

Natural Lifestyle

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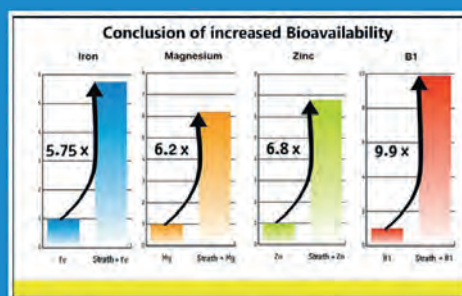
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LOVE LIFE,
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Welcome *September/October 2026*



One of the most rewarding aspects of being the proud Editor of *Natural Lifestyle* is the magazine's role in championing independent health stores. As a title dedicated to health stores and promoting not just the products found in there but the important service offered by retailers, we love nothing more than hearing from our readers about the difference their health food store has made to their wellness.

It is for this reason that we created the *Natural Lifestyle* Retailer of the Year Award, because we believe health stores deserve recognition for what they do. As shoppers in such stores will know, they are far more than a place just to buy product. They are a community resource, they provide a listening ear, expert advice, and a safe place to discuss health issues – they are so much more than other retail stores.

And this has been evidenced this month as we carried out the judging for the awards. After receiving hundreds of nominations for stores across the UK, it was whittled down to a shortlist of six wonderful stores, all making a difference to the lives of their communities. In talking to all our shortlisted stores, it confirmed what the team here at *Natural Lifestyle* knew – that health stores offer a crucial service to our local communities, and we will continue to champion them.

We are delighted to reveal our 2026 winner is the fantastic Health & Remedy, in Chard – and you can read all about it on page 14. We congratulate them, our runner-up, Fairhaven Wholefoods, as well as our shortlisted stores.

And as a final note, we thank health stores across the UK for all they do. Being in retail isn't an easy job in our current climate, and without such stores, our collective health and wellbeing would be poorer.

Rachel Symonds,
Editor

The best bits

An insight into what the *Natural Lifestyle* team have been up to this month.

It was a sightseeing trip with a view for Sales Director, Ruth, as she enjoyed a break to Lake Garda



It was game, set, match for Editor Rachel as she took to Centre Court to watch the Wimbledon Quarter Final.



September/October 2026 Contents

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REGULARS

6. INSIDE HEALTH

8. INSIDE BEAUTY

10. EXPLORE IN STORE

Why collagen is an essential for your health regime

13. EXPLORE IN STORE

Key nutrients to support healthier sleep

22. ASK THE EXPERTS

Your questions answered

30. THE LOWDOWN

Ways to find your calm

31. NATURAL LIFESTYLE GIVEAWAYS

32. RECIPES

Dishes to support your health while meeting your hunger needs

FEATURES

14. RETAILER OF THE YEAR

We are delighted to announce the deserving winner of the 2026 Natural Lifestyle Retailer of the Year

18. MENOPAUSE FOCUS

The key health and lifestyle shifts that can support women through this process

26. IMMUNE HEALTH

How to prep your health, holistically, ahead of the cold and 'flu season





Are you looking for a vitamin D supplement that is bioavailable and effective?

Get the proven benefits of sun exposure...

Without worrying about your skin

As you know, it is important to protect your skin when the sun is most powerful. Still, sun exposure is necessary in order for our skin to synthesize vitamin D, which contributes to a normal immune defense.

If we avoid the sun or somehow prevent the UV rays from reaching our skin, it will reduce our ability to make vitamin D. Just for the record, it is rather difficult to get enough vitamin D from your diet. Therefore, to maintain a reasonable amount of vitamin D in your system it may be a good idea to consider taking a supplement like D-Pearls.

D-Pearls are small, soft gelatin capsules with 20, 25, 75, 100 or 125 micrograms of vitamin D in each. This makes it easy for you to choose the right dose for the time of year and for your personal level of sun exposure.

- The vitamin D is dissolved in cold-pressed olive oil for better absorption
- Small vitamin D capsules that are easy to swallow – or chew



Pharma Nord
www.pharmanord.co.uk

Period privacy

A new cycle tracking app has launched in the UK designed to help protect women's menstrual data.

PERIOD., the Dutch cycle app, has brought its privacy-first period tracker to Britain. It comes a year after a jury in California found Meta liable for intercepting the menstruation and pregnancy data of women using the period app, Flo, the first verdict of its kind.

PERIOD. works without asking for a user's name, carries no advertising and sells nothing about the women who use it. It was built by Lisa Volkers, former Chief Editor of the Dutch title, *LINDA.meiden*, and her partner, Diederick Trampe, after Lisa sought answers about her own body and found apps that wanted far more than they needed to give them.

"I wanted one thing, which was to understand my own cycle, and instead I was handing over everything about myself to companies I knew nothing about," she explained. "So we built the opposite. You hold your data, you see what it is used for, and you can delete all of it in a second.



No pink, no goddesses, no paywall in front of the basics. It is a serious piece of engineering about women's health, built for the women using it and not for the advertisers who want their data."

Basic cycle tracking is free. Data is held on servers in the European Union, and users can export or delete everything they have entered at any time. PERIOD. plus, the paid tier, adds an AI assistant that answers questions about symptoms and hormones in plain language across 19 languages and does not train on what users tell it.



EATING FOR AUTUMNAL HEALTH

Autumn is a time seasonal affective disorder (SAD) can emerge, and a leading nutritionist is encouraging Brits to consider the role of diet.

As the seasons shift, SAD will affect around two million people in the UK, according to research from Nuffield Health and the Royal College of Psychiatrists. Sufferers feel low, tired, eat more, and crave sugary foods.

Dr Lucy Williamson Registered Public Nutritionist and gut health expert, explained: "Our gut microbes produce compounds that through the remarkable gut-brain axis, influence pathways involved in mood and brain function, affecting mood, stress resilience and mental wellbeing. This becomes particularly relevant as we move into autumn, when many people notice a change in mood or energy, and some experience SAD. While supporting our gut health isn't a treatment for SAD, nurturing a healthy gut microbiome is one valuable part of a broader approach to building resilience through the darker months."

So, what dietary advice does Dr Williamson offer for SAD season?

- Include fermented foods little and often.
- Aim for 30 different plant foods each week, remembering that fruit, vegetables, grains, beans, pulses, herbs, spices, nuts and seeds all count.
- Eat seasonally where possible and don't overlook frozen produce.

She added that sourcing food from regenerative or organic producers who use farming methods that restore soils is good for us and the planet.

"The more we reconnect with seasonal eating, diverse plant foods and the stories behind where our food comes from, the more we reconnect with the biology that has evolved alongside nature for thousands of years," she added.



Inside... HEALTH



Study reveals one in 10 at risk of vitamin C deficiency

New research has found one in 10 people are failing to hit their optimal vitamin C intake.

The UK study, led by researchers at Ulster University, found significant gaps remain, despite average vitamin C intakes being broadly in line with recommendations. Almost one in five people are not getting their optimal amount of vitamin C per day, while nearly 10 per cent – an estimated 6.99m – are consuming less than 25mg, which is considered too low and equates to around a third of an orange per day. Most concerning, almost one in 100 – or nearly 700,000 people – are risking deficiency, with intakes below the equivalent of an eighth of an orange per day, or less than one per week.

Older men and teenage girls were the groups most at risk of low vitamin C intakes, highlighting the need for targeted dietary strategies, the researchers wrote in the *Frontiers* journal.

Using dietary mathematical modelling from over 3,500 participants who took part in the UK National Diet and Nutrition Survey, the study explored how different amounts of fruit juice could affect vitamin C intake. The findings suggest that increasing the number of people drinking a daily 150ml glass of fruit juice would have the greatest impact on vitamin C intakes, with 100 per cent fruit juice currently contributing around 25 per cent of vitamin C intake in UK adults' diets.

Dr Maeve Kerr and Dr Alyson Hill, who led the study, commented: "Achieving the recommended five a-day is difficult for many people, however, this research has shown that 100 per cent fruit juice is a convenient and accessible source of vitamin C."

Vitamin C is essential for normal immune function, as well as supporting skin health, collagen formation and wound healing. In rare cases, severe deficiency can lead to scurvy, with symptoms including joint and muscle pain, fatigue, swollen and bleeding gums, and developing red or blue spots on the skin.

WE
LOVE

PHARMA NORD D-PEARLS – as we head towards autumn, this is a common time to be lacking vitamin D. Top up your levels with Pharma Nord's D-Pearls, small, soft gelatin capsules with 20, 25, 75, 100 or 125mcg of vitamin D in each – this makes it easy to choose the right dose for the time of year and for your personal level of sun exposure. The vitamin D is dissolved in cold-pressed olive oil.

PUKKA HERBS UNWIND TEA – a new addition to the Pukka tea range, Unwind combines sweet blueberry, chamomile, adaptogenic ashwagandha and nootropic lion's mane for a fruity cup of calm. It is 100 per cent organic, Fair for Life Certified, and can be enjoyed hot or cold as part of a daily wellbeing ritual.

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Dealing with skin dehydration

After one of the hottest summers, experts are warning of 'drought dehydration' for our skin.

According to Fresha, UK searches for 'dry skin' have climbed to 362,000 a month. And as the UK experiences its driest July in decades, experts are warning prolonged drought could be creating a hidden skincare problem they're calling 'drought dehydration'; weeks of exceptionally low rainfall and low humidity can weaken the skin barrier by accelerating moisture loss, leaving skin feeling tighter, drier and more sensitive.

