

LIFE ON A PLATE

SEASON 4, EPISODE 5: KIMBERLEY WILSON

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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SPEAKERS

Kimberley Wilson, Alison, Yasmin Khan

Yasmin Khan 00:00

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Hi, I'm Yasmin Khan. And you're listening to Life on a Plate, the podcast from Waitrose. Throughout the season, my co-host, Alison Oakervee and I are going to be talking to a range of fantastic guests from many walks of life and asking them to share their stories through the food memories, dishes and ingredients that mean the most to them.

Hello, Alison, how are you?

Alison 01:50

I'm all right, thank you. How about you?

Yasmin Khan 01:52

I'm good, thanks. Yeah, just settling into the cold weather, and I've been spending the week curling up with lots of cookbooks.

Alison 02:00

Nice. Have you found anything interesting, because there's just so many at this time of year.

Yasmin Khan 02:06

There are. Well, I've really enjoyed *Med* by Claudia Roden, who is one of my absolute food heroes, still knocking out cookbooks aged 85. So impressive. It is really impressive, isn't it? And what I love about this book is that it really takes you on a journey through the Mediterranean, whether it's, like, Spain and Italy or Greece or Turkey or even, like, the North African countries. And like all of her books, you just get a real sense of storytelling as well as the recipes. So, I've been eyeing up the chicken and onion pies with Moroccan flavors and lots of gorgeous, kind of, spaghetti dishes with garlic oil and chili. At a time when we're not traveling so much it's the perfect book to, kind of, take you on a little culinary journey. What about you? Have you, kind of, been enjoying any cookbooks?

Alison 02:55

Yeah, I mean, this weather, you know, when it's bit colder, I crave Indian spicy meals. So I've dug out Chetna Makan's, *Chetna's 30 Minute Indian* book that came out a couple of months ago. It's a great book. It's full of quick and easy recipes that are perfect for midweek; whether you want meat or fish or vegetable curries, there's some great recipes there. And of course, Chetna writes for Waitrose: she has a regular column in the *Food* magazine and the 'Taste' pages, and she also has done quite a lot of videos for us for our YouTube channel. So, you know, it's just great to cook recipes from someone you feel like you really know.

Yasmin Khan 03:33

Yeah, I love Chetna; she's one of my favourite people.

Alison 03:38

She's great, she's such a lovely lady. But the other person is Edd Kimber, who is on our baking special in the summer. He has got this great *One Tin Bake* series going on. He's got his second book, *One Tin Bakes Easy*, and it's just a really easy baking cookbook, all using the same size tin, which is just a hassle-free way of cooking.

Yasmin Khan 04:01

Mmm. But alongside devouring lots of lovely cookbooks. I've also been studying another book this week, which isn't a cookbook, but is the wonderful work of our guest, psychologist Kimberley Wilson. And it's called *How to Build a Healthy Brain* and my copy is now absolutely bristling with Post-it notes because I think it's so fascinating.

Alison 04:25

It's a great book, isn't it? But Kimberley may be better known to people as one of the finalists in *Bake Off*, back in 2013. But *Bake Off* really was just an interlude in Kimberley's career because she was already a psychologist then and has continued her work ever since as a practising psychologist. She's been a therapist in a women's prison; she's also a writer, a podcaster an Instagramer and she's a broadcaster too – so, she co-hosts *Made of Stronger Stuff* on Radio 4 with Dr Xand van Tulleken.

Yasmin Khan 04:59

I know; she's got such an impressive CV, hasn't she? But I think what I find particularly interesting is her work as a psychologist, which is very much centered around the idea that the mind is part of the body and so by looking after our bodies, which includes feeding them really well, we're also supporting normal brain function.

Alison 05:22

It sounds so simple and sensible, doesn't it?

Yasmin Khan 05:22

Yes, it's a really exciting area of research, I think, with new emerging studies being produced about how changes in diet and lifestyle can potentially influence our brains.

Alison 05:33

It was a very eye-opening conversation and I loved what Kimberley says at the end about how responsive our brains can be to changes we make in our lifestyles. It's never too late to start eating better for your brain.

Yasmin Khan 05:45

It's never too late. Absolutely. So, let's get to it. Here is our conversation with the wonderful psychologist Kimberley Wilson.

