat them we need to exercise to burn off the extra energy or we'll put on weight. The Farmer/shopper diet | 3. Avoid - Harmful. Contain manmade chemicals our bodies are not adapted to cope with. The Chemistry lab diet |
|--|---|---|
| <div data-bbox="651 1203 949 1318" style="border: 1px solid black; width: 133px; height: 72px; margin: 0 auto;"></div> | | |

Here's what I think. See if you agree.

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| <p>1. Essential - We can't get the nutrition from anywhere else. Our bodies need them to operate normally. The Hunter/gatherer diet</p> | <p>2. Luxury - We don't need them but they are nice. If we eat them we need to exercise to burn off the extra energy or we'll put on weight. The Farmer/shopper diet</p> | <p>3. Avoid - Harmful. Contain manmade chemicals our bodies are not adapted to cope with. The Chemistry lab diet</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fruit & vegetables • Nuts & seeds • Beans & pulses • Fish • Soya • Herbs • Eggs • Oats/Rye/Quinoa | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wheat products (including bread, pasta, couscous, breakfast cereals, cakes, pies & biscuits) • White Potatoes • Rice • Cheese, butter, cream • Chocolate & Sweets | <p>There are many but common ones to look out for are:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artificial sweeteners (NutraSweet/Aspartame) • Trans-/ hydrogenated fats. Found in artificially solidified fats (margarines) and any baked goods (pies, biscuits & pastries) and processed foods containing them. Also often in instant milk machine drinks like hot chocolates and coffees. • Monosodium Glutamate (MSG) |
| <p>Most</p> | <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">Milk & Meat</div> | <p>Some</p> <p>Preferably None</p> |

1 - ESSENTIAL

Humans evolved with the vitamins, minerals, fats and proteins present in Box 1 foods. **Our bodies cannot function correctly without these foods.**

For Example:-

- One of the functions of the Omega 3 fatty acids in fish is that they help to **keep our blood thin**. If we don't eat enough fish we may find ourselves having to take drugs like aspirin to keep our blood thin enough to **prevent heart attacks and stroke**.
- The anti-oxidant properties of many of the vitamins are needed to **mop up damaging free-radicals** that cause cell damage so eating from this box helps **prevent cancers, skin aging and even dementias**.
- **Energy is released more slowly** from these foods so eating more from this box and less from Box 2 and 3 helps keep energy levels stable during the day, **you will feel less tired and be far less likely to develop Type II diabetes**.

And while it's not a recipe for weight loss **it just makes sense** to me that people who eat mainly from this box will **feel less hungry** and therefore **find weight management easier** than people who eat mainly from Boxes 2 & 3.

2 - LUXURY

The fats, sugars and carbohydrates these foods contain were in our natural diet but in a far less concentrated form. **A change of mindset** is needed to get our head around this box.

- The **white/brown carbohydrates** here are **not really 'staples'**, we don't actually need them at all. Unless exercising hard the **colourful carbs in Box 1** can provide all the energy we need in a higher nutrition package.
- Chocolate and sweet and fatty foods are not really 'bad'. They don't contain anything toxic (unless they fall into Box 3 – check the label) just a lot of **concentrated calories** which can **make it difficult to maintain a healthy weight and blood sugar** if we over indulge.
- We don't have to banish any foods from Box 2 just **moderate our total consumption from this box each day**. Remember, cheese, bread, chocolate, pasta and crisps come from the same box so choose your real luxuries.

My recommendation is not to 'stuff' in cheap versions (which tend to be Box 3 anyway). **Treat everything here as a luxury**. Buy or make fabulous examples of Box 2 treats and eat just a little alongside lots of Box 1 essentials.

3 - AVOID

These are the dangerous ones. There is more and more evidence to suggest they **have long term detrimental effects on our health**.

- **Weirdly, diet products can make you fat**. In a study with rats, half were fed diet yogurt containing artificial sweetener and the other half normal yogurt. Both groups had access to as much rat food as they wanted during the day. At the end of the study the 'diet' rats were heavier, fatter and had eaten more rat food than the 'normal' group. It appears that these chemicals may mess with body chemistry **and interfere with our natural ability to regulate food intake**.
- It's reported that there is **no safe level of Trans-fats** (also known as hydrogenated fat) consumption because any increase in intake **increases risk of coronary heart disease**. There are also potential links to **Alzheimer's, cancer, diabetes, obesity, liver dysfunction and infertility**. The evidence is compelling enough that they have been removed from all products in Marks and Spencer's, New York Restaurants and some whole countries in Scandinavia.
- Flavour enhancers like MSG **make poor quality food taste good** and so over stimulate our taste buds that good food tastes bland.

