

A Picture of Health

In focus this month: Nutrition and healthy weight

In Public Health we look at the way people in Tameside live as a whole population. This helps us understand what the main health and wellbeing challenges are for people living here, so we can look for ways to improve levels of health. We'll be sharing facts and figures about health in Tameside with you every month, to put you in the picture. We'll also be giving you information on how you can help yourself and the people around you to live well.

1 Did someone mention healthy weight? Quick, brace yourself for a lecture on the joys of natural yoghurt and rice cakes. What, that doesn't sound like fun to you either? Thankfully A Picture of Health isn't here to preach. In fact, don't mention the 'D' word (you know, the one that always starts tomorrow), because good nutrition isn't the same as striving to be slim. This month is about knowing how to nourish your body and mind for the best of health, there are no quick fixes to squeeze inches. If weight loss is on your to do list though, regular Weight Matters courses are run in Tameside.



2 Think of nutrition like this: Someone gives you a new car (lucky you). It goes like a dream, it looks great and you love being seen in it. The garage nearby is open 24 hours, but they put additives in the fuel to make it stretch further so it's cheap to fill up. It keeps your engine going, although your car gives the odd cough and splutter. You have a nagging doubt that the fuel is damaging your car but as long as it's still running you tell yourself you'll worry about a breakdown if it happens. Then your engine packs up by the roadside and the AA have to tow you to the nearest garage! Really inconvenient, huge repair bill, and your car is out of action for weeks. Your body is like a car, if you put bad fuel into it, you run the risk of it breaking down. Good nutrition may make the difference between driving round in an old banger or a vintage classic.



3 We're all hearing that sugar is the new food villain, but how bad is it really? Nature has been making food since the Big Bang. It gets the balance between taste and nutrition spot on, so sugar is naturally present in healthy foods like fruit and veg. When humans add sugar to food, or remove the other nutrients by juicing, condensing, cooking and tweaking, we upset the delicate balance, making the food heavier in sugar than nature intended. This makes it easy to take in high amounts of sugar calories at a faster rate, and our bodies can start to feel the negative effects. As a rule of thumb, the less 'messed with' your food is, the better it probably is for you. Click here to see the top sources of added sugar in our diets.



4 New evidence tells us that sugar causes a host of health problems we didn't know about, but the one thing we have known for a long time is that sugar rots teeth. One in every five children under the age of 5 in Tameside has lost a tooth to decay, that's more than the national average. As much as we'd like to believe that the tooth fairy can magically switch rotten peggies for pennies (or pounds these days), the painful truth is that many are pulled out in operations. Spare your child the distress of an extraction, get sugar savvy with Change4Life's Sugar Smart App. It's a simple barcode scanner to check up on your treats, find it in your app store or click below for this and other smart tools.



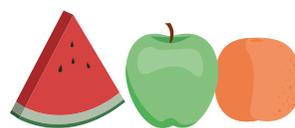
5 Salt is everywhere. On our dinner tables, on Friday night's fish and chips, it's in our salted caramel brownies...and for the trendier ones amongst us, it's even in our hair. Whilst a sprinkle of salt to tickle the tastebuds is fine in small doses, too much of a good thing can raise your blood pressure as well as your hair. High blood pressure is symptomless, but increases your chance of developing heart disease or having a stroke, so you might not know until it's too late. Adults should eat no more than a level teaspoon of salt per day, but as it lurks in unexpected places like cereal, pasta sauces and bread, the reality is the average adult eats an extra 766 grams of salt per year more than they should. That's the size of the large tub of table salt you keep at the back of the cupboard. And don't be fooled that your fancy organic sea salt is any better for you than the salt shaker at the chippy. It all has the same effect. Lo-salt is a good alternative with all the flavour, or if it has to be the real deal see below for how to cut back.



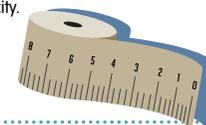
6 The definition of nourishment is food necessary for growth, health and good condition. The quality of the food we eat is just as important as the quantity. People who consume too much food that is low in nutritional value can find themselves in the position of being overweight, but undernourished. This can lead to ill health. A common culprit that helps maximise the intake of calories with low or no nutritional value in the diets of children and young people is the sugary drink. If Picture of Health had to pick just one piece of advice to give to parents to make the biggest difference to their child's health, it's to encourage them to 'Give Up Loving Pop'.



7 Five portions of fruit and veg a day. We all know we should be doing it, but how many of us let our good intentions turn to goo in the salad drawer, or the bananas go brown before hitting the bin? When budgets are tight it's easy to strike fruit and veg off the shopping list to save pennies, but your 5 a day doesn't have to cost a lot. Buy loose from Tameside's market traders to get just the amount you need, or try the budget supermarkets with their cheap weekly deals. If cooking fresh isn't your thing, tinned and frozen veg lasts longer. Just opt for the unsalted, unsweetened versions. Your body will thank you for it with higher energy levels and improved mood.



8 If you regularly put more food and drink into your body than it needs, it may eventually struggle to process it. That's when Type 2 Diabetes may set in. Whilst it's a disease most of us have heard of, the associated complications may not be so familiar. Loss of sight, amputation of feet, and heart and kidney disease are just some of the problems that can come hand in hand with diabetes. There are 10,000 people in Tameside living with the condition at the moment, so it's a very real threat to health for people living here, in fact you probably know one or two of them. Are you at risk? Next time you're near a tape measure, see how many inches you are around the middle. If you are over 31.5 inches as a woman, or 37* inches as a man, you're at increased risk. *These figures differ with ethnicity.



9 With the excesses of Christmas over and done with it's a good time to think about all that booze. Whilst lots of us like to unwind with a wine, or chill with a beer, do all those natural hops and barley do us any good? Well not really. There is no nutritional value in alcohol, and sadly the grapes in your wine don't count towards that 5 a day. Whilst a medicinal glass of red may deliver some health benefits, alcohol is high in calories. When used regularly or excessively the negatives far outweigh the positives. Unless you're a particularly savvy sipper, those extra pounds are just as likely to come from the mulled wine than the mince pies. Have a look at Change4Life's drinks checker to see how many calories were crammed into those Christmas cocktails.



10 Consuming nutritious food and drink benefits our bodies, but it can also help our minds. What we eat, how we eat it and when can all contribute towards increased feelings of wellbeing. When we feed ourselves well our bodies function better. We avoid the high and low moods that are caused by sugar rushes and caffeine kicks, the low self-esteem that comes from binging on junk, or the nausea and tiredness of hangovers. The odd blowout or party night can be just what the doctor ordered, but feeding ourselves well from one time to the next is a recipe for looking good and feeling great.



11 January is the time when most of us make a resolution to change something in our lives for the better. Whilst the year starts with good intentions just 8% of us stick with our plans. So what's the key to making a resolution that sticks? Be realistic. You're more likely to succeed by making one small and manageable change than aiming to become a teetotal gym freak overnight. How about one more piece of fruit a day? Bin the bacon butty and plump for porridge? Swap the sugar for a sweetener, or halt before you salt. Jan-U-ary is all about making that one small change to do something good for you. Make a small pledge to give yourself the gift of good health in 2016. Need some inspiration? Click here to see what everyone else is doing this Jan-U-ary.

It's all about knowing how to nourish your body and mind for the best of health.