Hi, Kimberley, thank you so much for joining us on Life on a Plate.

Kimberley Wilson 06:03

Thank you, my pleasure. Thank you so much for having me.

Alison 06:06

It's great to meet you.

Yasmin Khan 06:07

We've been really excited all week, actually, about talking to you. I am going to show you this book so you can see how many bits of it I have highlighted... but we're going to come on to that in a minute. And I thought I'd just ask, how are you doing, you know, the weather's getting a bit colder a bit autumnal – do you like this season? Is it a season you like?

Kimberley Wilson 06:28

I feel like this season is compensation for a rubbish summer. So, summer kind of didn't happen and I felt quite aggrieved about it. But the compensation is crumble season and porridge season. And it just makes me feel happier about life that I can start, kind of, moving towards bowl food and comfort foods to take me through.

Yasmin Khan 06:53

Absolutely. Do you have any favourite cold weather comfort foods? I mean, you mentioned crumble – is that the first thing that you want when the weather... when you need to put on the heaters for the first time?

Kimberley Wilson 07:04

It probably is – so, like, a plum crumble with custard probably is a go-to, just that lovely combination of tangy and sweet.

Yasmin Khan

Any spices in there?

Kimberley Wilson

A little bit of star anise quite often and some cinnamon, maybe some ginger if I'm feeling fancy. And then things like ramen – real bowl foods and soups, and soups that I can serve with a scone, and savoury cobblers... so just kind of getting into the carbs for the next six months.

Alison 07:37

So if that's your cold weather comfort, what do you hanker for in the summer?

Kimberley Wilson 07:41

In the summer I really love having, kind of, crisp salads with quite tangy dressings. Lovely – kind of, my favourite thing is a peach salad with a little, kind of, radicchio and some like crumbly cheese and some salted almonds.

Alison 07:56

Nice. What will be in your store-cupboard for the next six months while you're eating that carbs?

Kimberley Wilson 08:01

So I really love winter squash. So, I tend to do, like, braised lentils and roast squash either as broth or as a salad – a warm hot salad. What else? Really, soups and quite, kind of, hearty soup: broths, things that you're adding, kind of, oats and barley and lentils.

Yasmin Khan 08:23

A potage, as I believe they're sometimes called. I make those as well. So, my food heritage is Iranian and a lot of our soups, they're, they're not like a consommé, I mean, they are a hearty one-pot meal. So you have legumes and grains, like rice or bulgar wheat in the actual soup, as well as the vegetables and you know, so yeah, it kind of gets us to somewhere in between a soup and a stoop.

And of course, food is a huge part of your work, isn't it, Kimberley? Because not only do you have a degree in nutrition, but you're also a chartered psychologist, and one of the things your work focuses on is the role that food and lifestyle play in our mental health. And, I tell you what, I feel like I was made for this conversation today because my mum has a PhD in nutrition and dietetics, and then my dad is a psychiatrist. So, we grew up kind of talking about this topic quite a lot and I've always been really

fascinated by it, which is why I've got your book with a million, like, Post-it notes in it, with a million questions – because I think what you're doing with your work is really incredible. And I feel that there isn't really, you know, anyone really shining the light on this topic in the way that you are although there's a lot of increasing research done on it. But thank you so much for taking the time, anyway, to join us now.

Kimberley Wilson 09:39

Oh – pleasure, thank you.

Alison 09:41

Before we start, I'd love for you to clarify the difference between a psychiatrist, a psychologist and a therapist and what they all do, because they're easily confused for the layperson.

Kimberley Wilson 09:53

Yeah. So, psychiatrists are essentially medics – doctors who trained in the specialism of psychiatric illness and disorders. Psychologists also train specifically in psychiatric illness and disorders, but we are not medics, we do not give medication, we do not prescribe, and we are really there to offer treatment and treatment intervention. So quite often, your psychiatrist will refer you to a psychologist or a psychiatrist will make the diagnosis and then refer you to a psychologist for treatment. And then counsellors and psychotherapists is quite a big range, so it can be people who have degrees in psychotherapy or counselling, people who have had shorter trainings, and a different range of methodologies.

Yasmin Khan 10:36

Thanks so much for explaining that. And a large premise of your work is that the way that we think about brain health as being separate from physical health is inherently flawed. What do you mean by that?