NB.

o **Milk** is in the middle because whilst it is obviously a natural product, adult mammals are not necessarily adapted to consume large quantities. There are a lot of pros and some cons for drinking dairy milk and I'd encourage you to read some of the information yourself and make your own mind up. Personally I have some milk most days. If you use a lot of milk products I think it's good to switch some of your dairy consumption to soya (I find soya yogurts the tastiest way) mainly because there are also lots of pros to having some soya in our diet (more of this in a later Newsletter). I think it makes sense to use **semi-skimmed** milk because it has a better Nutrition/Energy balance than full-fat but when you take all the fat away in skimmed milk you also lose just about all the Vitamin A (as it is fat soluble) and half the Vitamin C. Semi-skimmed milk contains less than 2% fat which is really nothing. Even whole milk still contains less than 4% fat which is still a naturally low fat product. This is why the idea of very low fat yogurts is nonsensical to me, yogurt is already a low fat product, why strip out that little bit of fat and add in all those chemicals to replace it? Look at the ingredients lists on pots of normal yogurt and very low fat yogurt if you don't believe me.

o **Eggs** and **Meat** depend so much on how they are produced (see Newsletter 3 for much more information on why). In short the animal's diet also needs to be their natural diet for them to be a good source of food for us so chose free-range grass fed products over grain fed. Organic eggs and meat do not guarantee a natural diet as the animals could just have been fed organic grain. No matter how good quality the meat, there is really nothing in it that you can't get from fish and fish has a better Omega 3 ratio so it wins every time (see Newsletter 3 again). That's why I've put meat in Box 2 and the recommendations at the bottom of Box 2 still apply.

o **Oats**, **rye** and **quinoa** are obviously still brown carbohydrates but small quantities of grains were in our natural diet. See Newsletter 3 for more information on why these grains are better for us than eating wheat. In short they tend to have a lower GI so have less effect on blood sugar. If you are exercising and need extra calories, are trying to wean yourself of wheat or just really fancy some brown/white carbs these are the ones to go for first but keep the balance and eat at least half and half with fruit or vegetables.

Become your own Nutritionalist – Part II

So now we have a second means of analyzing our own diet. Find three highlighter pens or crayons or anything colourful, make yourself an Essential/Luxury/Avoid colour code (I've used green, orange and red but any colours will do) and go back to the list of everything you ate yesterday and categorise the foods you ate.

Again what do you notice?

What are the most obvious things you need to change?

What I find is that people who are struggling with their energy levels, weight and general health tend to have a diet is far too luxurious or even to be majorly avoided. If you notice this is the same for your diet then only you can hang everything in the balance and decide if you want to make some Essential changes.

And that's it. I think you can essentialize any of your favourite luxury foods by halving the quantity and adding in at least the same quantity of food from the Essentials box. Yes even the legendary bacon sandwich.

Essential Foods and Weight Loss

I don't usually talk specifically about weight loss as I think it's better to **start by trying to get healthy rather than trying to get thin** but I know it is of interest to many so here are a few Top Tips. .

Focus on adding in Essential foods rather than cutting out Luxuries. When we ban ourselves from eating the Luxuries and 'fail' we feel bad about ourselves and we all know that when we feel bad about ourselves the first foods we reach for are in Box 2 and 3. **Just by eating loads of Box 1 foods we naturally cut down on Box 2 and 3 foods** without even trying. Then as we get healthier and start to feel better about ourselves we feel more in control and it becomes easier to take more active choices to reduce the amount we eat from Boxes 2 and 3.

Eat proper food rather than messed about with diet foods. If I want a treat I have a real treat and enjoy it rather than some synthetic excuse for food. I've noticed that diet foods actually tend to taste sweeter and/or creamier than real

food even though they contain neither real sugar nor real cream. I think this makes us crave more and more sweet and creamy foods and makes real food, that should taste delicious, taste bland until you get used to it again (this also happens if we eat a lot of processed food). It's a generalisation of course but I've noticed that a slim person's fridge usually contains real food and an overweight person's fridge usually contains diet food. It's easy to assume that people eat diet foods because they are overweight but what if it's the other way round? There's more opinion and information from a proper Nutritionist about the down side of NutraSweet (aspartame) and also MSG's on this You Tube clip <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g-pnzj0c06Q>.

