

# Regular Feature: Diet and Nutrition

Michelle Willcocks - Registered Dietitian

## Mindful Nutrition over the festive season



[editor@iajournal.co.uk](mailto:editor@iajournal.co.uk)



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**Season's Greetings, fellow ostomates! For those who don't know me I am Michelle - a fellow Ileostomist, amateur GB age group triathlete (world champion in 2017) and Registered Dietitian. I am very excited to have been invited to write a nutrition article as a regular feature in the IA Journal for the foreseeable future. This opportunity coincided perfectly with my decision to reduce my full-time hours in the NHS working as a Diabetes Specialist Dietitian to free up one day a week for me to pursue other projects and interests - supporting the ostomy community, with IA being one very close to my heart.**

I hope that you enjoy reading my articles and take away some useful tips. I also plan to share a stoma-friendly recipe with each article to tantalise your taste buds and encourage you to exercise your culinary skills in the kitchen!

Please send any of your suggestions for topics you'd like me to write about to [Editor@IAjournal.co.uk](mailto:Editor@IAjournal.co.uk). I want to ensure that the information is relevant to my fellow ostomates, although I recognise how diverse the subject of nutrition is, which makes sense of course. We are all individuals in our own right, living very different lifestyles, and our food choices and eating behaviours are individual to us all. The one main thing we have in common is

our ostomies and the caution we are advised to take when choosing certain foods.

Although in reality we all have differently functioning ostomies, and although some can eat pretty much any foods they desire with no adverse issues, others find they have limitations and choose to restrict foods from their diet, after learning from experience that they cause them undesirable side effects. Additionally, we may share stoma-related anxieties associated with eating scenarios - particularly within social situations. These topics will be addressed recurrently within season-specific topics.

I can't believe I've reached the 5th paragraph without mentioning the 'C' word that resonates with us at this time of year. I'm not talking about Covid - we've had enough of that for one year, thank you. I'm talking about Christmas! Love it or hate it, I think you will all agree we need some festivities in our lives to boost our spirits after the turmoil of 2020.

Although Christmas is probably going to be quite different this year with the recent social restrictions, we must find some joy amongst it all. After all - we haven't all gone through our surgeries to have our lives put on hold. We can't control this pandemic but we can control

other aspects of our lives and perhaps focus on the things that bring us joy.

For me that's my family, friends, exercise and food!

Christmas is often a time when we are actually busier than normal - despite it being a time for relaxing. I've always found it exhausting because I normally work (in the NHS) up until Christmas eve, and find that I'm trying to attend whatever social events I am invited to and then arranging time to travel to see my family and friends. It's never really a relaxing time for me at all!

I used to have my ulcerative colitis flare-ups over the Christmas period and had hospital admissions on two consecutive Christmases, but luckily I was allowed home for Christmas day, although I spent most of it in bed (or on the toilet) whilst my family tucked into their Christmas dinner. I felt like I was being tortured; my mind was longing for all the yummy food but every time I ate something, the ulcerative colitis made its presence known by sending shooting pains through my abdomen, and my poor large colon was losing the battle, barely able to hold onto anything that passed through. The urgency 'to go' came on quicker and the ability to 'hold on' diminished. Cue a number of 'accidents' and a crushed Christmas spirit.

My ileostomy surgery took place after the new year in 2011. I listened to the New Year's Eve fireworks from my hospital bed and imagined how next Christmas and New Year would be so much better. I wanted to celebrate in style, and I hadn't even had my surgery yet! Roll on one year, and Christmas 2012 with Stewie my stoma completely lived up to my

expectations, because I appreciated every detail of it - especially the food and the socialising! Everything tasted so good because I was able to relax and remain in the moment, whereas pre-surgery my absent mind would be anxiously wondering when the 'urgency' would start, and I always felt on the edge of my seat - literally!

With my new-found appreciation of the simple things in life, I'd spent the year figuring out my stoma's behaviour and which foods were well tolerated and which were less so. I found that insoluble fibres were more likely to speed up my output and too much of some of these foods could also cause me partial blockages. I found that drinking with my meals was important for my stoma output and prevented the 'pancaking' experience, which you all know is not as fun as it sounds!

I found that red wine and strong coffee would cause watery output - particularly if consumed before food, but milky coffee is well tolerated. I also found other patterns related to the stoma noises that Stewie would make and how I could, to some extent, control the onset of these noises. This has proved very helpful in social situations; particularly at work. A lot of the noise comes after meal times as air is pushed through the stoma. I find that eating stodgy or starchy foods minimises this noise (probably because these foods help to slow and thicken the output), whereas insoluble fibres (such as salad and vegetable-type meals with sauces) creates more liquid output and allows air to squeeze through the stoma alongside the liquid, which creates the loudest (and most embarrassing) noises. In addition to the types of foods eaten, I have found that eating behaviours also play a major

part in how my stoma behaves during and after meal times. If I've not eaten for a good few hours and then I eat, I can guarantee that Stewie will be windy and noisy shortly after that meal. The gas produced in my stomach in-between meals accumulates, but the stoma and remaining small intestine remains fairly inactive up until food enters the digestive tract. At that point the small intestine is stimulated and this air passes through to the stoma and is forced out, making a few loud noises! So, having a regular eating pattern seems to help keep things a little quieter during the day.