Kimberley Wilson 10:49

So, we have been living, working, practising under a 400-year-old paradigm, really: that the mind is ethereal, kind of separate, out there, its own being in the universe and isn't actually fully anchored in the body. And, you know, that really does stem from Descartes. But he was wrong. He was very, very wrong. Your mind is a function; it is an emergent function of your brain in the same way that your heartbeat is an emergent function of your heart. And your brain is an organ, it is a physical organ, like your heart, like your liver, like your kidneys and for that reason, it has some very basic physiological needs in order to function well. It needs adequate nutrition, it needs appropriate movement, it needs modification and management of stress, it needs, you know, oxygen to work well. There are these basic physiological needs that your brain has in order to work well. And a brain that is working well will have more optimal functions and the functions of your brain are your concentration, your mood, your attention, your memory, all of these things. Your brain doesn't have its own separate nutritional supply, you know, it doesn't have its own oxygen supply: all of that comes from the body. And so, what happens in the body has a profound, direct and often very immediate impact on what's happening in the brain. And we need to really start thinking about that.

Yasmin Khan 12:32

I think you make the point so articulately, and one of the things that really stood out with me from the things that I've seen that you've written, is when you said, you know, all of us could probably name, you know, the three things that we need to do for healthy heart because it's been so drummed into us, hasn't it, over decades of public health information. Whereas ask people, you know, what are the three things you might need (I mean, just to simplify things) for the brain, and we just simply don't have that information.

Kimberley Wilson 12:57

Yeah, I think there is a particularly Western separation between the mind and body that comes out of a history of, well, initially, we thought that mental illness was about possession by the devil, right? It was about something happening with these esoteric spirits or the supernatural phenomena. And that was the grounding of our understanding of mental illness. And then we moved into hysteria and wombs wandering around the body, and, you know, all of this sort of stuff. And so we really started to conceptualise, both in, kind of, public life but in medical research and thinking, to conceptualise the mind as separate from the body. And what that has meant is that we've neglected the evidence that comes from the body, you know, the relationship between physical illness and depression, the fact that when you start to come down with something, you're coming down with a cold, one of your first signs is often just not feeling good, feeling low, apathy, a bit of lethargy, even before you get the symptoms of a blocked nose or something like that. And so we have ignored these kind of clear signals that when something is happening in the body, when something's happening in the immune system, it affects how you feel, it affects the way your brain functions. And if we could start to again reintegrate our thinking around that, then it gives us many more access points for intervention, because one of the big issues with disorders of the brain and mental health is that, well, first of all, there are leading causes of disease and disability; depression is a leading cause, or one of the leading causes of disability worldwide. And Alzheimer's disease, dementia, is the leading cause of death in the UK. And we approach them – certainly depression – with very few tools. Either you can talk about it or you can take medication. And what we miss then is the impact of nutrition, the impact of movement, the impact of your immune function on things like depression. So the more we understand about the basis and the etiology of it, the more interventions and hopefully the more effective treatments we can have for people who are suffering.

Alison 15:03

Your book, *How to Build a Healthier Brain*, looks at how food and lifestyle just affects our brain health and mood and behaviour. When did that interest of linking brain health with food begin?

Kimberley Wilson 15:16

I've always been interested in food and nutrition; I've always been an eater. But I guess that in terms of my professional work, it was when I was working in prisons, and I was running the therapy service at HMP Holloway, which was a women's prison in London. And one of the things about working in women's prisons is understanding the incidence of self-harm, because at the time, women represented something like five or six per cent of the total population of the prison estate in the UK. But when you

looked at the rates of self-harm, women were making up something like 40, 45, maybe 50 per cent of the actual recorded incidence of self-harm. And it was around this time that a replication of a study came out. So, there was a study that was done in 2002 and then a replication came out around 2009. And it found, very interestingly and very, very relevant to the work that I was doing at that very moment, that improving nutrition in prisons reduced objective incidents of violence. So, in prison, when there's an incident of violence or of some self-injury, it's recorded in a logbook, on the wing. And so you can count the number of incidents that have occurred. And so this study – the 2002 and the replication – found that improving nutrition, through supplementation in this case, in prisons, in male offenders, reduced objective incidence of violence by 30 per cent.