Danielle Louise, Hair and Beauty Expert at Fresha, explained: "Your skin barrier relies on water to stay healthy. Once it starts losing moisture faster than it can replace it, you'll notice tightness after cleansing, flaky patches, increased sensitivity and make-up that doesn't apply as smoothly. The scalp is affected in the same way, becoming dry, itchy or flaky because it's exposed to the same dry air. Even people with oily or combination skin can become dehydrated during prolonged dry weather."

So, what can you do to help?

Danielle advised: "Think about layering hydration rather than piling on thicker creams. Apply a hydrating serum containing hyaluronic acid or glycerin while skin is slightly damp, then lock everything in with a moisturiser containing ceramides or squalane. That combination helps slow moisture loss and supports your skin barrier."

Simple habits can make a noticeable difference: "Keeping showers lukewarm, using gentle cleansers and moisturising within a few minutes of getting out can help skin retain hydration. Low humidity can dry out the scalp. Switching to a gentle hydrating shampoo and reducing heat styling for a few days often helps restore comfort."



NaturalLifestyle RECOMMENDS

This issue, we delve into inner skin health with our pick of skin supplements.

Green People Advanced Pro-Collagen Skin Defence

– a vegan supplement formulated to support the skin's natural collagen. At the heart of the formula is Vollagen, a 100 per cent vegan complex that delivers all 18 amino acids associated with collagen. Developed to help build, protect and support the skin's natural collagen, it targets visible signs of ageing, environmental stress and the changing needs of menopausal skin. It also includes vitamin C, zinc, copper iron, and grape seed extract.

Aegle's Clear Skin Complex

– if you've struggled with adult acne, Aegle's might have the answer; Clear Skin Complex is crafted for women dealing with hormonal breakouts. It contains broccoli seed extract and rosemary extract, powerhouses known for their hormone-balancing benefits, chromium picolinate, and vitamins A and D3 to balance blood sugar and support hormonal regulation, along with prebiotics and probiotics, because a healthy gut is crucial for healthy skin. It also contains Champagne grape seed and melon extract, rich in antioxidants to brighten and protect your skin for a more radiant complexion.

HOLISTIC HAIR RESCUE



If your hair is feeling the effects of the hot weather, Fushi Wellbeing can help. The Ayurvedic brand's Really Good Hair Oil combines freshly pressed argan oil with nutrient-rich botanicals to deeply nourish dry, damaged hair.

Unlike many hair oils, Fushi's formula is freshly pressed to maximise potency. It's can be used as a pre-wash treatment, overnight mask, or to create the perfect slicked-back bun, while replenishing moisture lost through UV, chlorine, salt water and heat styling.

Argan oil is rich in antioxidants, essential fatty acids and vitamin E and helps improve hair elasticity, reduce breakage and split ends, while restoring softness and shine. Brahmi is used to nourish the scalp and support healthy growth by stimulating hair follicles and improving scalp circulation, while avocado oil is packed with oleic acid, healthy fats and vitamins. It penetrates the hair shaft to deeply moisturise, strengthen dry strands and enhance shine. It also contains neem, known for its antimicrobial and anti-fungal properties, which helps nourish the scalp, calm irritation and support healthy-looking hair.



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Healthy SLEEP GUIDE

Holistic advice to help you to build healthy sleep habits.

A worrying statistic from The Sleep Charity reveals nearly half of British adults are getting less than the recommended seven to nine hours of sleep a night – worrying, yet hardly surprising when you consider the raft of factors in our modern lives that can leave us sleep depleted. Whether it's a poor diet, a busy lifestyle with little downtime, alcohol, caffeine, excess stress or too much time spent on screens, many of us are simply not allowing our bodies the ability to sleep.

And we must recognise how much of a problem this is; one or two nights of poor sleep isn't going to do a huge amount, other than leaving you tired the next day and feeling less alert. But if this is prolonged, it can lead to stress and anxiety, and your immune system may not function as well. Over time, poor sleep has been connected to weight gain, high blood pressure, and cardiovascular disease. It can also affect hormone balance and can even cause issues with blood sugar control.

The role of nutrition

People can fail to connect how nutritionally healthy you are – which includes your diet and your supplement routine – with your ability to sleep. And while it is only part of the picture, it does play an important role.

Let's start with the factors that need to be removed; ultra-processed foods lack nutrients and can cause blood sugar imbalance, leading to a rollercoaster that leaves you craving more sugar. You may also want to minimise carbohydrate-rich

foods too close to bedtime as they can disrupt your sleep.

Instead, prioritise wholefoods and a balanced diet that includes protein, fibre and good fats. Try to focus on foods that offer a range of nutrients, such as green leafy veg, nuts, seeds and legumes, which are all magnesium-rich, as well as plenty of fruit and veg. Montmorency cherries can offer melatonin, which we need to help us to sleep. Added to that, foods that contain the amino acid, L-tryptophan, such as turkey, eggs, oats, and dairy products, provide the building blocks for serotonin and melatonin.

You could also add in helpful herbal teas instead of caffeine; we love chamomile and valerian for their calming, sleep-supportive properties, while also keeping you hydrated.

And when you eat is also important; eating too late at night means your body has not had the time to digest and we go to bed with a full stomach. Try to space your meals out through the day and ideally, stop eating three hours before bed.

Supplements for sleep

There are some wonderful supplements, including vitamins, minerals and herbs, that are well-known to support healthy sleep – we would always suggest visiting your health food store for advice based on your needs, and be sure to tell them if you are taking any medication.

As a general guide, supplements to support sleep includes:

• **Magnesium** – there is good reason this mineral is often referred to as 'nature's relaxant', as it is involved in more than 300 processes and one of

the key areas is around relaxation and nervous system function. It is a fantastic supplement to take before bed to gently calm and unwind.

• **L-theanine** – this is an amino acid that helps to quieten the mind. It is often paired with the herb, lemon balm, which is calming and relaxing.

• **Ashwagandha** – known as an adaptogen, this herb can ease the body's stress response.

Saffron – this is known to help with both relaxation but also sleep quality.

• **Valerian** – this herb is well-known for its ability to support sleep, and is ideally taken in the hours before bed as you wind down.



A healthy routine

In addition to a focus on nutrients, we must also adopt simple habits that, when you follow consistently, will really help you get into a healthy sleep pattern.

Try to stick to the same sleep schedule, even at weekends, so that your body knows when it is expected to sleep and wake. And it's important to get outside through the day to expose yourself to daylight and top up your vitamin D.

Movement is also important, so try to exercise regularly, although a note of caution; try to avoid intense cardio sessions in the evening as it can make it hard for your body to wind down.

Try also to minimise use of screens at least an hour before bed as these emit blue light, which can disrupt your circadian rhythm. Meditation or mindfulness are ideal practices before bed to slowly calm the mind.

TERRANOVA NUTRITION - MAGNESIUM [AS TRAACS™ BISGLYCINATE] 100MG COMPLEX

When considering to supplement with Magnesium, choosing a form that is highly tolerable, digestible and well-absorbed are important factors, this is why Terranova have selected an optimised Bisglycinate form trademarked as TRAACS™ [The Real Amino Acid Chelate System] from Albion™. Based on years of extensive research, TRAACS provides a fully reacted Magnesium Bisglycinate that ensures superior bio-availability for supplementation. Further enhanced by P5-P [Vitamin B6] and synergistic wholefoods such as Avena Sativa, Nettle Leaf & Pumpkin Seed. This formulation is designed for routine daily use within a balanced diet, supporting consistent magnesium intake as part of everyday nutrition. www.terranovahealth.com



NATURESPPLUS MAGTEIN® MAGNESIUM L-THREONATE

NaturesPlus Magtein® delivers Magnesium L-Threonate, a highly bioavailable form of magnesium that has been studied for its role in supporting normal psychological function and contributing to the healthy functioning of the nervous system. This advanced chelated form is designed for optimal absorption and effective utilisation within the body. Featuring 100% guaranteed Magtein® magnesium L-threonate — with no magnesium oxide — the formula offers a carefully selected source of this essential mineral for those looking to support their nervous system wellbeing as part of their daily routine. Discover the difference with Magtein® Magnesium by NaturesPlus. www.naturesplus.co.uk – £ 36.95



MEET GLORI DEEP SLEEP – NATURAL SUPPORT FOR A BETTER NIGHT

Glori Deep Sleep is a Soil Association Certified Organic and vegan sleep supplement, proudly made in Britain. Created for those seeking a natural approach to restful sleep, Glori combines organic Sea Lettuce, Ashwagandha, Valerian Root, Lemon Balm, Chamomile and organic Zinc in a carefully considered plant-based formula. Each ingredient has been thoughtfully selected to complement your evening routine and support your natural approach to wellbeing. With certified organic ingredients and a commitment to quality, Glori Deep Sleep brings together nature's carefully selected botanicals in one simple, plant-based formula, designed to help you make the most of your night-time routine. www.gloriuk.com



GENTLE MAGNESIUM BISGLYCINATE

Lamberts Gentle Magnesium provides 150mg elemental magnesium in the well absorbed and well tolerated bisglycinate form. This form is popular as an alternative for those with a sensitive digestion as it is gentle on the stomach. Many people recommend it as part of a relaxing nighttime regime, as magnesium contributes to normal muscle and psychological function. It can also contribute to a reduction in tiredness and fatigue, making it ideal for those who struggle with their energy levels. Most people in the UK fail to consume a sufficient level of this mineral from their diets so supplementation can be useful. www.lambertshealthcare.co.uk



