

# I've reversed my diabetes, do I still need metformin?

**Q** I WAS diagnosed with type 2 diabetes last year and was prescribed 500mg metformin daily. But I decided to overhaul my lifestyle by eating healthily and, as a result, have lost 2st and my HbA1c score has dropped from 92 to 36. So should I keep taking metformin, or can I stop?

Des Pike, Pontypool, Torfaen.

**A** WHAT an outstanding achievement and I applaud your effort and commitment.

Type 2 diabetes is a serious condition that is affecting rising numbers of people in the UK, thanks mainly to surging obesity rates. The condition causes blood sugar (glucose) to rise to dangerously high levels.

While many people experience few, if any, symptoms, these high levels can cause major complications if not controlled — including damage to the eyes and nervous system, along with increased risk of heart disease through rapidly accelerating atherosclerosis (where the arteries become furred up).

In type 2 diabetes, the body stops responding properly to insulin, a hormone that helps mop up glucose from the blood, transporting it to the muscle cells where it's used for energy. Instead, glucose builds up in the body, causing long-term damage.

One marker of diabetes is sugar in the urine. A blood sugar test may then be carried out to confirm the diagnosis.

But this is a snapshot result, and a more telling result comes from an HbA1c blood test, which gives a measure of your average blood sugar level over the previous two or three months.

People diagnosed with type 2 diabetes are recommended to get their HbA1c level below 48mmol/l.

Your outstanding self control has lowered yours from 92 to just 36mmol/l, effectively placing you in 'remission'.



**ASK THE GP**  
**DR MARTIN SCURR**

But you will need to stick to your lifestyle and diet plan or your weight will increase again and your diabetes could return.

As for whether or not you should keep taking metformin, you must accept the advice of your GP but I would anticipate the prescription will cease if a regular HbA1c tests confirm your readings remain in the safe zone.

**Q** I HAVE Barrett's oesophagus. I have phlegm in my throat constantly and seem to be coughing all the time. I was prescribed Beconase which doesn't help much. Any ideas?

Ian Balloch, Grangemouth.

BARRETT'S oesophagus, as I hope has been explained to you, occurs as a result of gastro-oesophageal reflux disease (GORD), where acid leaks from the stomach up the oesophagus, leading to heartburn and possibly a recurrent cough.

Over the long term, the constant exposure to acid can cause cells at the base of the oesophagus to change, and so the lining becomes red and thickened. In a small proportion of cases (less than 1 per cent), these altered cells may become cancerous.

The conventional treatment for Barrett's is proton pump inhibitors (PPIs), drugs such as

omeprazole that suppress acid production. However, between 10 and 40 per cent of patients continue to experience symptoms despite taking prescribed medication.

It is likely that your symptoms — coughing and phlegm in the throat — are due to continuing reflux, so-called 'silent' reflux at night.

Previously this has been a subject of some debate but the balance of opinion now is that GORD can indeed result in nasal disorders such as sinusitis in some people. The fact that you've been prescribed Beconase (generic name beclomethasone) steroid nasal spray to reduce inflammation, suggests this is what your doctor thinks you have.

However, as this hasn't helped you, I have two suggestions for you to discuss with your GP.

First, you may need to be prescribed a stronger steroid nasal spray, such as fluticasone, to be used night and morning. And secondly, it may be that your current dose of PPI is not enough to suppress your acid production. Sometimes 40mg or even 80mg once daily is needed by some patients.

## IN MY VIEW...

### Patients do better with the same GP

IMAGINE if there were a simple approach that improved patient satisfaction, led to better management of long-term conditions, and cut the need for hospital referrals and admissions.

In fact, it exists — it's the 'named GP' system, under which every NHS patient is allocated a GP responsible for overseeing their care.

But a recent study found that only half of patients now see the same GP.

And this isn't set to improve, as there aren't enough GPs to go round.

This is a longstanding problem. Our leaders need to be thinking not just about now, but 20 years from now: we need more medical school places and greater incentives to go into general practice.

The doctor/patient relationship is not a luxury: it saves both money and lives.

## WRITE TO DR SCURR

■ WRITE to Dr Scurr at Good Health, Daily Mail, 2 Derry Street, London W8 5TT or email drmartin@daily.co.uk — include your contact details. Dr Scurr cannot enter into personal correspondence. Replies should be taken in a general context and always consult your own GP with any health worries.

**W**ITH the rising cost of living, it's becoming increasingly expensive to eat healthily. As part of an occasional new series, Good Health asked dietitian Dr Sarah Schenker to create a series of wholesome, inexpensive meals using a selection of cheap store-cupboard staples, this week starting with cans.

'You can slash the cost of any meal — and pack your plate with nutrients — by switching fresh food for canned,' says Sarah Schenker. Canned food is usually inexpensive, convenient and has a long shelf-life, minimising cost and the environmental impact of food waste. Better still, the canning process means many products are nutritional powerhouses.