Yasmin Khan - Advert: John Lewis Partnership 16:50

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Back to interview: Yasmin Khan

You've highlighted issues around violence and self-harm but the research also showed that diet and lifestyle can have a huge impact on the other major disease of our lifetime, dementia. In your book, you reference a report in *The Lancet*, in which the research said that potentially, a third of dementia cases could be prevented, even where there's a genetic component, by dietary and lifestyle changes.

Kimberley Wilson 17:48

And actually, that's been updated now. Since the book was published, they have increased that proportion to 40 per cent. Forty per cent of global Alzheimer's disease could be delayed or prevented through changes in lifestyle.

Yasmin Khan 18:00

I mean, I would say that probably every family in the world at this stage, you know, is affected, aren't they by, well, both depression and dementia. But yeah, so tell me, you know, how optimistic do you feel that people can ward off these illnesses through changing their habits?

Kimberley Wilson 18:17

Well, optimistic in terms of the science is very compelling. And the science is compelling not just in terms of observation but in terms of intervention. So, in studies where they have taken older people who already have early signs of neurodegeneration or cognitive decline, and they've taken these people and have improved their nutrition, have got them doing a little bit of regular exercise (because exercise is again, a very robust way of improving brain health) they have halted and, in some cases reversed the cognitive decline. So in terms of the research, I'm optimistic. In terms of the implementation of the further research, I think that that's where things become more difficult because, for example, the evidence around diet says if we can get people onto a more Mediterranean-style diet,

or even just a more traditional diet – so if you live in Scandinavia, the traditional Scandinavian diet, if you live in Japan, the traditional Japanese diet – essentially not a Western, highly processed, lots of free sugar diet, it just says the more you adhere to your nation's health guidelines, your nutritional guidelines, the better off you'll be, the lower risk of depression you will have. But what we know is that the implementation of that information already isn't incredibly high.

Yasmin Khan 19:36

But it's within our grasp, isn't it? I think that is, I think that's the message, I think, that I definitely got from your book, because you so clearly actually set out in a practical way – basically, if we eat these seven food groups, we're going to feel better for it.

Kimberley Wilson 19:51

Yeah, and I think there's... we have to think about accessibility, because what is true, is that, you know, eating well – it does take more time. You can eat 100 processed calories much more quickly than you can make 100 unprocessed calories palatable. Also, the hyperpalatability of a processed food is going to make a wholefood diet feel less tasty, you know, when you get so used to eating food that has all these additional flavourings and extra salt and extra sugar, then a moderately palatable diet feels less tasty.

Yasmin Khan 20:22

What food groups should we be eating for our brain? If people do want to start eating healthier food for their brain, what do they want to be including?

Kimberley Wilson 20:30

My first and foremost, soapbox, high-horse nutrient is always going to be omega-3 fatty acids. These fats, which are found in oily fish and seafood, or in an algae-based supplement if you don't eat animal foods, are the structural components of your brain. So they form at least a third of the outer membrane of your brain cells. So if you're... I always say, if you think of your brain cells as a house, or your brain as a house, one in every three of those bricks is omega-3 fatty acids.

Yasmin Khan 21:10

One in three? But that's interesting, because I think a lot of us, you know, have heard that, 'Oh, yeah, omega-3 is good for your brain.' But, actually, to know that it's that much of a building block, that feels like news to me.

Kimberley Wilson 21:18

Essentially, the structural resiliency of your brain starts in utero. And so, if the mother isn't getting sufficient omega-3, then she's going to give birth to a child whose brain is already vulnerable. And then there are those additional stresses that come, you know, from daily life and just growing up and the things that we're exposed to. So, we need to have – in order to get sufficient omega-3 in our diet – 140 grams of oily fish per week, and adults in the UK are getting about a third of a portion. So we're having one portion of oily fish a month on average. And only 1.3 per cent of children in the UK are getting sufficient omega-3.

Yasmin Khan 22:02

And what about you know, obviously increasingly we know people who are turning towards a more vegetarian diet or a plant-based diet so presumably then that, you know, has its own challenges? And I know that you write in the book that, kind of, in terms of supplements and, you know – everyone, I think, flaxseeds are kind of always given, aren't they, as, like, the answer – but what do you recommend for people who are hearing this but can't eat fish for whatever reason?