Roll on 10 years and I now feel like I know my stoma behaviour incredibly well. I have 'safe' foods that I eat during the working day and in sociable situations where I do not know the company well enough to crack

jokes about my noisy stoma, although sometimes Stewie does catch me out and it's very embarrassing! I try and laugh it off and tell myself it's only a trivial inconvenience which far outweighs the alternative of living with ulcerative colitis! I save my favourite vegetable and salad-type meals for my evening time, when I am in the company of my fiancé and completely comfortable with Stewie 'singing' away through the evening. We always have a laugh about it and I love Chris for making me feel so relaxed about it.

As for enjoying a meal out - I rarely worry about my stoma making noise because it's always muffled by the noisy restaurant environment, and I choose whatever I fancy - normally a spicy curry!

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Whether this is your first or umpteenth Christmas season after having your stoma surgery, I hope that you take the time to relax and enjoy all that this time of year has to offer and reflect on the journey you have taken and how your relationship with food has changed since having your stoma. I would recommend that you explore your stoma's behaviour with food and remember that the remaining part of your bowel is very adaptable. Therefore, your stoma output and food tolerance should improve over time following surgery.

## Michelle's top tips for mealtimes

I have compiled a list of handy tips for you to consider:

- Try and reduce stress before eating
- Relax at meal times
- Don't rush meals - chew every mouthful thoroughly
- Eat mindfully
- Plan your food choices around your day ('quiet foods' at work, 'noisy foods' at home)
- Have a regular meal pattern
- Avoid getting 'over full'

### The next edition

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Final date for editorial contribution to be received is 8th January 2021.

- Avoid eating too late at night if you don't want to have to empty your bag multiple times through the night.
- Drink with meals to loosen output
- Stodgy, starchy foods thicken output
- A small portion of starchy food with a salad can thicken output but allow you to still eat insoluble fibrous foods (handy tip for eating out and buffets).
- Avoid drinking alcohol on an empty stomach.
- Keep a food diary to note which foods you can tolerate and which you can't.
- Introduce new foods slowly - in small quantities.
- Cook vegetables well to break down fibres. For example: my stoma tolerates cooked carrot better than raw carrot. Although I can have some raw carrot if I chew it well.
- If you miss eating nuts get a pestle and mortar or an electric blender to crush nuts into tiny pieces and chew slowly. OR use nut butters to get the taste without the texture.
- Worried about stoma noises in sociable situations? Ask for background music - it can help muffle the noises at the dinner table and help you to relax.
- In the unfortunate situation where your stoma publicly makes itself known rather loudly, laugh it off if you are with friends or family, or blame your partner!

## Recipe: Stoma-friendly butter nut squash soup (serves 6-8)

My soup maker is my best friend this time of the year. This is my favourite soup to make. I've saved a few plastic soup cartons and reuse these to store my soups made in batch. You can freeze it if you are not going to eat it all within the next few days. I also use the leftover soup as a sauce to go into my slow cooker, or I add spices to it and make a curry with it! For batch-cooking, double up your ingredients and freeze it at home. Enjoy!

- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 1 carrot, chopped
- 2 tbsp unsalted butter/ 2tbsp olive oil
- 1 butternut squash, peeled and chopped, seeds discarded
- 3 cups vegetable stock (1 stock cube)
- 1 cup water
- Pinches of nutmeg or mixed spice, cinnamon, salt and pepper

Optional: grated ginger, chopped chilli.  
Chopped garlic.

### Method

- 1. Sauté onion, carrot, in butter/ oil:** Heat a large thick-bottomed pot on medium-high heat. Melt the butter in the pot. Add the onion, carrot and sauté for 5 minutes. Lower the heat if the vegetables begin to brown.
- 2. Cook the soup:** Add the butternut squash,

vegetable stock, and water. Bring to boil. Reduce to a simmer, cover, and simmer for 30 minutes or so, until the squash and carrots have softened.

- 3. Purée the soup:** Use a blender or soup maker to purée the soup
- 4. Add seasonings:** Add pinches of nutmeg, cinnamon, and cayenne. Add salt and pepper to taste.

If using a soup maker:

- 1) Sauté the onion and carrot for 2-3 minutes with olive oil in the soup maker. (add Garlic, chilli and ginger if desired).
- 2) Turn off the sauté button and add the chopped squash, pour in the vegetable stock, and add the spices.
- 3) Switch on the 'blend' function - wait 20 minutes
- 4) Soup is ready! Enjoy!

