

PAINFUL PERIODS EXPLAINED

Learn to address the causes.



What to expect from this booklet

Hello and welcome!

I'm so glad you decided to download this booklet – and I hope you had a chance to attend the live webinar too.

This is a great first step towards finally understanding your painful periods and making lasting changes to support your body in a powerful way.

I know how debilitating painful periods can be – and the first time I heard someone say that painful periods are not inevitable I was totally dumb struck.

PAINFUL PERIODS ARE NOT INEVITABLE?!

Then why do so many of us simply power through for years with debilitatingly painful periods and no support?

I hope this little booklet gives you some insight into what may be causing your pains and how you can support your body by making sustainable nutrition and lifestyle changes.

In this booklet you will find:

1. A brief description of what is meant by 'painful periods'
2. An overview of the menstrual cycle and associated hormones
3. An overview of the causes of painful periods
4. Nutritional and lifestyle strategies to help your body find balance
5. "Emergency" tips for when you are in pain
6. Supportive Recipes

I truly hope you enjoy this booklet and find it useful. I always love to hear feedback so please connect with me on [Instagram](#) or [Facebook](#) to let me know how you found it!

I wish you health and joy,

Marie

xx

Founder of [Efia's Kitchen](#) and the '[7 Days of Being Kinder to Yourself](#)' Retreat



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DISCLAIMER

Important: None of the information provided in this book is intended to diagnose, treat or cure any medical conditions.

Always consult your medical practitioner before making any significant changes to your diet, lifestyle or similar. The information in this presentation is not intended to suggest that you should not seek professional advice or follow your medical professional's recommendations. It is always best to make lifestyle changes under the care of a medically trained practitioner.

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What I mean when I say 'painful periods'

90% of women experience period cramps but only 55% need medication and 32% can't do what they normally do due to the pain.

The stats above are a good way of illustrating that mild cramping around your period (particularly on days 1 & 2) is normal, whilst heavy cramping and pain that stops you from doing things is not.

The experience of periods that are so painful, that they require pain medication or stop you from doing things is called **dysmenorrhea**.

Dysmenorrhea can be primary (no other underlying causes) or secondary (caused by underlying conditions such as polycystic ovary syndrome, endometriosis, adenomyosis, pelvic inflammation or a small cervix).

STOP: if you experience any of the following symptoms make sure you have spoken to your health care practitioner to rule out any underlying causes!

- Pain that lasts longer than 1-2 days
- Pain that impairs your mobility
- Pain that can't be managed by over the counter medication or requires you to take over the counter medication for prolonged periods
- Very heavy periods
- Very irregular periods
- Missing periods

If underlying causes have been ruled out, read on to find out what may be behind your painful periods and how you can address this using diet and lifestyle.



Do you even know your cycle?

Bare with me.

Before I get into the causes of painful periods, or the nutritional and lifestyle strategies you can use to address them, I think it's important that you understand what happens during a typical menstrual cycle.

If you're already clued in and understand this stuff, you're welcome to skip ahead 😊

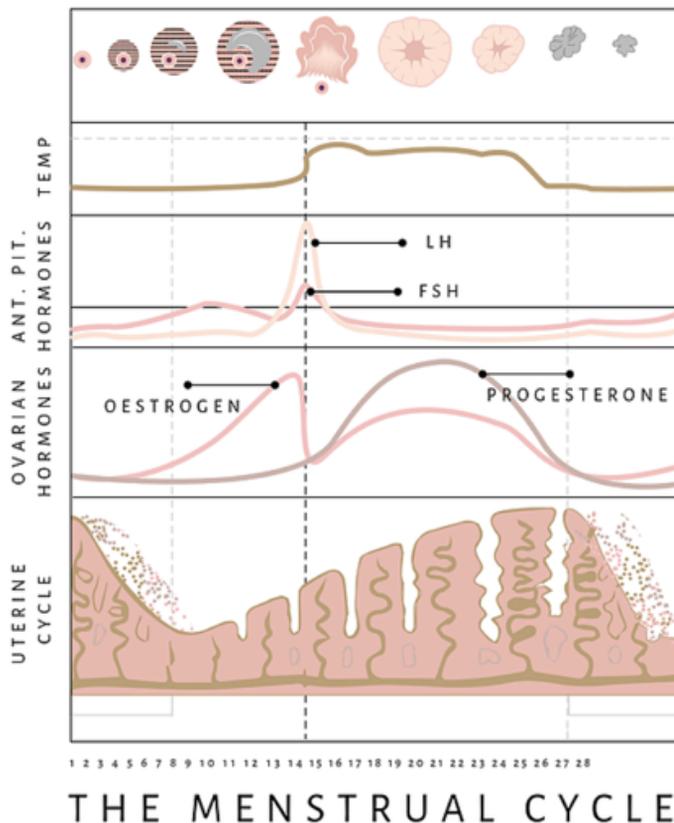
Your cycle is determined by hormones produced by your brain *and* your ovaries. I will describe these on the next page.