Kimberley Wilson 22:25

So, omega-3s in terms of human biological health come in three main types: EPA, DHA, and ALA. So EPA and DHA come from marine foods – oily fish and seafood, bivalves, mussels and that sort of thing – and ALA comes from flaxseeds, chia, walnuts and that sort of thing. So, we do need some of that; they are important; you should eat nuts, enjoy your seeds, that's fantastic. And very, very strictly, kind of technically, the body can convert ALA to EPA and DHA. However, it cannot do that very well. So the conversion rate is somewhere between eight to 11 per cent. So there are lots of ways in which that's just not going to be sufficient. So if people are taking – if you don't or can't eat animal foods or fish, oily fish, seafood, you don't like the taste whatever it is – taking an omega-3 where the omega-3 is ALA, or where it says from flaxseed source or chia seeds source is not going to cut it. What you will need is an algae-based vegan source of DHA. And essentially what happens is that the DHA is synthesized in microalgae anyway, then the fish eat it, concentrate it in their bodies, and then we eat the fish. So going to an algae-based source is kind of cutting out the middle fish and going straight to the source. And that's what you'll want to be doing. And you 'll want to be getting at least 500. So, if you look at the back of the packet it will say EPA, DHA – you want that figure to say 500 milligrams per day.

Alison

What about cooking with seaweeds? And that's kind of a bit of a trend but does that help add anything?

Kimberley Wilson

Well actually iodine is found quite abundantly in things like seaweed and kombu and nori. And iodine is really important for brain development. And there have been some reviews that have looked at the lack of iodine in, again, in women's diets and in pregnancy, and particularly because iodine is found in salts and in milk, as people switch away from dairy milk to plant-based milks, they're losing that iodine component in their diets. And again, iodine isn't one of these, kind of, trendy nutrients that people talk about. People often, you know, they'll talk about, maybe, vitamin D, particularly at this time of year as we head into winter and autumn, but no one's talking about iodine – iodine is actually essential for brain development. And so there is a concern, or certainly I am concerned, that if you're cutting out these animal foods, which aren't just about protein, people often think, 'Well I'll get my protein from elsewhere' or 'I'll get my iron from elsewhere' and people think that those are the only nutrients. But animal foods are a source in terms of brain health of omega-3s, of B12 – B12 is so important for the brain that deficiency can mimic dementia. So iodine and B12, choline, which is found predominantly in egg yolks, these nutrients – choline goes on to make acetylcholine which is a neurotransmitter, which is required for learning and memory – these are found predominantly in animal foods. So if you're cutting out animal foods from your diet, you need to be aware of the importance of these nutrients for you, and if

you are intending to conceive or are pregnant, for your child, and you'll need to then think quite carefully about how to get those nutrients into your diet, either through supplementation or selection of, you know, certain... some plant foods can perhaps offer them but probably supplementation is your best bet.

Yasmin Khan 25:59

That's brilliant. So helpful, thank you. So we've got our omega-3s, our iodine, what other key food groups do we want to be doing? What's the Kimberley Wilson Top 10?

Kimberley Wilson 26:08

So, in terms of food groups, the food groups would be, yes, oily fish to start with, in order to get your omega-3.

Leafy green vegetables. So, one of my favourite studies showed that in older people who had a small bowl of leafy greens a day – so your spinach, rocket, watercress, that sort of thing – had brains that were 11 years younger than their peers; the nutrients in leafy greens slow brain ageing such that by this time in their lives, their brains were functioning a decade younger. And again, you don't have to eat a lot of them. It's, you know, it's a handful, it's the amount that you can throw in often – in the book, I say just take a handful of spinach and put that in your shop-bought salad – that's, you know, that's what we're talking about. Have some frozen spinach chunks and throw those into your smoothie, add it into pasta; you won't even taste it. You think you don't like spinach? Those frozen chunks barely taste of anything, it just disappears.

The polyphenols, so those brightly coloured foods, berries in particular. So blackberries, blackcurrants, blueberries – blueberries get all of the PR and I just want to also let people know, the native blackcurrants... elderberries have 10 to 100 times the polyphenols of blueberries, they just don't have the PR. So, I went out – I think we probably just missed the season – but I managed to get out and forage for elderberries and I have them in my freezer to turn them into syrup to flavour my kombucha through the winter.