'During the canning process, cans and their contents are heated, which can reduce the levels of some vitamins, particularly vitamin C — but it means the remaining nutrients are locked in until the can is opened,' says Sarah Schenker.

This preserves many water-soluble vitamins (including B and C), which are sensitive to heat and air and often easily lost during normal home-cooking and storage methods. Protein, carbohydrates and fat are unaffected by the canning process. And most minerals, as well as vitamins A, D, E, and K, are retained.

Some tinned foods even contain more nutrients than fresh. Fish, for instance, is canned hours after being caught, so you know it is fresher (and should contain more water-soluble B vitamins) than fresh fish, which may travel considerable distances to reach your supermarket shelf.

Sarah Schenker says the key to creating a balanced, nutritious meal lies in incorporating a good source of protein (meat, fish, eggs, pulses) — individually or in combination — along with a healthy wholegrain carbohydrate (brown bread, rice or pasta) and plenty of vegetables.

When it comes to tinned food, prices can vary — a can of tomatoes might cost from 28p to £1.10. You'll pay less if you don't opt for tins with a ring pull, and Sarah Schenker says value cans are usually no less nutritious than premium brands: 'Although price may affect flavour because of the quality of the produce that's been canned, it won't affect nutrition.'

**NOTE:** Cost-per-portion figures have been calculated by taking the price of the meal cooked from scratch using ingredients from a large online supermarket, then subdividing by the number of portions.

## CHICKPEAS

### Around 60p a can

CHICKPEAS are a source of protein (one can contains 30g of protein: the NHS recommends 45g of protein a day for women; 55g for men) and fibre (one can contains 24g of fibre: the NHS recommends 30g of fibre per day), plus the minerals manganese, copper and iron, zinc and magnesium.

Three heaped tablespoons form one of your five-a-day. Pulses have a low glycaemic index, so can help to regulate blood sugar levels; studies suggest regular consumption could reduce the risk of certain cancers, including bowel cancer.

**COOKING TIP:** These can be eaten straight from the can; added to soups and stews in place of meat; blended with tahini to make hummus; mashed with herbs to form falafels; or tipped into salads (which provide the vitamin C to help boost absorption of the iron in the chickpeas).

## CHICKPEA AND SWEET POTATO CURRY

SWEET potatoes, tomatoes and spinach provide vitamin C and are a good source of beta carotene, needed for a healthy immune system. The dish is high in fibre which helps lower cholesterol and improves digestion; each portion provides four of your five-a-day.

**PER PORTION:** 460 calories; 17g protein; 7g fat; 87g carbohydrates; 12g fibre

**COST PER PORTION:** £1.65

## By LOUISE ATKINSON

### SERVES 4

- 1tbsp oil
- 1tbsp cumin seeds
- 1tbsp chilli flakes
- 2tsp ginger powder (or a knob of fresh ginger peeled and grated)
- 1 onion, finely sliced
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 2 x 400g cans of chickpeas, drained and rinsed
- 400g can of tomatoes
- 2 large sweet potatoes, peeled and cut into bite-sized cubes
- 500ml vegetable stock
- 1 bag of spinach leaves
- 200g basmati rice
- Handful of fresh coriander leaves

**FRY** cumin seeds, chilli flakes and onion for 7 minutes, or until the onion is soft. Add garlic and ginger and fry for a further 3 minutes. Add chickpeas, tomatoes and sweet potato to the pan.

Pour over the vegetable stock, mix then cover with a lid and simmer over a low heat, stirring now and again, for 30 minutes. Stir in spinach leaves and allow them to wilt for a minute.

Cook the rice according to packet instructions. Serve with rice and sprinkle with fresh coriander.

## TINNED TOMATOES

### Around 40p a can

**NUTRIENTS:** Vitamins A, C and K, plus potassium and antioxidants including lycopene and beta carotene. One fifth of a can counts as one of your five-a-day. Antioxidants in tomatoes help reduce inflammation and lower blood pressure. The canning process helps break down the tomato's cell walls, making nutrients more easily

# Tasty meals packed full of nutrients – and made using tinned food costing £1 or less...

# IT'S CANTASTIC!



## SHAKSHUKA

THIS high-protein, low-fat dish gives you four of your five-a-day and meets guidelines for a complete, healthy meal — balancing protein (12g-17g), carbohydrates (30g-80g), fat (10g-25g) and fibre (5g-8g).