During each period the lining of your uterus detaches and is shed (through bleeding), in the next cycle the lining builds up again before it is shed in your next period.

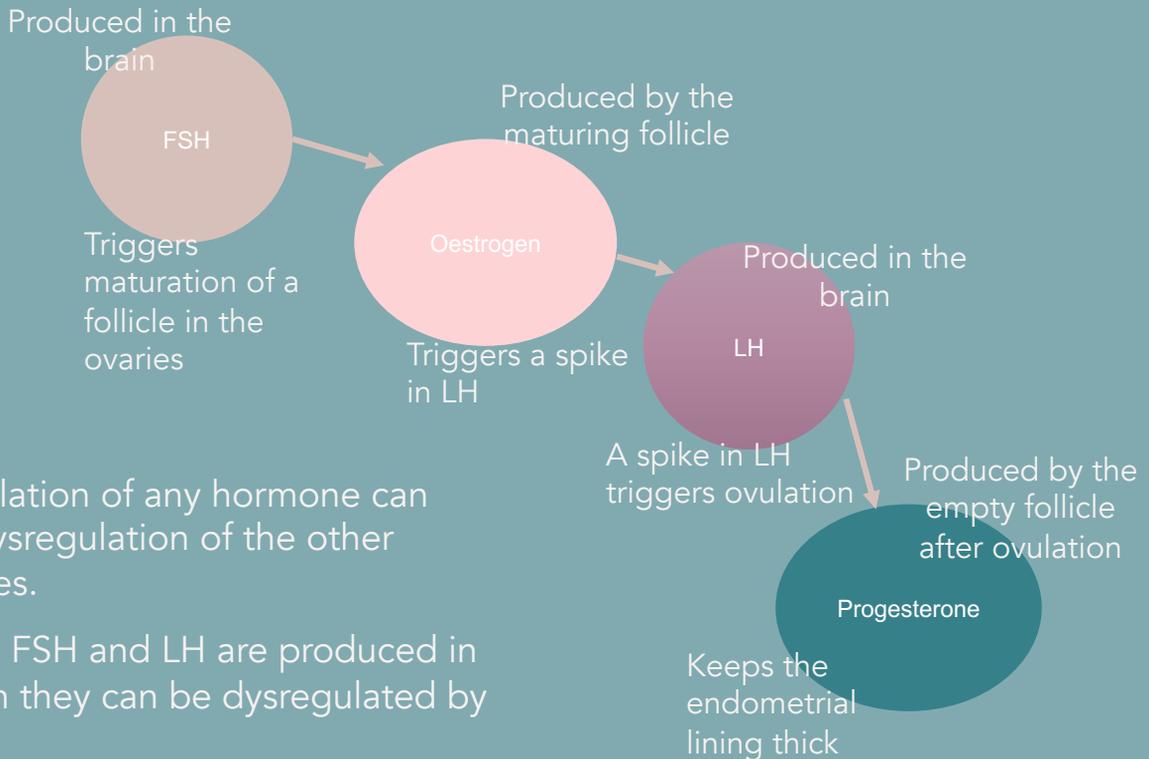
Your cycle starts on the first day of your period and ends on the last day before your next period.

It has two phases; the **follicular phase** which is from the beginning of your period until ovulation, and the **luteal phase**, which is from ovulation until your next period.

