JACKIE – NUTRITION

**Jackie:** The right nutrition is absolutely vital for good health, and in terms of the right nutrition it means a very varied and balanced diet. There are three main food groups: protein, which is made up of foods like meat, fish, eggs, dairy products like milk or cheese, and then vegetable protein with things such as nuts and seeds, lentils, chickpeas, beans. The next major food group is carbohydrate, which is often made up of grains, so things like bread, rice, pasta … uh … also potatoes. And … uh … there’s a section called complex carbohydrates which includes vegetables. And then the third section is fat. And fat breaks down into two sections: saturated fats, which tend to be found in … uh … red meats or dairy products, for example, and what we call essential fats, which are the Omega 3 … um … essential fats, which … uh … there’s been a lot of advertising and marketing around these days, and they tend to be found in oily fish, for example, salmon or tuna … um … seeds, avocado, etcetera. Now, it’s very important to make sure that you have a blend of each of those different nutrients – protein, fats and carbohydrate, because they each play a very different role, and an important role, for the various bodily functions. If you don’t get enough of one of them, then there will be a knock-on effect, which may ultimately lead to some kind of health problem. If you get too many of one, the same kind of thing can happen. So it’s very important to make sure you’re having a good balance of all three.

On top of that, we have something called micro-nutrients, and these are made up of vitamins and minerals. They’re equally important. They contain things like vitamin A, vitamin C, and minerals are things like calcium, iron, magnesium, etcetera. Each of these … uh … in small quantities are very, very important for health and so it’s important to make sure that you’re eating plenty of the right foods. In terms of how to approach this, the best thing first of all is to think about making sure that you’re having a good balance of protein and carbohydrate with every meal and snack. The best way to go would be to make sure it’s complex carbohydrate, and that’s what I like to call brown foods, things such as brown bread, wholemeal bread, gr— granary bread, or bread with seeds. Um, also brown rice or whole wheat pasta. Other great examples of— of complex carbohydrates are all the different kinds of vegetables. Now, if you blend complex carbohydrates with protein, then that’s going to lead to sustained energy, and for those people who feel tired all the time or who have those energy dips – for many of us it’s at three o’ clock in the afternoon where it’s very hard to get back to work – it’s usually because you haven’t had enough protein at lunch time and it’s also usually because you haven’t been eating the right kind of carbohydrate.

When I talk about the wrong kind of carbohydrate, what I basically mean is sugar. Sugar is a major problem at all kinds of levels. First of all, sugar is the main culprit when it comes to weight gain. Everybody thinks about fat, but poor old fat needs a new PR company because actually the f— the reason it’s called fat is not because it makes you fat. Fat does not make you fat, sugar makes you fat. And sugar can be found in so many foods. Not just the obvious things like chocolate or cakes or cookies, but also … um … the— the white foods, the white carbohydrates, so white bread, white rice, white pasta and lots of refined foods. So if your lunch is made up of a white bread sandwich and a bar of chocolate, then what will happen is your body will burn through that very, very quickly, and you’ll end up with this famous energy dip in the afternoon. If you have, for example, a brown bread sandwich with a good quantity of protein in the form of let’s say chicken or salmon, and maybe a piece of fruit, then you’re going to be getting fibre and protein all in one go. Fibre, which is complex carbohydrate, another word for complex carbohydrate if you like, is very, very important because it’s slow release energy. Protein is hard to digest, so it slows down the release of the carbohydrate even further. So if you can think about having protein with every meal and snack, you are much more likely a) to have sustained energy levels throughout the day, and you won’t be relying on the coffee or the chocolate all the time, and secondly, you’re going to be— you’re much less likely to be putting on weight, which is always a bonus for most of us these days.

Obesity is a major issue on a global scale, and in terms of today’s diet it’s probably one of the biggest challenges faced by health professionals. The problem with obesity is that it’s a risk factor for a number of major chronic health conditions. I’m talking about things like type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, so things that might provoke heart attacks or strokes. Um, also … uh … problems such as cancer can be linked to obesity. So making sure that you stay a healthy weight is terribly important.

The modern diet has changed a lot and it doesn’t really help us in terms of our health. The first thing to realise is that we’re simply not eating in the same way as our parents and our grandparents were. Back in the old days, for want of a better term, people used to eat real food, whole foods and very often women stayed at home and prepared that. And in some ways, the fact that the world has changed so much and that women now have a much more important role in the workplace has actually also impacted our food, because everybody’s in a hurry and people don’t have the time to actually prepare and eat a healthy meal. So in many countries there is a big reliance on what we call ready meals, and ready meals are those meals that you can find in a foil container that are all processed and ready to go, and you can put them in the microwave, press the button and two minutes later you’ve got your lasagne or your chicken dish with rice or whatever it might be. But it’s processed and it’s been stored and there are additives and preservatives to keep it— … um … to keep it fresh. And so of course it’s just not the same thing. It’s not as fresh and it’s not as full as nutrients as all the things you might have normally eaten.

Because we’re in a hurry all the time, we tend to rely on these quick foods a lot. There’s the growth of what we call fast food, so all those famous burger chains that you see in many countries across the world now, where you can eat very, very cheaply but not very, very well. And that of course is a major problem given that there’s an economic crisis in many areas. So those countries that are in recession and where people are struggling with— … um … to keep their jobs and they’re worrying about money, people will be looking to spend less on food, and so very often that can mean you’re— you’re buying things that aren’t so good. Ironically, the best food, the fresh food, the fresh vegetables, the fresh meat, is quite expensive, so it can be quite expensive to have a really healthy diet. And it— it’s very, very difficult to make sure that you’re eating everything that you should be eating in the right way.

One of the other instances that we’ve noticed with the increase in the global market is the change in health across the world. Obesity, for example, is something that for many years, people associated a little bit more with the United States because of the type of diet that was very popular there – people drinking a lot of Coca Cola, eating burgers, eating sweet things. And that has changed the shape of that nation. But what’s become increasingly worrying is that that has now crossed the Atla— Atlantic, moved into Europe, and there are many countries in Europe who are becoming increasingly concerned about the obesity in their countries. What’s also interesting is if you take a— a quick look at Asia, is how the diet has changed there. Traditionally, the Asian diet has relied much more on vegetables, vegetable proteins and rice, and for many years, looking at global health, the instances of chronic diseases such as breast cancer were much, much lower. In fact, breast cancer was very much a western disease, but in the last thirty to forty years, things have actually changed a lot. The global market and the exposure that you get to different countries and different cultures has meant that many of these traditional Asian countries has changed their diets. And they’re introducing a lot more in the way of meat, particularly red meat, and dairy products. And the statistics are starting to change. We’re starting to see instances of breast cancer, for example, growing in those areas. And while it’s very interesting, it’s also very concerning to see just what an important impact nutrition can have on your health.