I suggest **altering the balance of Essential and Luxury foods you eat until you can keep at a stable, healthy weight for life rather than yo-yo dieting.** Gradually increase the percentage of Box 1 foods you eat compared to Box 2 until you start to lose weight (of course doing some exercise will help this process too). Each time you adjust to the new 'diet' and it starts to feel easier you can chose to either stay there or shift the balance further the left. For someone who is very overweight and currently eats mainly from Box 2 and 3 just switching over to more Box 1 foods should be enough to start losing weight. However, I have noticed that if your diet is already pretty good and you just want to lose a few pounds you are probably also going to have to **think about how much you eat.** Box 1 foods contain far fewer Calories than Box 2 but they still contain some. I think diets that promise they are easy and you can 'eat as much as you like and still lose weight' set us up for disappointment and failure. The principles of a healthy diet and maintaining a healthy weight are very simple but changing long term habits is not always easy and there is a lot of temptation out there. I think if we **think about it being simple but not always easy** that gives us a more realistic mindset and sets us up for success.

If the bad news is that I don't think even a totally Essential diet is guaranteed to make us model skinny the real good news is that I reckon it would be pretty impossible to be obese or even very overweight on a primarily Essentials diet and active lifestyle. I really think we can be a happy, healthy weight on a well balanced Essentials diet without too much hardship. Whenever I'm eying up a Luxury food the way I think of it is:-

Luxury food = Exercise OR weight gain

It's not unfair, it's not 'bad genes', it's a fact of life and our choice. Everyone needs a different balance to maintain their weight and some people can get away with more Luxuries than others (and obviously we don't like them) but

I don't know anyone over the age of about 30 who stays slim without being very careful about what they eat and exercising regularly.

Learning to love your Essentials

If the list of Box 1 Essentials is a bit of a shock to the system and/or to your taste buds then go easy on yourself. **Start by eating more of the ones you do like even if it's only a few** (maybe just more peas, carrots, cashew nuts and salmon if that's all you like). Then **gradually add in one or two more at a time** as you get more used to the new diet. Start by adding in the foods you will eat but would never normally chose rather than those you really dislike.

I encourage people to **talk about "not being used to" foods rather than "not liking" them** as this is usually the case and encourages an active rather than a victim mentality. We often grow up with aversions to foods either because we didn't eat them as children or we were forced to. What ever the reason, I believe as adults, our diet and our health is now our own responsibility. If you know your diet is largely made up of Luxuries and you are not used to eating the Essentials then it will take time to learn to love them but be a bit tough on yourself if you have to. Remember **they are Essential so get them down even if you find them boring or it feels a bit like taking your medicine to start with**. If it helps then think about it in those terms, they literally are medicine and will save you having to take a lot of drugs in later life so this is not a bad analogy.

Vegetables may taste a bit bland at first if your taste buds have been over stimulated and numbed by eating overly sweet, salty or additive laden food but give them a chance. Once you readjust you'll taste the full depth and range of flavours and natural sweetness of fruit and vegetables and never go back. I used to love Heinz tomato soup and it was my student treat. Then I switched over to making my own soups and of course the famous Lycopene soup (No.2). A while back I thought I'd treat myself and have a tin of Heinz tomato soup and I couldn't eat it. I can now actually taste all the sugar they put in there and it tastes more like pudding than soup, the same with baked beans. So have a go and persevere but don't be too tough and force yourself to eat a lot of foods you really dislike all at once or you are less likely to stick at it.

One of the only foods I used "not to like" or rather could never seem to get used to was olives. I used to try maybe one a year and always spat it out into

my napkin as I thought it tasted vile. And yet I could see that other people really enjoyed them and they are in the Essentials box and really good for us. At parties there are often crisps and olives out and I thought it would be really good if I could eat and enjoy the olives (Box 1) rather than the crisps (Box 2). Then my sister told me that someone told her that *if, every time you see or are exposed to a food you don't like you eat one (if it's small) or a mouthful (if it's not) and get it down rather than spit it out, within a year you'll like it.*

So I tried it. It was a real struggle for a few months but I persevered. After six months I surprised myself by involuntarily reaching for a second olive and eating that too and I thought "these aren't so bad". Then about six months later I took myself off on a ten day self-supported trek in Patagonia. I carried most of my food so was on quite tight rations.