The luteal phase is *always* 14 days, but the follicular phase varies from woman to woman. Normal cycle lengths vary from 21-35 days.



YOUR HORMONES



Dysregulation of any hormone can cause dysregulation of the other hormones.

Because FSH and LH are produced in the brain they can be dysregulated by stress.

Factors like inflammation, high blood sugar, obesity and toxins can cause upregulation of hormones that are not helpful.

Chronic stress can result in increased production of stress hormones (cortisol), which 'steals' from sex hormones.

This is called 'pregnenolone steal' and can result in reduced levels of sex hormones.

Oestrogen dominance, relative to other hormones, can contribute to painful periods and PMS.



PROSTAGLANDINS

Ouch.

Prostaglandins are responsible for our muscle tissues contracting and relaxing.

During your period they cause the uterus lining to cramp – helping the endometrial lining to detach and shed.

Research shows that some prostaglandins are *inflammatory* whilst others are *anti-inflammatory*.

The inflammatory ones trigger contraction, the anti-inflammatory ones trigger relaxation.

Research shows that women with dysmenorrhea have significantly higher amounts of the prostaglandins that cause cramping.

In fact, dysregulation of prostaglandins may be causing your painful periods.

This could be caused by:

- Too many prostaglandins that cause cramping
- Too many prostaglandins that cause cramping *binding* to your uterus lining
- Prostaglandins that cause cramping and those that cause relaxation sending signals at the same time.

Prostaglandins are dysregulated by:

- High intake of omega-6, low intake of omega-3*
- High levels of cortisol and adrenaline (your stress hormones)
- Dysregulated progesterone levels (a sex hormone)

*I'll tell you where to find these in food in a minute.



Learning to cope.

You don't have to make huge changes to experience change.

As with everything in nutrition and lifestyle medicine – there is no one answer to everything. And there is no quick fix.

Instead, you will find that by making a few simple, sustainable changes you will experience a down-stream cascade of improvements.

Each of the recommendations I make links with the other recommendations. That means, you can choose just one or two areas to change to start out with, and build on that.

Imagine each change you make is a brick that you are laying on the foundations of your house! Brick by brick you will get to the result you want.

Choose the changes that feel most manageable, that fill you with the most excitement or that feel most relevant to you.

Don't try to change everything at once!

Slow and steady wins the race 😊

Here you can see an overview of the recommendations I will make. On the next pages you will find practical tips and recipes to help you put these into practice.

- 1. Manage stress**
- 2. Balance blood sugar**
- 3. Reduce inflammation**
- 4. Support detoxification**



1. MANAGE STRESS

BREATHE.

Research shows that deep breathing exercises can reduce objective and subjective measures of stress.

Try 1 or 2 minutes of one of the exercises below before getting out of bed and before going to sleep daily:

4, 1, 5 breathing

Sit or lie comfortably, place your hands on your belly, breathe in for a count of 4, hold for a count of 1, breathe out for a count of 5. Repeat for 1 or 2 minutes.

Lateral breathing

Sit or lie comfortably, place your hands on either side of your ribcage so your fingers meet in the middle (just above your diaphragm), breathe in deeply into the sides of your ribcage - notice the tips of your fingers being pulled apart by the movement. Breathe out until your fingers touch again. Repeat for 1 or 2 minutes.

SLEEP.

Good sleep is a key element of managing stress. Poor sleep increases anxiety, mood swings, procrastination and the tendency to overeat the next day.

Having said that it's important that you don't let worry about the impact of not sleeping get in the way of your sleep.

Try implement these simple changes for 4-6 weeks to see an improvement in your sleep:

- Make sure your room is completely dark at night
- Get (day)light exposure as soon as you wake up
- Dim the lights after dinner, reduce screen time
- Try the 'paradoxical intention' – tell yourself you don't want to sleep

Alternatively work with a functional medicine practitioner or therapist to help get your sleep back on track.



1. MANAGE STRESS

NATURE AND MOVEMENT.

Research shows that just looking at nature through a window reduces stress levels and inflammation.

It also shows that lack of movement is a key contributor to inflammation and stress.

Exercise also releases neurotransmitters that contribute to us feeling more positive, energetic and motivated.