TIRED BUT STILL WIDE AWAKE

You know the feeling. The body is exhausted, the mind is still going and rest never quite arrives. Ashwagandha is the herb Ayurveda has turned to for this for thousands of years, traditionally used to steady the nervous system and support deeper, more restorative sleep. It doesn't sedate. It helps the body find its own baseline again, with subtle calm in the first week and fuller benefits building over four to eight weeks. Ayurvedic Organic Ashwagandha uses whole root, certified organic, with no fillers. Take one in the evening. Available in 60's or 120's at independent health stores and online at ayurvediq.co.uk



GET READY TO SLEEP WELL

A.Vogel Sleep Well Dissolvable Granules are an easy-to-use, plant-based food supplement designed to support a calm, restful night's sleep and help you wake refreshed. With a unique blend of lemon balm extract, lettuce extract, magnesium and L-tryptophan, the convenient orange-flavoured granules dissolve directly in the mouth—no water required. Suitable for adults and children aged 12+, they're non-addictive and fit effortlessly into your bedtime routine. Magnesium contributes to normal psychological function and the normal functioning of the nervous system, while lemon balm helps maintain a normal sleep www.avogel.co.uk



TERRANOVA NUTRITION - SUPER SKIN DRINK 90GRAMS

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www.terranovahealth.com/terranova-super-skin-drink/



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Ideal for those seeking natural support for beauty and mobility, it nourishes your body from within for radiance and strength. This helps with everyday health and appearance. Marine Collagen Powder retails at £29.99 for 250g. Contact HealthAid Ltd on **020 8426 3400** for purchase and stockist information or visit www.healthaid.co.uk



NEW PUKKA GUT HEALTH & UNWIND BLENDS

Support everyday wellbeing with Pukka's new herbal tea blends. Pukka Unwind combines sweet blueberry, chamomile, adaptogenic ashwagandha and nootropic lion's mane for a fruity cup of calm, while Pukka Gut Health blends warming ginger, refreshing peppermint and naturally fermented kombucha to support digestive balance. Both blends are 100% organic, Fair for Life Certified, and can be enjoyed hot or cold as part of a daily wellbeing ritual. Featuring fully recyclable packaging and compostable tea bags. @pukkaherbs for more information.

www.pukkaherbs.com/uk/en



QSILICA PLANT BASED COLLAGEN FOR YOUTHFUL SKIN

Experience the future of ethical skincare with our plant-based collagen alternative. Formulated with scientifically backed Vollagen®, this breakthrough supplement directly replicates the precise amino acid profile found in human Type I collagen. Unlike heavy animal-derived alternatives that require complex digestion, our isolated amino acids are completely water-dispersible. This allows your body to effortlessly absorb and utilise the nutrients immediately.

Infused with cell-protecting antioxidants, this daily formulation actively targets the signs of aging. Whether you prefer convenient capsules or a versatile powder, making this a part of your beauty ritual will visibly diminish fine lines, enhance moisture retention, and restore youthful skin elasticity.

www.qsilica.co.uk



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www.sunflowerfamily.co.uk



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As we age, our body's natural collagen production declines, contributing to the appearance of fine lines and reduced skin elasticity.

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to support your daily beauty routine. Each ready-to-drink sachet combines premium hydrolysed marine collagen with vitamin C, biotin and acerola extract. Vitamin C contributes to normal collagen formation for the normal function of skin, while biotin helps maintain healthy skin and hair. Convenient, great-tasting and easy to enjoy on the go, Collagen Shot™ makes supporting radiant, youthful-looking skin effortless—one sachet at a time.

www.newnordic.co.uk





EXPLORE IN STORE



COLLAGEN *choice*

It's never been easier to find collagen supplements but choosing the right one for your needs can be confusing. Here, we break down why collagen is beneficial, and the best supplement for you.

We're increasingly told we should all be taking collagen, and while there is no arguing with how important it is for health and wellness, it can feel like a minefield to know what you should be taking. Whether it's around the type that's right for you, or lack of clarity over the best delivery format, choosing the right collagen for your individual needs can feel challenging.

Do you need it?

The short answer is it depends on your age, lifestyle, and health needs. For example, the younger you are, the easier to produce collagen, whereas the older we get, the lower our levels. That said, given the many functions that collagen contributes to, most people could benefit from a collagen supplement.

But why is it so important? Collagen is the body's most abundant protein, made from amino acids. It provides structure and support to the body, including our joints, bones, tendons, and ligaments, not to mention skin. Therefore, when we lack in collagen, it can show with wrinkles, loss of elasticity, sagging skin, hair loss and brittle nails, as well as joint stiffness and discomfort.

The reasons why levels can be low are varied, but many are well within your control; for example, smoking, a nutrient-depleted diet that favours

processed food, sun exposure and too much sugar all play a role.

Up your intake

There are different ways you can boost your collagen intake, and some of this can be done through food, but supplements are also important.

The richest sources of collagen include bone broths and fish skin. You can also focus on protein-rich foods as these provide the amino acids required to produce collagen. Recommended foods include chicken, fish, eggs, and pulses. You also need to ensure vitamin C in your diet as this nutrient helps support collagen production; ensure plenty of fruits such as berries or citrus fruits, and vegetables.

If you decide to supplement, these will generally be made from bovine or marine sources. Ideally, seek those made with hydrolysed collagen peptides, which are broken down into smaller peptides and believed to be absorbed better.

From a quality perspective, try to opt for supplements that come from certified grass fed, wild caught or organic sources as these will cover both quality but also animal welfare.

It's important to note that if you are a vegetarian or vegan, there are no suitable collagen supplements as it cannot be sourced from plants. Instead, you can opt for a supplement that provides the amino acids and nutrients needed to support collagen production.

KNOW YOUR TYPE

You know you want to take a collagen supplement but then comes the challenge of choosing the right one, given the many products made with different types.

It's worth considering what you want a collagen supplement for to determine what you need, with a general guide around the most common types being:

- **Type I** – this makes up around 90 per cent of the body's collagen. It is linked to skin, hair and nails, as well as bones, and so is commonly used in supplements.
- **Type II** – best for your joint health, as it supports cartilage.
- **Type III** – this one is good for skin.

There is a total of 28 types of collagen, so talking to your health food store about your needs, and the best supplement for you, is crucial. It is worth taking a supplement that has a mix of types to get a range of benefits.

Natural Lifestyle

Retailer of the year 2026

PROUDLY SUPPORTED BY



Health & Remedy *gets* GOLD

We are delighted to announce the 2026 *Natural Lifestyle* Retailer of the Year is Health & Remedy, in Chard.

Being in retail in our modern world brings with it many challenges; competition from the big supermarkets and online trading, a cost-of-living crisis, not to mention rising operating costs. But independent health stores, through all these challenges, continue to show up each and every day with a listening ear, advice, quality products and more, to ensure they support the health and wellbeing of their communities.

It is for this reason we developed the *Natural Lifestyle* Retailer of the Year award many years ago, and why we continue to run it each year, because we believe health food stores are unique and special places to shop, and this should be recognised.

And we are delighted to announce our 2026 winner is Health & Remedy, based in the Somerset town of Chard. Run by Cris and Jason Wootton, what this pair have accomplished in not much more than a year of being open is impressive; wanting to create a better work/life balance, they both left the large health business they were involved with, and decided to return to Chard, where Jason is from. Finding a shop unit, they opened the store in 2025 and have already earned a reputation as an important community resource.

The sheer number of nominations received for Health & Remedy was impressive, but it was what customers were telling us that really struck the judges. One wrote: "They could win with just their personalities. They've brought life back into our town with their energy. The shop is literally filled to the brim with everything you need for a healthy lifestyle. Nothing is too much trouble and no matter how many people

are in the shop, they always take time to explain, recommend or guide you in the right direction."

Another nomination read: "Health & Remedy have brought positivity to the town. Not only do they provide a unique shop experience with their daily tea to try, they regularly do samples of products to try which focuses on health and nutrition. Whenever I have been in, the knowledge in their products and help they provide is always amazing. Their social media is engaging and fun, always bringing a smile to my face. Every visit is greeted with warmth and friendliness, which makes every visit a joy. Not only have they brought such a great shop to the town, as they have grown, they have managed to create employment too. Cris and Jason are a ray of sunshine and deserve every success in their fabulous business."

One customer commented: "They have literally changed the entire vibe of the high street in the town. They've united fellow small businesses, supported local events, challenged social stereotypes within the town, and made a huge impact on the community – and this is all on top of having the most amazing range of natural, organic health and beauty products (and if they don't have it, they'll find it for you). Jason and Chris could have just opened a shop and quietly ran it. They didn't. They took a shop that had a history and revived it to be a must-see focal point on our high street through the most skilful blend of marketing and proactive social community engagement I think I've ever seen. Their list of contributions to the local community is simply too long to list."

Finally, another said: "When they moved into



WINNERS HEALTH & REMEDY



Chard, the town instantly lifted by their positivity. They personally guided me with some of my menopause symptoms, directing me to the best products and checked with me that they were working a few weeks after. They are a beacon to emulate and the whole town is better for their presence, and, in turn, everyone's health will improve. They engage and encourage everyone to be healthier and if you harness their ethos, you do feel better. I am so glad they are here. They lift everyone up."

