

ask the experts



Nutrition
Emma Stirling
Nutrition editor



Fitness
Martha Laurey-Bird
Fitness editor



Cooking
Lucy Kelly
Senior food editor



Motivation
Allan Bolton
Men's consultant

Find out what our experts say about cooking lentils, the best fish choices, the link between mood and food, and starting to exercise.

Q Can you please explain how to use red lentils? I buy the dried variety but I'm not sure about soaking them. Can you tell me how I use them?
Karen Leas, via email

Lucy Kelly replies
A This is an easy one, Karen, because red lentils are so simple to use. Unlike dried beans, they don't have to be soaked overnight. They're generally used in soups and casseroles and can also be used to make classic Indian dahl.

Start by rinsing lentils under cold water to remove any grit then add them to whatever dish you're making. They only take 15–20 mins to cook until soft and thicken whatever they're in.

To use them in a salad, boil for 10 mins so they're just tender and still hold their shape. Don't overcook or they'll go mushy, like overdone peas. Lentils are a great substitute for potato or rice and a source of protein.

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Q I know that I should be trying for at least two serves of fish per week for heart health, but what are the best choices?
Erin Wiley, via email

Emma Stirling replies

A According to the Omega-3 Centre, you should favour oily fish to help meet your intake of protective omega-3 fatty acids. They list super sources of oily fish (150g raw serve) as containing at least 2000mg of omega-3s, and are found in fresh Tasmanian Atlantic salmon, New Zealand king salmon, rainbow trout, barramundi and swordfish as well as canned salmon, sardines and mackerel. For a guide to other good sources visit their website at www.omega-3centre.com.

It's also wise to think about the sustainability of your fresh and canned catch. At last count there were 18 targeted fish species in Australian waters that are overfished. Ecosystem change, habitat damage, water pollution, marine pests and climate change all contribute to the depletion of fish stocks. According to Dr Chris Smyth from the Australian Conservation Foundation, a new assessment process for wild and farmed seafood products will make it easier for shoppers, chefs and restaurant-goers to go green. The Australian Sustainable Seafood Assessment Program was developed in conjunction with the University of Technology, Sydney and a team of leading marine scientists. A key feature of the program is its focus on seafood products, not species. This is because the same species may be caught or farmed sustainably in one area but not in another. Go to www.acfonline.org.au and www.seafood.co.nz

Finally, we need to be mindful of potential contaminants, such as mercury, in certain fish species. See recommendations for all people, with additional advice for pregnant women and young children, at www.fsanx.gov.au



ask the experts

Q I have been told that exercise can have a positive effect on your mood and help relieve conditions like depression. How is this so and what's the best exercise to do?
Jeanette Young, Moree, NSW

Martha Lourey-Bird replies

A While mood affects some of us more than others, the daily highs and lows of life can be an easy distraction from your exercise routine. At its best, a good mood can sidetrack you from your exercise plans and send you out socialising instead. At worst, mood can make you feel like doing nothing much more than lying on the couch indulging in your favourite comfort food. But when you're feeling down, try not to think of low mood as an excuse to avoid exercise – it's actually a very good reason to get moving.

It's important to know that you'll feel better after a workout than before it because when you exercise, your brain releases feel-good chemicals such as endorphins, serotonin and dopamine. These actually enhance your mood, which is particularly helpful to remember when feeling down or unmotivated about exercise.

The best forms of exercise to try in this instance are those that involve rhythmic movements that have some flow or momentum to them as they are more soothing than stop-start workouts. So try swimming, walking or yoga rather than a game of tennis or a circuit class.

Exercise will not just help you look better, it'll help you feel better too – another great reason to get active.



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Q I feel ready to start exercising for the first time. But, I'm embarrassed and nervous about it because I'm overweight and uncoordinated. How can I overcome this fear?
Erin Reece, via email

Allan Bolton replies

A First up don't think you're alone in this, there are many people who experience being stuck between a rock and a hard place as an exercise barrier. The good news is that non-exercisers only need invest a little effort to gain a lot, it doesn't take much exercise to make a big change.

Starting an exercise program can be confusing at best, and feeling embarrassed can crush your motivation. Turning negative feelings around is challenging and let's face it, no one likes feeling embarrassed. So, the trick here is to avoid embarrassment without avoiding exercise, and if you can get your head in the right place, your legs will follow.

Take a look at these things you can try:

- Convert 'feeling ready to start' to 'I've started' by predicting the future – think of how good you'll feel about yourself when you're finished, not how hard it is to get started.
- Use a pedometer, this requires no coordination at all. Pedometers are the quiet achievers of the personal coach world. Do whatever small daily tasks you can on foot. Eventually, you can convert this effort into a regular walk.
- If initially, you can't bring yourself to going outside, try one of the indoor techno consoles like Wii. Be sure to select activities that will not leave you feeling defeated.
- Whatever you decide, the only way to overcome your fears is to start, then you'll learn the feeling of success.