Incorporate exercise into your day-to-day by:

- Getting into the habit of stretching for a few minutes after waking up
- Going for a walk after lunch
- Walking part of the way to work/school
- Finding movement that brings you joy (run, swim, dance, rollerblade, play a team sport, tennis, yoga, Zumba etc.)
- Planning trips to nature on weekends

SOAK.

Magnesium is a mineral that the body uses to regulate blood sugar, manage inflammation and stress. In fact, magnesium supplementation has been shown to reduce anxiety in some people.

When we are stressed we lose more magnesium and so we have higher needs. Try to top up your magnesium levels by having *a magnesium soak (a bath or foot bath with Epsom salts/magnesium bath flakes) for 20 minutes 2-3 times a week.*

MASSAGE.

Follow up your soak by massaging your hands and feet with cream or oil.

Massages release a hormone known as oxytocin, which reduces our pain threshold and helps manage stress.



2. BALANCE BLOOD SUGAR

GOLDEN RULE.

Balanced blood sugar leads to reduced inflammation, mood swings, anxiety and stress levels. It also helps your body balance sex hormones better.

By following my golden rule you will support your body in regulating blood sugar.

To follow the golden rule make sure all your snacks, drinks and meals contain:



FIBRE

Vegetables and fruits with their peel, whole-grains, legumes, nuts, seeds, lentils



FAT

Olives, olive oil, avocado, avocado oil, grass-fed organic butter, nuts, seeds, eggs, oily fish



PROTEIN

Meat, fish, seafood, eggs, hard cheese, feta, quark, skyr, quinoa, soy, beans, nuts, seeds, lentils

FIBRE.

Research shows that women who eat more fibre have a reduced likelihood of having dysmenorrhea.

Aim for 25-30g of fibre per day, but increase your intake slowly to reduce the risk of digestive discomfort! Also make sure you drink plenty of water to avoid constipation.

CAFFEINE/ALCOHOL.

Limit drinks containing caffeine (coffee, black tea, coke, energy drinks) to one a day. Green tea contains another substance called L-theanine, which balances the impact of caffeine, so you can have more than one cup of green tea a day.

Avoid alcohol if possible. If you do drink have one or two small glasses of red wine with food.

2. BALANCE BLOOD SUGAR

REPLACE SUGAR.

Sugar (as well as refined carbohydrates like white bread, hot white rice and potatoes, white flour, white pasta etc.) is absorbed into the blood stream super fast- causing spikes and dips in your blood sugar levels that are related with mood swings, inflammation and dysregulated hormones.

Replace refined carbohydrates with whole-grains, or have your white rice and potatoes cooled (this allows resistant starch to form, which can only be digested in the colon).

Use some of the suggestions on the right to replace sugars in your diet.

I'm not saying *never* have refined carbs or sugar – I'm just saying try to change the balance so that you have less of them and more fibre.

Some suggestions:

- Dates with nut butter and cocoa powder
- Banana with peanut butter and cocoa nibs
- Dark chocolate (85% cocoa or more) with cashews
- Apple sauce (unsweetened) with walnuts and cinnamon
- A little raw (local) honey
- Frozen grapes with almonds
- Sweeten cakes, porridge, cookies etc. with mashed banana, dates, date syrup, honey or apple sauce
- Dried fruits with nuts



3. REDUCE INFLAMMATION

The changes you make to manage stress and balance blood sugar are likely to already have beneficial effects on your levels of inflammation.

OMEGA-3.

Increasing omega-3 in your diet (and reducing omega-6) may have additional benefit as research shows that omega-3 has anti-inflammatory properties.

You can find **omega-3** in the following foods:

- Oily fish like wild caught salmon (other salmon is high in omega-6), fresh tuna (not tinned), mackerel, herring and sardines
- Seafood like prawns and muscles
- Walnuts
- Chia seeds and linseeds
- Grass-fed (free-range) animal products
- Algae oil supplements*

You find **omega-6** in the following foods:

- Conventionally (factory) raised animal products like meat, poultry, dairy and eggs
- Vegetable oils like sunflower oil, rapeseed oil, corn oil, soybean oil, margarine
- Nuts
- Seeds

Omega-6 is also necessary for our body to function well, but unfortunately in today's world we eat far too much omega-6 and too little omega-3. Try to re-balance this by including more sources of omega-3 and by avoiding vegetable oils and conventionally raised animal products.