Commenting on their award win, Cris (pictured right) and Jason (left) told *Natural Lifestyle*: "We're so humbled that we received such lovely nominations from our customers and supporters. It makes everything that we've achieved in the last 11 months worthwhile. It's further proof that with the right energy, products and service, the high street is alive and well."

Congratulating them on their award win, Rachel Symonds, Editor of *Natural Lifestyle*, commented: "Cris and Jason shone through during our judging, not just for creating a successful health store in such a short period of time, but for their passion and positivity – they approach each day in their store with an enthusiastic, positive mindset – nothing is too

much trouble for their customers and they clearly love what they do. We also loved the support they show to other local businesses and how immersed they have become in the local community.

"The quality of the nominations from customers told us how much of an impact Health & Remedy has made to the local community, and we are delighted to give them the recognition they so clearly deserve."

Liz Smith, Director at Bio-nature, which distributes brands including Terranova and sponsors our awards, added: "At Terranova Nutrition, we're incredibly proud to work alongside retailers who share our commitment to quality, education, and customer care. We've been blown away by the incredible number of votes received for this year's Retailer of the Year award. The level of support shown for independent retailers has been truly inspiring.

"Congratulations to our worthy winner, Health & Remedy. This award is a testament to the trust, passion, and dedication you have built within your community. To earn this level of recognition from those who support you every day is a remarkable achievement, and one that is thoroughly deserved. We're proud to celebrate your success."

OUR DESERVING RUNNER-UP

This year's runner-up is the wonderful Fairhaven Wholefoods, in Letchworth, Hertfordshire, which has been a family business for 40 years, first run by the Sternbergs, and since 2008, has been owned by the Timms family (pictured).

The store is incredibly well-stocked, supports other local businesses, and is committed to helping customers be greener through education as well as its vast supply of refills. It is a one-stop shop for all you need to live a healthy, holistic and greener lifestyle, and the level of loyalty from customers who value the support and advice they receive shone through in both the nominations and during the judging.

Some of the fantastic nominations included from one customer, who said: "This is a lovely family business with wonderful, helpful, friendly staff, who feel more like family at times! They are always willing to offer a listening ear and sometimes a cup of tea or even a hug! Not to mention the wonderful array of very pure food and ethical gifts. As a customer of many years standing, they are the best as far as I'm concerned."

And another told us: "The best health food shop around with variety and healthy ingredients. I don't know what I would do without this store so locally and hope it will be around for ages! The staff are so helpful and smiley too, they honestly go out of their way to make your shopping experience perfect!"

Tressa Timms, who owns the business with husband, Neil, and whose son, Stefan, is to take over the business, told us: "To be shortlisted for *Natural Lifestyle* Retailer of the Year was an incredible feeling, but to be awarded Runner-up, out of such a large number of health stores, is a real honour. The Fairhaven family would like to pay tribute to our wonderful customers, who took the time to share their health stories and nominate us, but also to our tremendous, knowledgeable staff members, who always take the time to listen to our customers with empathy and kindness. We describe ourselves as cogwheels that move synergistically, working together for the good health of our community."



OUR SHORTLIST

In addition to our winner and runner-up, we were also delighted to shortlist a range of wonderful stores, all serving their local communities with support and advice, and deservedly earning a reputation for excellence. Our shortlist was:

Modern Herbals, Halifax: This long-established store has built up an impressive reputation for the advice and support offered. One customer wrote in their nomination: "Modern Herbals truly deserve to win, their products are clean ethical and nourishing, they always do their utmost best to advise customers about what to take to improve their wellbeing and health. The store is well presented organised and thoroughly cleaned at all times. I have been a loyal customer for many years, and I can say I would not choose any other health store except Modern Herbals." While another said: "Staff are so patient, kind, caring and always have a smile, product knowledge is so good, and the window display is always organised so nice and colourful."

The Fig, Derby: Having been in Derby for decades, The Fig has built a strong following in the town. One shopper told us: "Simply the best. Mel has amazing knowledge, is incredibly helpful, as well as a genuinely lovely person to deal with. The shop looks (and smells) fantastic. Her knowledge has done wonders in finding natural remedies for my autistic son who has severe allergic rhinitis. She is a life saver." And another wrote: "Customer service is excellent and Mel is friendly and welcoming with an excellent knowledge of people's needs regarding natural health remedies. The shop, though small, is bright and cheerful with everything displayed to catch your eye and easy to find, with a vast range."

Whitstable Nutrition Centre, Whitstable: A family business owned by Michelle Newbold, whose late father established it many years ago, Whitstable Nutrition Centre has a loyal following. One nominee wrote: "For almost two decades, I have been a loyal customer of Whitstable Nutrition Centre. This is a family run business led by the wonderful Michelle, whose knowledge and guidance is unparalleled. I was very unwell a few years ago and truly believe that Michelle's kindness and professional guidance allowed me to regain my strength and wellbeing in a gentle and completely holistic way. I shall always be hugely grateful for that." And another said: "Fantastic shop, huge range of health food goodies and always service with a smile. Michelle and her team have a wealth of knowledge, and the family heritage shines through. Always a pleasure to shop and have a good old natter!"

Wholistic Roots, Southbourne: A new shop that has only been open just over a year, it has spent no time building a strong name in the area. One customer said: "Wholistic Roots have been open for about a year and a half, and they have totally changed the high street for the better. People come in at their wits end, desperate for help with their health they're simply not receiving in usual medical avenues. Mel, the owner, who is a naturopath and nutritionist, has had an immensely positive effect on so many people with precise, conscious and well-educated support." While another commented: "Mel is incredibly knowledgeable. Whatever the ailment, she knows exactly how to tackle it. She was the second person I told I was pregnant and has been an amazing support throughout with supplements etc. She's sunshine every day and it's always so lovely to have a chat and learn something new from her. It's such a hub and a staple in our local community."

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Menopause *nourishment*

We talk about the menopause so much these days, yet many women are still struggling with symptoms. So, while it's positive there's greater awareness, we still have a long way to go to ensure women understand how they can support their health and, in turn, ease their symptoms.

It is an area in which natural and holistic health offers much promise; from a healthy diet and lifestyle, through to supplements and holistic therapies, there is much you can do to help yourself.

Lindsay Powers, Nutritional Therapist and Head of Nutrition at Good Health Naturally, commented: "Women have experienced menopause throughout history, and there is little evidence that the menopause itself is inherently worse today than it was a generation ago. What has changed is awareness. Women are now more likely to recognise and talk about symptoms that may previously have been dismissed as simply part of ageing.

"That said, there is still a significant gap in knowledge and understanding. Much of the conversation has focused on the medicalisation of menopause, with HRT and, in some cases, antidepressants often being the first options discussed. While these can be valuable tools for many women, there is often less emphasis on the role that diet, lifestyle changes, stress management and natural supplements can play in supporting wellbeing during this transition. A more holistic, balanced approach alongside medical options is still lacking in mainstream guidance, which can leave many women feeling unsupported and unsure where to turn."

Keri Briggs, Senior Brand Specialist at Lamberts, added: "A study led by UCL uncovered some interesting statistics regarding this time of life; 94 per cent of women had not been taught about the menopause and 49 per cent felt uninformed about it. Unsurprisingly, this led to nearly 16 per cent of women dreading this period of their lives and 63 per cent finding it hard to cope with. Given that this is a process that 51 per cent of the population will experience, the lack of knowledge and available information seems unbelievable, and most women are forced to do their own research about how to cope more easily with the symptoms they experience."

The menopause is a hugely transitional time in a woman's life and requires nurture and nourishment, as our natural health experts discuss.



The science of menopause

Most people understand the menopause is related to the end of periods, but it's important to be aware of what actually causes the range of symptoms.

Keri explained: "Menopause is a term used to describe the one day which is marked by the absence of the menstrual cycle for a period of 12 months and can only be established after this point. However, many people describe the period leading up to this point, technically called the perimenopause, by the same name. Anything after this point is post-menopause and symptoms can also continue for several years after the menopause has occurred.

"As women reach, on average, their mid-40s, the level of oocytes (cells which mature into an egg) naturally decreases to the point at which follicle stimulating hormone will start to rise, due to a lack of feedback from these oocytes. Oestrogen levels will initially fluctuate and then decline, and it is this hormone which is responsible for many of the effects most associated with perimenopause."

Slawek Gromadzki, who works in nutritional support/research and development at HealthAid, went on: "The foundational cause of menopausal symptoms is the natural, accelerated loss of ovarian follicles, known as follicular atresia, which brings about a decline in the production of primary reproductive hormones, specifically oestrogen and progesterone. When the relative ratios of oestrogen, progesterone, and testosterone fluctuate and ultimately drop, the hypothalamus – the brain's master thermostat – loses its regulatory stability, misinterpreting internal signals and generating various symptoms, like

hot flashes.

"This hormonal shift can be exacerbated by underlying unmanaged blood sugar instability or hypoglycaemia, poor neurotransmitter synthesis, and depleted adrenal health. When a woman's body enters this transition with pre-existing metabolic inflammation and a lack of stabilising progesterone to counter the drop in oestrogen, the central nervous system becomes highly hyperactive, multiplying the frequency and severity of symptoms."

And we should be aware of the potential health risks that can arise post-menopause.

