



Dear Doctor / Healthcare Professional,

Your patient has enrolled in “The South-West Plant-Based Challenge”. They are joining a large group of health care professionals, general practitioners and support workers in the South West of England who are challenging themselves to experience the health benefits of a healthy, whole food, plant-based diet for 28 days.

The challenge is supported with an on-line course that provides heart-healthy recipes, shopping lists, meal plans, educational content and on-line support. The recipes are firmly focused on whole-foods, with very little added salt or added oils. The meal-plan provides healthy plant-based recipes only, meaning that participants will not be eating eggs, dairy or meat products. Essentially, they will be eating an extremely healthy version of the Mediterranean Diet.

Multiple medical studies have shown that a healthy, whole food, plant-based diet can be very useful in improving markers of cardiovascular risk. For example, the Broad Study demonstrated significant improvements in Body Mass Index, serum cholesterol and other risk factors among overweight and obese individuals with poor metabolic indicators (1). This dietary approach has also been shown to help overweight individuals achieve significant weight loss and reduce levels of insulin resistance without limiting portion size or caloric intake (2).

This completely plant-based style of eating has been endorsed by both the British Dietetic Society and the The US Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics as being nutritionally adequate with wide-reaching health benefits at all stages of life (3, 4).

The majority of our challengers are themselves GPs working in the South West. We are very grateful for your support as they embark on this healthy eating challenge.

Measuring Progress:

All challengers have been asked to check their blood pressure, body weight, height and fasting cholesterol profile before and after the challenge. They may ask be your surgery to help with this by carrying out these standard checks in December and again in late February.

If you are unable to help with this, we would greatly appreciate if you can simply provide the blood request forms for two fasting cholesterol profiles. We will be running local clinics where a nurse volunteer will take a blood test and other measurements, before and after the challenge.

Patients on medication for high blood pressure:

A healthy, whole food diet without added salt or oils can lead to improved control of blood pressure. For this reason, if patients are on medication for high blood pressure it is possible that their level will improve and even become low during the challenge. We advise all patients on treatment for high blood pressure to obtain a home blood pressure monitor if possible so that they can check their blood pressure on a daily basis.

Any participant on treatment for high blood pressure who experiences dizziness or fainting episodes during the challenge should see their GP to have their blood pressure checked as a matter of urgency.

Patients on medication for diabetes:

Adapting a healthy, whole food diet without processed carbohydrates, meat or dairy can increase insulin sensitivity and lead to better control of blood sugar in individuals with diabetes. However, if participants are on medications to keep their blood sugars under control they may notice that their blood sugars are running lower than usual while on the course.

This is especially important for patients who take any form of insulin. We therefore advise that any participants with diabetes make sure to check their blood sugars regularly each day during the course. Patients should always endeavour to work with their usual doctor and dieticians while making these healthy changes to their diet and lifestyle.

Thank you for your support!

We have worked very hard to ensure that the challenge is educational, healthy, evidence-based and fun. Thank you so much for supporting our challengers as they embark on a healthy lifestyle change. As a little thank you, we have included a sample recipe for you to enjoy overleaf.

Dr Alan Desmond, Consultant Gastroenterologist, Torbay Hospital

Dr Jenny Corser, GP, Barton Surgery, Dawlish

Ms Deborah Howland, Specialist Dietitian, Torbay Hospital

Stephen and David Flynn, Best-selling authors, chefs and CEOs of The Happy Pear

We hope that you enjoy this South-West Plant-Based Diet Challenge Recipe:

Beetroot, Spinach and Apple Salad



A simple, yet attractive and tasty purple salad! This makes a delicious lunch or side dish.

Serves 4

Ingredients:

750g of beetroot (uncooked)
60g of pumpkin seeds
60g of sunflower seeds
1 large apple (try to use a really crunchy one)
50g of baby spinach

Dressing Ingredients:

60ml of apple juice
40ml of balsamic vinegar
2tsp of Salt
2tbsp of maple syrup/agave syrup

Instructions:

- Remove all the dirt from the beetroot, top and tail, then scrub the skin, but don't peel. Grate it into a bowl.

- Toast the pumpkin and sunflower seeds in a dry frying pan for a few minutes, until they start to pop, colour and smell lovely.
 - Core and finely slice the apple and add to the bowl of beetroot along with the toasted seeds and spinach.
 - Mix the apple juice, balsamic vinegar, salt and maple syrup in a cup or jug, using a whisk or a fork, and pour over the salad. It is best to dress only what you are going to eat, as the salad doesn't last so well once dressed.
 - Enjoy!
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References:

1. Wright N, et al. The BROAD study: A randomised controlled trial using a whole food plant-based diet in the community for obesity, ischaemic heart disease or diabetes. Nutr Diabetes. 2017
 2. Kahleova H, et al A plant-based diet in overweight individuals in a 16-week randomized clinical trial: metabolic benefits of plant protein. Nutr Diabetes. 2018
 3. Melina V, et al. Position of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics: Vegetarian Diets. J Acad Nutr Diet. 2016
 4. Position statement of the British Dietetic Association August 2017, accessible at www.bda.uk.com/news/view?id=179
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If you have any further questions about the challenge please contact Dr Alan Desmond
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