*Although algae supplements can be a good source of omega-3, I would recommend speaking to a nutritional therapist before purchasing a supplement to make sure it is **safe** and **effective** for you.



4. SUPPORT DETOXIFICATION

CRUCIFEROUS VEG.

These vegetables contain nutrients and enzymes that support the body to carry out its detoxification processes.

Cruciferous veg include:

Kale, broccoli, cauliflower, brussels sprouts, cabbage

LEAFY GREENS.

These vegetables also contain nutrients and enzymes that support the body to carry out its detoxification processes. Leafy greens include:

Kale, spinach, chard, watercress, rocket, salad, mustard greens

Try to include a variety of all these vegetables in your diet instead of sticking to one type.

Tip: keep frozen veg in your freezer to stir into anything you are cooking.

REDUCE TOXINS.

One way to help your body detoxify is to reduce the 'load' your body has to detoxify each day.

Try to reduce your exposure to the following to help your body:

- Plastic food containers
- Plastic water bottles
- Alcohol
- Smoking
- Perfume (including perfumed laundry detergent or dishwasher liquid)
- Shampoos, soaps and creams that contain phthalates and parabens
- Avoid tinned foods from tins with BPA in the lining
- Avoid Teflon pans

Find out more on [this](#) website.



Emergency Strategies.

Let me be clear. When I say "emergency strategies" I **do not** mean to say these are alternatives to consulting your medical professional if something unusual/severe is happening with your cycle.

What I mean is that these are strategies to offer extra support for when your period is painful.

In fact. It might be a good time to say that making the changes described on the last few pages is unlikely to result in instant change.

It will likely take about 3 months for the changes to take effect and for you to start feeling improvements.

That's because you are making **sustainable** changes – which help your body find balance.

And **balance is not found overnight**, it takes a few menstrual cycles for everything to come into place.

So here are my top tips for coping during a painful period:

- Have blood sugar friendly snacks to hand (look back to the page on balancing blood sugar or use some of the recipes on the next pages)
- Take care of yourself *before* and keep frozen, healthy meals in your freezer for days when you can't move
- Apply mild heat to the area of pain
- Don't cramp up – do gentle stretches – like [these](#)
- Don't forget magnesium soaking!
- Try self massage to increase your oxytocin levels and improve pain tolerance



Recipes and Shopping List.

I'm so excited about this section!

If you follow me on [Instagram](#) you will know that I'm a committed foodie. Developing and trying recipes is one of my favourite pastimes!

In this section you will find a collection of recipes for snacks and meals that support blood sugar balance, are full of anti-inflammatory ingredients and nutrients your body requires (particularly for heavy periods).

I have also included a shopping list – with indication of how many portions of each type of food you should be eating on a typical day.

Remember – this will vary depending on your own personal needs. Always consult your healthcare practitioner or work one-to-one with a nutritional therapist before making any significant changes to your diet.



RECIPE INDEX

Period pain soothing smoothie
Blood sugar balancing smoothie
Lentil stew
Beef stew
Fluffy pancakes

Period pain soothing smoothie

SERVINGS: 1
PREP TIME: 5 mins
TOTAL TIME: 5 mins

This recipe is perfect for when you are in lots of pain and are craving a sweet, soothing energy boost.

Because of its protein and fat content it is less likely to cause a blood sugar spike, and the cacao and hemp provide magnesium and omega-3.

Ingredients:

- 1 banana
- 1/2tbsp (raw) cacao powder
- 1tbsp hemp protein powder
- 1/4 cup frozen mixed berries
- 3/4 cup non-dairy milk (oat, cashew, pea or hemp)

Instructions:

Place all ingredients in your blender and blend until smooth. Serve cold and remember to chew as you sip to help with digestion.



Blood sugar balancing smoothie

SERVINGS: 1

PREP TIME: 5 mins

TOTAL TIME: 5 mins

This recipe is less indulgent than the last one, but it's fresh and nourishing. It contains lots of antioxidants thanks to the beetroot and berries, which are anti-inflammatory. The walnuts contain omega-3 and lemon supports digestion.