Slawek explained: "The sustained absence of oestrogen exposes a woman's body to a much higher risk of silent, degenerative health conditions that require proactive management. The most common is a loss of bone mineral density, leading to osteoporosis, because oestrogen plays a vital role in inhibiting bone-resorbing cells. When it disappears, bone breakdown outpaces bone formation, particularly if a woman has spent decades consuming an acidic diet high in animal proteins (including dairy) and low in weight-bearing exercise.

"Simultaneously, the cardiovascular system loses the natural vascular protection provided by oestrogen, which leads to an increased risk of arterial stiffness, elevated blood pressure, high cholesterol, and chronic cardiovascular disease. Additionally, the post-menopausal drop in hormones alters brain metabolism, lowering the utilisation of glucose in brain cells and increasing a woman's long-term vulnerability to cognitive decline, memory impairment, and neurodegenerative conditions like dementia."

Symptom triggers

Some women will suffer with a broader range of symptoms than others, but what are the most commonly experienced?

Keri advised: "Symptoms are often considered to be limited to hot flushes and night sweats, and this can be all that is experienced as they approach perimenopause. However, there are a huge range of symptoms and not knowing what to expect can make the process much harder for women, and those around them at home and work, to deal with them effectively.

"Two of the most common symptoms are hot flushes/flushes and night sweats, known as vasomotor symptoms, with 72 per cent experiencing hot flushes and 58 per cent having night sweats, with sleep disturbances affecting 64 per cent. The cause is not clear, but it is thought fluctuations in oestrogen may lower endorphins and increase production of noradrenaline and serotonin, triggering increased heat loss. However, there are many less well-known, but equally if not more problematic symptoms. These include vaginal dryness, insomnia, mood swings and weight gain. Fatigue, depression, loss of libido, brain fog, hair loss and anxiety are also noted.

"Most of these symptoms are caused either directly or indirectly by the drop in oestrogen; decreases in oestrogen can cause lower serotonin, which is linked to depression and anxiety. Many are also inter-related as low serotonin can cause sleep

and appetite issues, poor sleep can cause low mood and cognitive issues and vice versa, and hot flushes and night sweats can make women feel low, anxious and cause sleep disturbances."

Slawek went on: "On a psychological level, fluctuating hormones trigger rapid mood swings, irritability, anxiety, panic attacks, depressive episodes, and cognitive challenges often referred to as 'menopause brain', characterised by memory lapses and a distinct lack of concentration. Less common or frequently overlooked symptoms include heart palpitations, muscle and joint pain due to systemic inflammation, and metabolic changes that cause weight gain, particularly around the abdomen. Other changes may include thinning hair, dry skin, vaginal dryness, a decline in libido, an increased susceptibility to chronic urinary tract infections, and even an underlying decline in lung function and structural respiratory efficiency."

So, what is it that can determine a woman's menopause experience?

Lindsay explained: "Modifiable factors such as diet, exercise, stress levels, and sleep quality play a significant role in shaping a woman's menopausal experience. The typical Western lifestyle, high in processed foods, caffeine, sugary snacks, stress, and low in physical activity, relaxation, and restorative

sleep, can disrupt hormonal balance and potentially worsen menopause symptoms.

"In contrast, women in some cultures, such as Japan, often report far fewer or even no noticeable menopausal symptoms. Research suggests diet is a major contributing factor. In particular, the high intake of soy-based foods, such as soybeans, edamame, miso, tempeh, and tofu, provides phytoestrogens and isoflavones, plant compounds with a chemical structure similar to oestrogen, which may help naturally support hormonal balance. Other sources include flax seeds and red clover."

Slawek added: "Several biological and lifestyle factors can dictate how severely a woman will suffer through the menopausal transition. Chief among these is chronic, unmanaged stress, which overworks the adrenal glands; because the adrenals are designed to act as a secondary production site for sex hormones when the ovaries decline, adrenal fatigue directly intensifies hormonal drops. A lifetime of severe nutritional deprivation, specifically diets rich in refined carbohydrates, sugars, and inflammatory industrial seed oils, starves the endocrine organs of the raw materials required for manufacturing balanced hormones. Physical inactivity (or a sedentary lifestyle) further impairs metabolic flexibility and circulatory health, while high exposure to environmental endocrine-disrupting chemicals like BPA, phthalates, parabens, and conventional, hormone-injected meats increases the risk of erratic and severe symptoms."

There is also a clear dietary aspect.

"Certain dietary habits can make menopausal symptoms worse. Excess sugar and refined carbohydrates may contribute to energy crashes, mood fluctuations and weight gain, while excessive caffeine can worsen anxiety, palpitations and sleep disturbances. Alcohol is another common trigger, often exacerbating hot flushes, night sweats and disrupted sleep," Lindsay explained.

"Japanese women traditionally eat a diet rich in omega 3 fatty acids from fish, with plenty of green vegetables and a lower intake of refined carbohydrates. They also tend to maintain a healthy weight and stay physically active, factors to positively influence hormone health and symptom severity."

Healthy patterns

A simple, yet consistent approach to your diet and lifestyle can help with your symptom management. But what does that look like?

Lindsay suggested: "A healthy eating plan should focus on nutrient-dense whole foods.

Plenty of vegetables, fruits, legumes, nuts, seeds and fibre-rich whole grains can support gut, heart and metabolic health. Adequate protein is

particularly important to maintain muscle

mass and strength, while healthy fats from foods such as oily fish, olive oil and avocados support cardiovascular health. Key nutrients including calcium, magnesium, vitamin D and K are essential for healthy bones, while omega 3 fatty acids support heart health. Staying well hydrated and including antioxidant-rich foods can support healthy ageing and overall wellbeing during the postmenopausal years."



MENOPAUSE

Keri added: "Following a Mediterranean style diet is one of the most useful steps. This diet focuses on polyphenol, potassium and magnesium-rich fruits and vegetables, foods such as nuts and seeds, which contain omega 3 and 6 fatty acids, olive oil and lean meats and oily fish, such as herring, mackerel, salmon, and sardines, which are also rich in omega 3 fats. Processed foods are avoided, and the emphasis is on the consumption of fresh, unprocessed, or minimally processed foods which are naturally much lower in sugar, salt and trans and hydrogenated fats."

And from a lifestyle perspective, adopting healthy routines is important.

Keri recommended: "There are several lifestyle medicines with excellent effect for many perimenopausal issues. Hypnotherapy has been shown to reduce vasomotor symptom frequency and severity as effectively as pharmacological treatments, in some cases by 74 per cent, as well as improving sleep quality and sexual function. Mindfulness has also been shown to improve sleep quality and overall quality of life scores in perimenopausal women. Inhalation of lavender oil also improves sleep and reduced the frequency of hot flushes by 50 per cent. Several studies have also shown reflexology and acupuncture to be useful, particularly for vasomotor symptoms."



Nutrition and the menopause

While we all need a broad intake of nutrients, whatever age and sex, there are certain vitamins, minerals and compounds that become particularly important for menopausal women.

Lindsay advised: "Women going through menopause are at greater risk of certain nutrient deficiencies, which can worsen symptoms. Hormonal changes, especially the drop in oestrogen, affect how the body absorbs, uses, and stores nutrients. For instance, reduced oestrogen leads to lower bone mineral density, increasing the need for calcium, magnesium, and vitamin D. Stress, common at this life stage, can also deplete B vitamins and magnesium faster. Ageing can reduce digestive efficiency, making it harder to absorb nutrients, while changes in appetite or diet may limit intake. Studies have shown that low levels of magnesium, B vitamins, vitamin D, and omega 3 fatty acids may contribute to fatigue, mood changes, sleep disturbances, and poor bone health."

Slawek added: "Women passing through this major life stage are at an exceptionally high risk of experiencing nutrient deficiencies due to both decreased digestive absorption and an increased metabolic demand caused by chronic hormonal stress. The consumption of refined carbohydrates and sugars rapidly depletes the body's internal stores of essential minerals like magnesium and zinc, which are mandatory for hundreds of vital enzymatic reactions, nervous system relaxation, and proper insulin management. Age-related

declines in stomach acid production, paired with insufficient sunlight exposure and a lack of key dietary cofactors, leave many women severely deficient in vitamin D3 and K2, which are essential for preventing systemic calcium wasting and maintaining bone density."

So, what are the best supplements to help?

Keri recommended: "Vitamin B6, which is often used for symptoms of PMS, can also be relevant for similar symptoms experienced during the perimenopause. B6 is involved in the production of neurotransmitters such as dopamine, serotonin, GABA and melatonin and is indicated for issues such as low mood, mood swings, and sleep. Soya isoflavones have been

shown to reduce hot flushes and other vasomotor symptoms but also linked to bone and heart health due to their phyto-oestrogenic effects.

"Sage is also phyto-oestrogenic and can reduce hot flushes, in the most severe cases by up to 100 per cent.

Recent findings suggest vitamin E can also have phyto-oestrogenic effects and has been shown in small trials to reduce both the severity and duration of hot flushes. Sea buckthorn berry oil, which is rich in omega 7 fatty acids, has also been shown to be useful for vaginal atrophy and the health of the mucosa in this area."