About day four of a hike around the Torres Del Paine circuit in Patagonia. It was cold, even snowing sometimes overnight so there was a lot to carry. There were a couple of huts to buy bits of food but I carried most things. This is what a ten day pack looks like four days into a hike.

Once back to the town I showered and changed into clean clothes and went out for my celebratory 'eat anything I like' meal. I'd been planning it in my

head for at least the last two days of the hike and had decided on one of the amazing Argentinean lamb grills with loads of fresh vegetables and salad (I don't carry meat and fresh vegetables so they are what I always crave). I sat in a café/bar first for a cocktail and tried to pick something off the snack menu to keep me going. Nothing appealed and the thought came that what I really wanted, above all else, were OLIVES. They weren't even on the menu and I was craving them. I asked the waiter and he found some huge, purple Kalamata olives and I sat there and ate a whole dish with my cocktail and loved them. Now I really enjoy olives and eat them very often.



And this is what I do it for. This is where I woke up on Christmas day 2008, 3 days into that Patagonian hike. I sat with the morning sun on my face and my back against a tree (my spare knickers drying on a make shift line). I ate my mega-mix muesli (No.3) with rehydrated skimmed milk powder, made a tin mug of Rooibos tea on my little stove and looked up at the mountains. I want to be able to carry my life on my back and walk 6-8 hours a day into places like this for as many years as I can, hopefully well into my 50's, so I have to look after my body now.

What do you want to be doing in your 50's, 60's and even your 80's?

I told my friend Jo about the 'eat one every time and eventually you'll like it' technique and she said she'd give it a go with raw tomatoes which she's never liked. Six months on she reported she could now eat them, was going to keep going for the rest of the six months and then start on another 'dislike'. Apparently, it's been the best thing with her four year old daughter. The new rule in the house is that **everyone eats at least one mouthful of everything** (including the adults – role modelling is really important here). She says so often her daughter says "I don't like this Mummy" but instead of letting her leave it or forcing her to eat it all Jo says "just eat one bite" and usually after that bite the response is "I do quite like this now" and she'll happily eat the lot.

Al's Top Tips for Essentialising your diet

- *Go easy on yourself at first, still eat your Luxury foods but cut them in half and make up the difference with Essential foods. E.g. if you'd normally have pizza for dinner have half the pizza and make the rest of the plate up with salad, grilled vegetables, corn on the cob etc. If you really like cake and pudding, take half or a smaller portion and fill the dish up with chopped fruit or berries.*
- *If you give in and go crazy on the Luxury foods all is not lost. Don't eat again until you are hungry and make sure the next meal or snack is all from the Essentials box. This way you will still be half and half.*
- *Replace pasta, rice or potatoes with a 'green carb' mix. Keep bags of soya beans, broad beans and peas in the freezer and boil or steam a handful of each (you can cook them together). Serve in addition to your usual vegetable.*
- *Chose fish as your default option instead of meat or cheese. Unless it's going to be a real treat and really worth it.*
- *If you are feeling low on Energy think 'Vitality' instead and reach for a piece of fruit rather than the chocolate or biscuits.*
- *Don't eat Luxury foods when you are hungry. Fill up on Essentials first.*
- *If you really want something from the Luxury box (like chocolate), eat an Essential first (like an apple or a handful of dried fruit) and then eat the chocolate if you still want it.*
- *Make as much of your food as you can from scratch. If you are buying ready made food look at the ingredients list and chose ones where the ingredients are foods rather than chemicals or numbers.*
- *Learn to look for hidden trans-/hydrogenated fat (may also be called solid vegetable fat) and artificial sweeteners (NutraSweet and aspartame are common) in the ingredients list. Switch to another product that doesn't contain them.*
- *Essentialize any meal by adding extra vegetables and/or serving a mixed salad on the side. Make an essential cheese omelette by lightly frying chopped vegetables in the pan before you add the egg. Make essential stir fries, curries and pasta sauces. Add extra vegetables to essentialize ready made foods and sauces.*