Ingredients:

- 1 banana
- 1 small cooked beetroot
- ½ cup frozen organic blueberries
- 2 tbsp lemon juice
- 1 handful of walnuts

Instructions:

Place all ingredients in your blender and blend until very smooth.

It's okay if there are still little bits of walnut, chewing your smoothies actually boosts the flow of your digestive enzymes and helps your body know that there is digestive work to be done. This reduces the likelihood of digestive discomfort and helps your body absorb the nutrients.

lentil stew

SERVINGS: 2

PREP TIME: 10 mins

TOTAL TIME: 30 mins

Red lentils are a good source of iron for vegetarians. Many women with painful periods also have very heavy periods, which may mean they have an increased need for iron. The orange vegetables and lemon juice in this recipe help the body absorb the iron, as plant sources tend to be less bioavailable than animal sources.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup split red lentils (soaked over night)
- 1 red onion, chopped
- 1 clove garlic, crushed
- 1 tbsp grated ginger
- 1 large sweet potato, cubed
- 1 tin coconut milk + 1 cup water
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1 tsp turmeric
- 1/tsp cinnamon
- Juice of ½ lemon
- 1 tsp olive oil
- 1 tbsp chopped coriander to serve

Instructions:

Heat the oil in a large pot and brown the onion, garlic and ginger

Add the seasonings and stir well, before adding the lentils, sweet potato, coconut milk and water

Simmer for 20 minutes or until lentils and sweet potato are tender

Stir in the coriander and lemon juice before serving



Beef stew

SERVINGS: 2

PREP TIME: 10 mins

TOTAL TIME: 30 mins

This stew contains beef or venison – great animal sources of iron. Soba noodles are made with buckwheat, which is a great fibre and protein rich carbohydrate. Ginger, garlic, onions and mushrooms all support optimal digestive functioning – which is beneficial for managing inflammation. The greens are full of folate and support detoxification and energy production.

Ingredients:

- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1 tsp ginger, grated
- 2 Portobello mushrooms, sliced
- 1 carrot, cubed
- 200g beef/venison strips
- 1 cup organic kale, spinach, chard, chopped
- 1 tsp olive oil
- ½ cup water
- 1 tbsp gluten-free soy sauce
- 1 tbsp rice wine vinegar
- 1 tbsp sesame seeds
- 1 tbsp chopped coriander, to serve

Instructions:

Heat the oil in a large pot and brown the beef strips, add the onions, garlic, ginger, carrot and mushrooms after a few minutes, sauté for another few minutes

Season with soy sauce, rice vinegar and extra salt if needed

Add the water and greens, allow to simmer until the greens are wilted

Serve with soba noodles, sprinkled with sesame seeds and coriander



fluffy pancakes

SERVINGS: 2

PREP TIME: 5 mins

TOTAL TIME: 20 mins

Unfortunately, breakfast is a meal that violates my 'golden rule' for most people. Cereal and milk or porridge and fruits are rich in carbohydrates but low in fats and proteins. These pancakes are a fantastic alternative that will set you up for stable blood sugar throughout the day.

Ingredients:

- 200g buckwheat flour
- 4 tbsp linseeds
- Dash of salt
- Dash of cardamom
- 300 ml water
- Oil of choice for frying (olive oil or grass-fed butter)

Toppings:

- Live, natural (coconut) yoghurt
- Nut butter
- Dark chocolate
- Apple sauce
- Berries
- Banana
- Raw honey
- Cacao nibs

Instructions:

In a large bowl mix together all the dry ingredients

Whisk in the water with a fork

Heat oil in a frying pan and add 1 large tablespoon of batter per pancake

Turn the heat down (to medium) and flip the pancakes on they start to have a slightly dry appearance on top

Remove from the pan once lightly golden on both sides, repeat with any remaining batter