Slawek added: "Women should implement a targeted supplemental routine to include black cohosh, red clover, and non-GMO soy isoflavones to gently occupy vacant oestrogen receptors, alongside vitex or chasteberry to optimise the progesterone-to-oestrogen ratio,

and ashwagandha or Siberian ginseng to revitalise exhausted adrenal glands. Evening primrose oil or starflower oil provides rich concentrations of gamma-linolenic acid, which acts as a powerful anti-inflammatory agent that improves skin elasticity and significantly lowers frequency of hot flashes. Magnesium is the cofactor required by the liver and kidneys to activate vitamin D within the body, while providing deep muscular relaxation and supporting long-term skeletal bone density."

Lindsay went on: "Maca is popular for managing stress and lowering cortisol. Some studies suggest it may help alleviate menopause symptoms, such as hot flashes and disrupted sleep. Collagen supplements support joints and cartilage, while helping prevent premature skin ageing. They may also improve vaginal dryness and enhance elasticity in the urinary tract, helping to prevent stress incontinence. Finally, saffron is gaining recognition for its mood-enhancing and anti-anxiety effects."

It's also important to focus on bone health.

Keri explained: "Improvements in bone mass will be limited by dietary factors and our intake of bone building nutrients. Calcium is perhaps the most familiar of these and an adequate calcium intake is essential for the composition of bone, along with collagen. Vitamin D is closely linked to calcium, and low vitamin D impairs absorption of dietary calcium. This will lead to low bone mineralization and development of osteoporosis. Vitamin K is also vital for bone, as it is required for the activation and carboxylation of vitamin K dependent proteins and osteocalcin, which are involved in bone metabolism and the deposition of calcium in the bones."

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Ask the experts



Energy without stimulants...

by Dr Rashmi Acharya

Why do so many of us lack energy, and what does it do to our health?

Most people I see are not sleeping less than previous generations – they are living in a way that borrows energy, rather than creating it. The usual contributors are poor sleep quality, chronic stress, blood sugar swings from low-protein meals, shortfalls in iron, B12, vitamin D or magnesium, dehydration and thyroid dysfunction. Ayurveda looks first at Agni, the digestive and metabolic fire. When Agni is weak, food is not converted efficiently into nourishment, and fatigue follows.

Left unaddressed, persistent tiredness affects far more than mood. It dulls concentration, reduces physical performance, disturbs appetite and sleep, and erodes resilience to stress. Most people then reach for a stimulant, which deepens the cycle rather than breaking it.

How do stimulants work?

Caffeine does not create energy. It blocks adenosine, the brain's signal that it is time to rest, so alertness rises temporarily while the underlying deficit remains. Occasional use is fine, but daily reliance masks poor sleep, inadequate nutrition and chronic stress, and caffeine taken late in the day delays sleep onset and reduces sleep quality, which means more fatigue tomorrow and more caffeine to match it. Sugar-heavy energy drinks add a spike

and crash on top. The better question is not 'how do I stay awake?' but 'why isn't my body producing energy efficiently?'

Can you suggest a practical plan to support energy?

- **Nutrition:** Build each meal around 20-30g of protein from eggs, dairy or legumes, paired with high-fibre carbohydrates for steady blood sugar. Avocados are a useful addition, rich in iron, magnesium, zinc and selenium. Hydration matters too, as even mild dehydration reduces physical and mental performance.
- **Supplements:** Correct proven deficiencies of vitamin D, B12, iron or magnesium. Adaptogenic herbs such as ashwagandha or tulsi may support stress resilience in suitable individuals, under professional guidance.
- **Lifestyle:** Aim for 20 to 30 minutes of morning sunlight, 30 to 45 minutes of daily walking, two or three strength sessions a week, and 10 minutes of yoga, meditation or slow nasal breathing. Prioritise seven to nine hours of sleep and avoid caffeine after midday.

As Hippocrates observed, natural forces within us are the true healers of disease. Lasting vitality comes from supporting the body's own ability to produce energy, one nourishing meal and one healthy habit at a time.

Q What are beta glucans and how they can support my health?

Slawek Gromadzki advised: Beta-glucans are natural fibres found in foods such as oats, barley, mushrooms and yeast. What makes them particularly interesting is that different types of beta-glucans can support health in different ways.

Those found in oats and barley are best known for their benefits for heart health. They form a gel-like substance in the digestive system, which helps reduce the absorption of cholesterol. Studies have shown that consuming around 3g of oat beta-glucan a day can help maintain healthy cholesterol levels. They can also slow the absorption of carbohydrates, helping to reduce the rise in blood sugar after a meal.

Beta-glucans from baker's yeast and certain mushrooms are slightly different and are particularly valued for their potential role in supporting our immune system. The best studied are beta-1,3/1,6-glucans, which interact with immune cells, including macrophages and neutrophils. These cells help the body recognise and respond to potential threats. Human studies suggest that yeast beta-glucans may help support a healthy immune response.

One of the easiest ways to increase intake is through the regular consumption of oats, barley and mushrooms. Beta-glucans are also available in supplement form, with yeast-derived beta-1,3/1,6-glucans commonly used to support immune health.

Overall, beta-glucans can be a valuable addition to a healthy diet, with benefits for heart health, balanced blood sugar and the immune system.



DR RASHMI ACHARYA

is a classically trained Ayurvedic physician (B.A.M.S), writer and Advisor to Ayurveda, dedicated to making the wisdom of traditional medicine relevant, accessible and inspiring for modern life.



BEN MAKEHAM

is a qualified naturopath and is currently Science & Education Manager at Activated Probiotics. Ben is a strong proponent of evidence-based complementary medicine, with a special interest in the systemic effects of the gut microbiome.



BRANDI DUPUIS,

CFO and Brand Manager at Regenerative Omegas, works at the intersection of nutrition, sustainability and plant-based omega-3. Through her work, she helps educate about plant-based omega oils and their role as part of a balanced approach to health and nutrition.



SLAWEK GROMADZKI

is author of health-related articles, health promoter and lecturer, certified herbalist and health consultant. He has a Master's degree in Public Health and a Bachelor's degree in Health Promotion. He works as a Nutritionist for HealthAid.

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Q How do omega oils support women experiencing PMS, and why are plant-based options useful?

Brandi Dupuis explained: For many women, the days leading up to a period can bring an unwelcome combination of cramps, bloating, fatigue and mood changes. While this phase, often referred to as PMS, is closely connected to the natural hormonal changes of the menstrual cycle, nutrition may play a supportive role. Omegas containing healthy fats are an important part of that support system.

Omega-3 fatty acids are particularly impactful because they help support the body's normal inflammatory response. Research has found that omega-3 intake may help reduce the severity of menstrual pain and cramping, although more research is needed to understand how different omega-3s may influence the wider range of PMS symptoms.

Plant-based omega oils offer another way to incorporate these beneficial fats into the diet. Ahiflower oil, derived from the seeds of the *Buglossoides arvensis* plant and grown using regenerative farming in the UK, is naturally rich in stearidonic acid (SDA), a plant-based omega-3 fatty acid, as well as gamma-linolenic acid (GLA), an omega-6 fatty acid. Together, these fatty acids provide a unique nutritional profile that can complement a balanced diet and support the body's normal fatty-acid pathways.

For women looking for plant-based sources of omega fats, ahiflower offers an option that doesn't rely on fish or marine ingredients and is environmentally sustainable. As with any nutritional approach, consistency matters, and omega-rich foods or oils work best as part of an overall healthy lifestyle that includes nutritious food, movement, adequate sleep and stress management.

The power of the gut...

by Ben Makeham

Can you explain why the gut is so important for our immune system?

Most immune activity actually happens in the gut. An estimated 70 per cent of the immune system resides in the digestive tract, known as gut-associated lymphoid tissue (GALT), which is the largest point of contact between the outside world and the body. Every day, it takes in food particles, microorganisms and other foreign matter, some harmful and some beneficial, so the immune system is positioned there to act as a gatekeeper. This interface is known as the gut-immune axis. After birth, and as our gut is being colonised by a diverse range of microorganisms, the signals they send to the immune system are essential for the development and maintenance of effective, balanced immune responses. These immune cells then circulate around the body, supporting effective immune responses in distant sites such as the nasal cavity or the lungs.

What happens to your immune system when the gut microbiota is disrupted?

A number of factors can disrupt this balance. Gut

dysbiosis, with fewer beneficial microorganisms, can reduce those beneficial signals which help to prepare the immune system to defend the body. Factors which can contribute to dysbiosis include antibiotics, which can reduce microbial diversity, a diet low in fibre, which starves beneficial bacteria of fuel, and stress and poor sleep, which can also deplete healthy gut microorganisms.

How can probiotics help?

Fortunately, specific probiotic strains have been shown to participate in 'immune training' in the gut to help support the immune system. A specific combination of probiotic strains, *Lactobacillus plantarum* HEAL9 and *Lactobacillus paracasei* 8700:2, has been studied in adults across two clinical trials. Participants who took this specific combination of strains once daily over a 12-week winter period had 29 per cent fewer colds than those on placebo, and a 38 per cent reduction in symptoms if they did get sick. Those benefits came from regular, preventative use, so that they have time to train the immune system, rather than using them symptomatically.

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BUILD YOUR IMMUNE foundations

Natural Lifestyle offers an essential guide to supporting your immune health, holistically.

A strong immune system need not be complicated, take a lot of time, or cost lots of money. Very often, strong immunity is built on small, but consistent habits. And the time to start thinking about immune health is now, ahead of the weather turning cooler and the start of cold and 'flu season.