**PER PORTION:** 275 calories; 14g protein; 11g fat; 33g carbohydrates; 7g fibre

**COST PER PORTION:** £1.25

### SERVES 2

- 1tbsp olive oil
- 5 spring onions
- 1 clove garlic, peeled and crushed
- 1tsp each of chilli flakes, cumin and paprika
- 1 red pepper, sliced
- 400g tin of chopped tomatoes
- 1tbsp tomato puree
- 2 eggs
- Handful of chopped parsley
- 4 slices of rye bread

**FRY** spring onions, garlic and spices for 4 minutes. Add red pepper and cook for a further 6 minutes. Stir in tomatoes and puree, bring to boil and simmer for 5 minutes to reduce. Season to taste. Crack eggs into mixture, cover and cook for 10 minutes. Sprinkle with parsley and serve with the bread.

onion, garlic, carrots and celery for 5 minutes, until softened. Turn up the heat, add mushrooms and cook for a further 5 minutes. Add sardines and tinned tomatoes. Bring to boil, then reduce heat to medium and bubble for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally to break up the fish. Serve with spaghetti, sprinkled with parsley.

## JAMBALAYA

ADDING soya beans to this delicious rice dish, along with the peas, means this meal is an inexpensive source of high-quality protein. The canned sweetcorn boosts the fibre content while providing the antioxidant lutein, important for eye health. Each portion provides three of your five-a-day.

**PER PORTION:** 469 calories; 19g protein; 11g fat; 79g carbohydrates; 8g fibre

**COST PER PORTION:** 85p

### SERVES 4

- 1tsp olive oil
- 100g chorizo, peeled and diced
- 1 onion, chopped
- 350g risotto rice
- 1tbsp red wine vinegar
- 400g can chopped tomatoes
- 1.2l hot chicken stock
- 150g frozen peas
- 2 x 120g tin sardines in tomato sauce
- 2 x 400g tins chopped tomatoes
- Large handful fresh parsley, chopped
- 100g tinned sweetcorn

**HEAT** olive oil in a saucepan and sizzle chorizo for 1 minute. Add onion and cook for 5 minutes, until soft, then add rice and cook for 1 minute. Pour in the vinegar, then add tomatoes and stir well. Gradually add hot stock, a ladleful at a time, stirring the rice until stock is absorbed. With the last ladleful of stock, add the peas, soya beans and sweetcorn. Stir until rice is cooked.

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- 1 onion, finely sliced
- 2 carrots, finely chopped
- 3 celery sticks, finely chopped
- 200g mushrooms, roughly chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 2 x 120g tin sardines in tomato sauce
- 2 x 400g tins chopped tomatoes
- Large handful fresh parsley, chopped

**WHILE** the spaghetti is boiling, gently fry

available.

**COOKING TIP:** Cooking tomatoes with a little olive oil enhances the absorption of 'fat-soluble' lycopene and beta carotene.

## SARDINE BOLOGNESE

THIS tangy pasta sauce incorporates inexpensive sardines as a source of protein; oily fish is a rich source of omega-3s, which have anti-inflammatory properties that help prevent heart disease. Adding two tins of toma-

atoes and mushrooms means one portion of this also provides three of your five-a-day.

**PER PORTION:** 441 calories; 25g protein; 13g fat; 60g carbohydrates; 12g fibre

**COST PER PORTION:** 95p

### SERVES 4

- 350g wholewheat spaghetti
- 1tbsp olive oil

# TRANSFORM TIN OF TUNA INTO BURGERS FULL OF VITAMINS

## TUNA

### Around £1 a can

EACH can of tuna provides around 25g of protein (that's around half of your daily needs), plus selenium to protect cells from damage, as well as iodine, B vitamins, including vitamin B12 needed for healthy blood cells and niacin (vitamin B3) needed for energy metabolism.

**COOKING TIP:** Choose tuna in spring water rather than oil (109 calories compared to 159 calories); it also has about three times more beneficial omega-3 fats as tuna in oil.

## FAGIOLI

THIS Italian-inspired salad is low in calories and fat but high in protein and fibre. The canned haricot beans add protein, iron, fibre and calcium.

A portion provides three of your five-a-day.

**PER PORTION:** 216 calories; 25g protein; 1g fat; 28g carbohydrates; 13g fibre

**COST PER PORTION:** £1.47

### SERVES 2

- 100g can of tuna, drained
- 400g can of haricot beans, drained
- 1 red onion, thinly sliced
- 1tbsp white wine vinegar
- Juice of a half a lemon
- 1 clove of garlic, peeled and finely chopped
- 2 large tomatoes, sliced
- Handful of fresh parsley, chopped

**MIX** everything apart from tomatoes and parsley together, season well with salt and black pepper and allow to stand for

30 minutes. Serve on tomato slices, sprinkled with parsley.

## TUNA BURGERS

THESE burgers make a deliciously nutritious alternative to beef burgers. Adding sweetcorn boosts your intake of B vitamins including folate, as well as magnesium and potassium plus lutein and zeaxanthin, which can help to protect eye health. With the salad garnish, you will be getting two of your five-a-day.

**PER PORTION:** 318 calories; 24g protein; 7g fat; 23g carbohydrates; 7g fibre

**COST PER PORTION:** £1.20 per burger (plus 15p for salad)

### MAKES 4

- 3 slices wholemeal bread, torn in pieces