Serve with all the toppings you like



shopping list cheat sheet

Food Group	Whole Food Examples			Notes
Animal protein	Eggs Beef Venison Chicken Fish Lamb Duck Pork	Liver Kidney Ox tongue Heart Rabbit Bison Crab	Cod Wild salmon Sardines Tuna Shrimps Muscles Mackerel	If you eat animal products aim for about 3 servings of animal protein per day. One serving is about 30g . Organ meats are nutrient dense and cheap.
Plant protein	Beans (kidney, adzuki, black, butter, cannellini, mung, fava) Chickpeas Lentils	Peas Nuts (walnuts, almonds, pecans, brazil nuts, cashews) Peanuts	Seeds (chia, linseeds, sunflower, pumpkin, hemp) Soy	If you are vegetarian make sure you include a serving of plant protein with each meal.
High fibre grains and root vegetables	Quinoa Black rice Red rice Wild rice Buckwheat Sorghum grains Millet grains	Beans (kidney, adzuki, black, butter, cannellini, mung, fava) Peas Chickpeas Lentils Jerusalem artichoke	Sweet potato/yam Beetroot Parsnip Celeriac Plantain Squash Pumpkin	Aim for about 3 servings of these foods a day. You can plan your main meals so ¼ of your plate is taken up by these foods.
Non-starchy vegetables	Asparagus Aubergine Bell peppers Bok choy Broccoli Brussel sprouts Cabbage Carrots Cauliflower Chinese cabbage	Chives Cucumber Garlic Ginger Green beans Kale Leek Lettuce Mushrooms Mustard greens	Onions Rhubarb Seaweed Shallot Spinach Swiss chard Tomato Turnip/swede Watercress Zucchini	Eat at least 2 cups , ideally 3 cups , of these vegetables every day. Particularly prioritise cruciferous veg (eat these cooked) and leafy greens.
Fats and oils	Oily fish Fish oil supplements Algal omega-3 supplements Organic sour cream/full-fat cream	Coconut cream/milk Nuts and seeds Avocadoes Grass-fed butter Grass-fed ghee Olive oil	Olives Avocado oil Coconut oil Walnut oil Linseed oil	Make sure all snacks and meals have some source of fat. Don't go overboard with portion sizing.
Fruits	Apricots Apples Bananas Blackberries Blueberries Cranberries (fresh) Grapefruit	Grapes (purple) Grapes (green) Guava Honeydew melon Nectarines Oranges Passion fruit	Peaches Pears Plums Raspberries Strawberries Tree tomato Watermelon	Eat your fruits with a source of protein or fat, like nut butter or coconut yoghurt. Eat about 1 cup per day.
Probiotic foods	Coconut yogurt Fermented pickles Sauerkraut	Kimchi Miso Natto	Chickpea tempeh Soy tempeh Kefir	Make sure your probiotic foods are raw and unpasteurised. Add 1tbsp to your meals.
Flours	Buckwheat flour Quinoa flour Oat flour	Cassava flour Chickpea flour Sorghum flour	Teff flour Flax meal Almond meal	Find your favourite and use these nutritious flour alternatives for baking.
Sweeteners	Dates Bananas	Raw honey Date syrup	Apple sauce Dried fruit	See section on blood sugar balance.
Sauces and spices	Apple cider vinegar Avocado mayo Ceylon cinnamon Chilli Cumin	Guacamole Horseradish Lemon & olive oil Lime juice Mustard	Pesto Salsa Tamari sauce Turmeric Wasabi	If buying store-bought make sure these don't contain sugar, additives and vegetable oils. Cook with lots of spices.

Do you want to work with me?

Time for a thank you. For taking the time to read through this whole booklet. Thank yourself for prioritising your health and wellbeing.

The next step is to put it all into practice.

I hope I've managed to break things down and make them feel manageable.

Remember, it takes about 3 months to see lasting change, when making nutritional and lifestyle changes. Don't give up before that!

If you've been trying to figure things out on your own for a while, if you've got lots of complicated other symptoms, if you're overwhelmed or if you'd simply like a kind and empathic soul by your side as you make these changes, why not get in touch to work with me?



You can email me at efiaskitchen@posteo.org to book a free 15 minute consultation today. During this time we will explore how I could help you and whether or not the two of us are a good fit.

You can read about the therapy packages I offer [here](#).



*Let's have a
virtual coffee
and chat!*

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