As Dr Rashmi Acharya, Advisor to Ayurvediq, puts it: "Immunity is not built in moments of crisis; it is cultivated in the ordinary choices we make every single day."

But let's first consider why the colder months are a more common time to fall ill.

Alice Bradshaw, Head of Nutrition Education and Information at Terranova, explained: "Autumn and winter can create conditions that place pressure on immune health. Reduced daylight hours and lower levels of sunlight may contribute to lower vitamin D, which plays an important role in normal immune function. At the same time, people spend more time indoors and in closer contact with others, increasing opportunities for viruses to circulate. Changes in routine, lower activity levels and shifts in dietary habits during colder months may also influence resilience. While the immune system itself does not become weaker purely because of the season, environmental and lifestyle factors can create circumstances where support may be beneficial."

Dr Acharya added: "Cold weather also influences our food choices, physical activity and sleep patterns, creating an environment where immune resilience may gradually decline rather than suddenly disappear."

HOW DOES YOUR IMMUNE SYSTEM WORK?

To understand why our immune system is so important, we need to know how it works.

Siobhan Carroll, Medical Herbalist at A. Vogel, explained: "The immune system is the body's defence network. It works around the clock to identify and deal with viruses, bacteria and other unwanted invaders before they have a chance to make us ill. What many people don't realise is that a healthy immune system doesn't just help us fight off coughs and colds. It plays a role in wound healing, inflammation, recovery from illness and even how energetic we feel. In fact, we come into contact with countless germs every day and often never become ill because our immune system quietly deals with them before symptoms develop."

Alice added: "The immune system also contributes to tissue repair, supports normal inflammatory responses and helps maintain balance within the body. An effective immune response also develops memory of previous threats, allowing the body to recognise and respond more efficiently when exposed again. Maintaining immune health is therefore important not only for day-to-day resilience but for long-term health."

And what happens, in terms of health, if your immune system is under par?

Dr Acharya explained: "Common signs include frequent or recurrent infections, prolonged recovery from illness, persistent fatigue, slow wound healing, recurrent cold sores and a feeling of being run down. These may indicate that the body's natural defences are not functioning optimally. Chronic immune dysfunction may also contribute to low grade inflammation, increasing the risk of conditions such as cardiovascular disease and metabolic disorders, while reducing the body's ability to detect abnormal cells and keep dormant viruses under control."

Alice added: "Prolonged periods of reduced immune function can have wider implications beyond increased susceptibility to seasonal illness. Individuals may be more vulnerable to recurring infections and slower recovery, which can place additional demands on the body. Long-term consequences may include ongoing respiratory concerns, digestive disturbances and the persistence of low-grade inflammation. Immune resilience also plays an important role in supporting healthy ageing and recovery processes."

The modern-day impact

There are many reasons why immunity can be low, and often it is not one sole cause. However, many modern-day elements can play a role.

"Chronic stress, inadequate sleep, poor nutritional intake, sedentary lifestyles and regular exposure to environmental stressors can all contribute," Alice explained. "Modern lifestyles may intensify these challenges, with highly processed diets, prolonged screen use, reduced movement and ongoing mental demands creating conditions that can gradually compromise immune resilience."

Siobhan went on: "Some of the biggest immune saboteurs are chronic stress, poor sleep, a diet high in processed foods and sugar, excessive alcohol consumption and lack of exercise. Modern life unfortunately tends to tick quite a few of those

boxes. It is also worth noting that sleep quality, as well as circadian rhythm, play a role in immune function, as highlighted in research. So, it is worth getting to bed before midnight (when the hours of sleep are more restorative) and maintaining regular times for going to sleep and getting up to maintain a balanced circadian rhythm."

And how obvious is it if immunity is lacking?

Alice advised: "When immune function is under strain, people may begin to notice signs such as frequent colds or infections, slower recovery times, prolonged wound healing, low energy, fatigue and digestive disturbances. Some individuals may also find they feel generally run down or less able to cope with physical and emotional stressors. These signs can indicate that attention to nutrition, lifestyle and overall wellbeing may be beneficial."



Immune health plan

Small consistent changes, and a generally healthy way of life, will have more impact than a short-term focus on immunity.

Alice advised: "A balanced diet rich in whole foods provides nutrients required for immune function. Colourful fruit and vegetables supply antioxidants and vitamin C, while quality protein, including poultry, meat, eggs, oily fish, beans, lentils, tofu and tempeh, provide amino acids and minerals that support immune cell development and repair. Healthy fats from foods such as nuts, seeds, avocados and olive oil help support cell structure and function."

Siobhan added: "The most effective immune support always starts with the basics. Focus on a diet built around real, minimally processed foods rather than ultra-processed products, aiming to include a wide variety of colourful vegetables, berries, leafy greens, nuts, seeds, beans and good-quality protein. An immune-supportive diet naturally provides key nutrients such as vitamin C, antioxidants and phytonutrients that help the immune system function optimally. Garlic, onions, mushrooms and ginger are particularly valuable additions and are easy to include regularly in everyday cooking."

"One often-overlooked factor is gut health, as a large proportion of the immune system is linked to the digestive tract. Supporting a healthy microbiome through fibre-rich foods and a diverse range of plant foods is key – aim for around 30 different plant foods a week to encourage

microbiome diversity. Fermented foods such as yoghurt, kefir and sauerkraut can help support beneficial gut bacteria. How and when we eat can also make a difference. Constant snacking or eating late can keep the body focused on digestion, leaving less capacity for repair and recovery. Where possible, allow clear breaks between meals and avoid eating too close to bedtime, unless there is a specific medical reason not to."

And Dr Acharya suggested: "Ayurveda teaches that immunity is not

something to be boosted but a state of physiological resilience cultivated through balanced Agni (digestive and metabolic function), minimal Ama (metabolic waste) and preservation of Ojas, the refined essence of all body tissues.

Modern immunology echoes this systems-based approach. Fresh, seasonal foods, diverse plant fibres, regular movement, restorative sleep, circadian alignment and stress reduction support microbial diversity as well as immune homeostasis."

And what shifts can you make in your lifestyle to also help?

Siobhan advised: "Prioritising good sleep, staying physically active, managing stress and maintaining good hydration help to support a resilient immune system. Stress management is another important piece of the puzzle. Regular movement, time outdoors, yoga, meditation or even simple activities like gardening can all help reduce stress load."



THE IMPORTANCE OF NUTRIENTS

We need a balance of nutrients to maintain immune health, and while ideally these come from the diet, there are some supplements you could consider.

Alice advised: "Poor dietary variety, digestive concerns, restrictive eating patterns and increased physiological demands may all contribute to nutrient gaps. Vitamin D3 is one of the most important for immune support in the UK due to limited sunlight exposure across much of the year. Zinc is involved in the production and activity of immune cells. Microflora supplements that support beneficial gut bacteria are receiving growing attention due to the close relationship between gut health and immune regulation. Selenium and omega 3 fatty acids may support normal immune processes."

Siobhan added: "Nutrient deficiencies can sometimes contribute to reduced immune function. Vitamin C is probably the best-known example, as it plays an important role in supporting normal immune responses and acts as a powerful antioxidant. Vitamin A helps maintain healthy mucous membranes, which act as one of the body's first lines of defence."

You could also add in certain botanicals.

Siobhan recommended: "Echinacea is one of the most well-researched herbs for immune health and is my go-to recommendation for supporting the body's natural defences throughout the colder months. Herbs such as passiflora, avena sativa, lemon balm and valerian can be useful for calming the nervous system, while adaptogens like Siberian ginseng may help the body cope with periods of sustained stress."

Dr Acharya added: "Experimental and emerging clinical research suggests guduchi can influence macrophage, neutrophil and cytokine activity, tulsi demonstrates immunomodulatory and adaptogenic effects, while amalaki, rich in polyphenols and vitamin C, helps counter oxidative stress that can impair immune function. These complement and not replace evidence-based nutrients such as vitamin D, zinc and selenium, particularly where deficiencies exist."

Alice suggested: "Elderberry is widely used during the colder months as part of winter wellness routines, while garlic has long been valued for its traditional role in seasonal health. Ginger may also be beneficial for its warming qualities and is commonly included in hot drinks or meals to support comfort and soothe the throat."



NATURAL LIFESTYLE

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Finding calm IN A BUSY WORLD

How to holistically ease the stress effects and discover a sense of calm.



Feeling stressed from time to time is part of everyday life. In the short-term, stress helps us respond to challenges by triggering the body's fight or flight response. Hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline are released, increasing heart rate and sharpening focus so we can deal with immediate demands.

The problem comes when stress becomes constant. Modern life rarely gives us time to properly switch off, and spending long periods feeling under pressure can affect mood, sleep, concentration and overall wellbeing.

Supporting your nervous system

While it's impossible to remove every source of stress, there are plenty of ways to support your nervous system.

Simple habits such as regular exercise, spending time outdoors and making time for rest can all help. Building in small daily rituals, like sitting down with a cup of herbal tea, can also encourage you to slow down and take a mindful pause. Sleep is equally important, giving the body an opportunity to recover and regulate the hormones involved in the stress response.

Taking a few minutes each day for slow breathing, mindfulness or simply stepping away from a busy

environment can also help signal to the body that it's safe to relax. Eating a balanced diet, staying hydrated and limiting caffeine if you're feeling anxious may also help you feel more balanced throughout the day.

Herbs to help the body adapt

Alongside healthy lifestyle habits, many people turn to herbal support. Adaptogens are a group of plants traditionally used to help the body adapt to physical and emotional stress. Rather than making you feel drowsy, they work by supporting the body's natural ability to maintain balance during periods of pressure.

Ashwagandha is one of the best-known adaptogenic herbs and has been widely studied for its role in supporting the body's response to stress. Holy basil has a long history of traditional use to support calm and emotional wellbeing, while lion's mane mushroom has attracted growing interest for its potential role in supporting cognitive function, making it a popular choice when stress begins to affect concentration and mental clarity.

Supporting your nervous system isn't about eliminating stress. It's about giving your body the tools it needs to recover, adapt and maintain balance through the ups and downs of everyday life.

READER GIVEAWAY

We have five bottles of Herbtender's Zen Drops to give away. Formulated by a medical herbalist, Zen Drops combine ashwagandha, holy basil, lion's mane and iodine from Seagreens in a convenient daily formula to support the normal function of the nervous system and create moments of calm in a busy world. The liquid formula offers flexible dosing and can be taken under the tongue or added to a splash of water as part of your daily routine. See opposite page to enter.



NATURAL LIFESTYLE Giveaways

Natural Lifestyle is about giving back to our readers, and each month this page will showcase a selection of giveaways.

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Feeding hunger and health

Packed with foods that make you feel good and recipes that are easy to follow, *Hungry* is the cookbook to satisfy cravings.



Soul healing tomato soup with cheesy muffins

You've heard of chicken soup for the soul, but this tomato soup speaks to mine more than any chicken soup ever has. Maybe that has something to do with my childhood penchant for Heinz? Who am I kidding – it wasn't just my childhood. There's something about tomato soup that's innately comforting, and this version has a lot more goodness than the classic from a can. Not only is it full of nutritious vegetables, it also gets a hearty boost of protein from the chicken broth (and yes, you can use vegetable stock instead if you'd like). I'm a firm believer that soup requires something to dip in it, so I've paired mine with cheesy English muffins for the ultimate comfort food pairing. You're welcome.

Serves 6

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 tbsp olive oil, plus extra for drizzling
- 2 large onions, diced
- 2 celery sticks, diced
- 2 carrots, diced
- 3 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 2 x 400 g (13oz) cans good-quality chopped tomatoes
- 400g (13oz) can brown lentils, rinsed and drained
- 1.2 litres (2 pints) good-quality chicken bone broth
- 2tbsp tomato puree
- 50g (2oz) sun-dried tomatoes, chopped
- Salt and pepper

FOR THE MUFFINS:

- 6 English muffins, split
- 200g (7oz) Cheddar cheese, sliced

METHOD:

- Heat the oil in a large pan over a low heat and add the onions, celery, carrots and garlic. Cook for 15 minutes, stirring frequently to ensure an even cook, until softened.
- Add the chopped tomatoes, lentils and broth. Stir well, then turn up the heat and bring to the boil. Once it's boiling, turn the heat right down, cover with a lid and leave to simmer for 15 minutes (stir every now and then to ensure it doesn't stick to the bottom).
- Add the tomato puree and the sun-dried tomatoes, cover again and cook for a further 10 minutes. Turn the heat off and allow to cool uncovered for 15 minutes.
- Blend the soup until smooth using a stick blender. Taste and adjust the seasoning if it needs it. The soup can either be eaten immediately or cooled and refrigerated for up to five days or frozen for up to four months. Before serving, garnish the soup with a drizzle of olive oil.
- Make the muffins when you're ready to serve the soup. Place the split muffins onto a baking sheet, cut sides up. Cover the two bottom halves with the cheese and cook in a preheated oven at 220°C, 200°C fan (425°F), Gas Mark 7, for eight-10 minutes until the cheese is melted and the muffins are turning golden brown. Top the cheesy halves with the plain halves and serve with the soup.



Dark chocolate, chia and raspberry cookies

Don't get me wrong, there's a time and a place for a traditional choc chip cookie, but what better way to jazz up some chia seeds than smuggling them into a chocolaty treat? Chia seeds are a great source of fibre, protein and omega 3 (which helps to regulate hormones, as well supporting eye, brain and heart health). We've also got oats, almond flour and raspberries here, deviating slightly from the classic cookie ingredients but providing some serious flavour enhancement, as well as nutrition. The chocolate chips? Well, they're just good for the soul.

Makes 10-12

INGREDIENTS:

- 125g (4oz) almond flour
- 50g (2oz) oats
- 1tbsp (½ oz) chia seeds
- ½ tsp baking powder
- ½ tsp salt
- 45g (1oz) caster sugar
- ½ tsp vanilla extract
- 1 egg
- 65g (2oz) unsalted butter, melted
- 85g (3oz) dark chocolate chips
- 75g (3oz) frozen raspberries

METHOD:

- Combine the almond flour, oats, chia seeds, baking powder and salt in a mixing bowl.
- Place the caster sugar, vanilla extract, egg and melted butter in a second bowl and mix with a wooden spoon until smooth.
- Pour the butter and sugar mixture into the dry ingredients and mix with a wooden spoon until fully combined. Add the chocolate chips and frozen raspberries and mix again so they're evenly distributed.
- Line a baking sheet with baking paper, then scoop 10-12 balls of dough onto it, pressing them down with the back of a spatula to form cookies (you may need two baking sheets).
- Bake the cookies in a preheated oven at 180°C, 160°C fan (350°F), Gas Mark 4, for 12-14 minutes until the edges are turning golden brown, and the middles are set.
- Remove from the oven, allow them to cool for a few minutes, then transfer to a wire rack to cool completely. Keep any leftovers refrigerated in an airtight container for up to five days (or freeze for up to two months).



Spinach, feta and egg filo tart

I love using filo pastry in my cooking – it's so satisfyingly crunchy, which means it acts as a brilliant base for tarts like this one. Pastry is yet another one of those things that people swear off because it's 'bad' for them. But in the context of a healthy diet, I'm a firm believer that there's room for all the foods you love – and I love this filo tart. Loaded with vegetables and topped with eggs, feta and pesto, this is just one combination that works. Feel free to get creative and try it with other ingredients, like tomatoes and mozzarella, or butternut squash and goats' cheese. The filo world is your oyster.

Serves 4

INGREDIENTS:

- ½ tbsp olive oil
- 1 onion, diced
- 200g (7oz) mushrooms, finely sliced
- 100g (3oz) spinach leaves
- 20g (½ oz) butter, melted
- 275g (9oz) filo pastry (about 7 sheets)
- 4 eggs
- 65g (2oz) feta
- 25g (1oz) green pesto
- Salt and pepper

METHOD:

- Heat the olive oil in a large frying pan over a medium heat and add the onion and mushrooms, sautéing for about five minutes until softened. Add the spinach and allow it to wilt for a couple of minutes, cooking for a little longer to help evaporate some of the water it will release, then season with salt and pepper and leave to cool.
- Brush a large baking sheet with butter, then arrange your pastry. Place the first filo sheet directly on the baking sheet and brush with melted butter. Arrange the next filo sheet on top, overlapping it clockwise on the first sheet. Repeat with the remaining butter and filo, aiming for equal overlap, until all the sheets have been positioned to form the tart base.
- Place the cooked vegetables in the centre of the pastry sheets in a rough disc, about 18-20 cm (7-8in) in diameter. Use the back of a spoon to create four little indentations in the vegetables, and crack in your eggs.
- Finish by crumbling over feta cheese, and dolloping the pesto over the top. Scrunch the edges of the pastry inwards to create the crust of your tart, rolling the pastry over slightly and brushing with a little more melted butter to help it maintain its shape.
- Bake in a preheated oven at 190°C, 170°C fan (375°F), Gas Mark 5, for 25-30 minutes, or until the pastry is golden and eggs are set. Remove from the oven and allow to cool for a couple of minutes before slicing. It can be kept in the fridge in an airtight container for up to three days and is also good cold.



Blueberry and walnut chia pudding

This easy chia pudding is the Pilates princess of breakfasts. Chic, put together, and most definitely a morning person. The blueberries give a healthy dose of nutrition with vitamins C, A, E and much more, while the chia seeds are a great source of fibre and omega 3 fatty acids (hello, skin health). Make these in advance to make sure you start the day on the right note (whether you're going to Pilates or just tackling your everyday commute).

Serves 3

INGREDIENTS:

- 250ml (8fl oz) milk of your choice
- 75g (3oz) frozen blueberries
- 4tsp maple syrup
- 65g (2oz) chia seeds
- 50g (2oz) fresh blueberries
- 300g (10oz) Greek yogurt
- 25g (1oz) chopped walnuts

METHOD:

- Place the milk, frozen blueberries and maple syrup in a blender. Blend until smooth, then divide between three jars or glasses.
- Divide the chia seeds between the jars or glasses, stir well and leave to thicken in the fridge for about 30 minutes.
- Take out of the fridge, arrange the fresh blueberries on top, then spoon the yogurt over the berries.
- Pop them back in the fridge – they'll be ready to eat in one hour or leave them overnight for a quick and easy breakfast.
- When you're ready to eat, top each pudding with crushed walnuts. They will last in the fridge for up to five days (covered or in an airtight container).



Hungry by Caroline Hanna (Hamlyn, £26) is out now. Photographer credit: Daniel Jones, Max Robinson, Christina Mackenzie.



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