Alison 27:32

So you cook them into a syrup because, of course, you do have to cook them first because they can be toxic raw.

Kimberley Wilson 27:38

And then, fibre. Fibre, fibre, fibre, fibre.

Alison

Nobody has enough of that. But no one.

Kimberley Wilson

No one! And it's much maligned, it's getting a little bit more – again, it's having a good PR turn around. People are looking at gut health and thinking much more about how we make fibre sexy, but in terms of your brain health, it's really about ensuring that your bacteria are well fed. So, your bacteria that line your gut, fibre is their favourite food; give them fibre, they will earn their keep, they will give you vitamin

K, they will give you B vitamins, they will give you precursors to neurotransmitters, they will produce serotonin for you, everything is going well. It's a lovely, a lovely, happy relationship, a good partnership. So, ensuring that you're eating enough fibre is essentially keeping your gut bugs happy and well fed, is going to help set the scene for just a body that's more in balance and an immune system that is quiet and doing its job.

Alison 28:48

Just before the pandemic and lockdown, you spoke about how we were in a mental health crisis in this country. Has the pandemic in the last 18 or so months added to that?

Kimberley Wilson 28:58

Yeah, I think what the pandemic has done is really pull the cloak away from how much people were struggling anyway, or who were just about getting by... you know, that people were just about managing with their mental health and partly a) because lots of people lost their coping mechanisms, you know, whether it was exercise or socialising, you know, we lost those normal, just social interaction, we lost those normal coping mechanisms. But then, as it went on, and particularly as the lockdowns went on much longer than we anticipated, the additional stress really eroded mental health and wellbeing.

Yasmin Khan 29:42

I think one thing that many people have felt during the pandemic is struggling with uncertainty. Do you have any tips for how people could deal with that?

Kimberley Wilson 29:52

Your brain really doesn't like uncertainty, it is the worst. Your brain would much rather have a very definite negative outcome as the option than an uncertain one. When you have uncertainty, you have this activation in the amygdala. Your amygdala is designed – we think about it as a fear centre – but really, it's designed to help you, to signal novelty and ambiguity. So, when you're facing something that is new or ambiguous, your amygdala says, 'All right, body, we need to marshal some resources, let's get some cortisol in here to help give you some energy, let's get some adrenaline in here to keep you alert and awake. So that we can deal with this ambiguity.' So the kind of corollary of uncertainty is this increase in stress. And that's why our bodies find it incredibly stressful, because your amygdala is like, 'OK, we don't know what's happening: let's stay awake.' So, we all find uncertainty very, very difficult and that's kind of how your brain is built.

What you can do – it's kind of one of two things, and it's a bit of a dialectic. You have to try to control the controllables, so try to manage the things that you can manage; and mostly the things that you can manage, are the things that you can do with your body. So, whether you can, you know, give yourself a bit of a routine; routine is very nice, because routine is very predictable. So, you can certainly during lockdown, I was advising people to, you know, 'Give yourself a routine. Go for a walk in the mornings. At this time, you have a cup of tea. This is the time you sit down to do some work.' You know, give yourself some structure, so that you can at least give your brain a little bit of a rest and tell it it knows what to expect – you know what to expect here. The other side of that is to acknowledge the things you cannot control. So that, kind of, maybe mindful, thoughtful way of just saying, 'I cannot control

everything.' We call it, we talk about 'radical acceptance', which is just being in that place and saying, 'I know I cannot control this. It's uncomfortable. It's unpleasant. I don't like it. I wish it could be different. But I cannot control it.' And just trying to accept it because where people get into trouble is trying to control the uncontrollable and that will exhaust you, that will deplete you, that will erode your resources. So yeah, a balance of those two things.

Yasmin Khan 32:23

I think that's so helpful. Thank you.

Alison 32:25

It is helpful to have a list of oily fish, leafy veg; sometimes it feels a bit overwhelming. What does your real day's diet look like? What would you say is a healthy day?

Kimberley Wilson 32:36

Sure. So, for example... So, yesterday I had... I find porridge is just a great catch-all for so many nutrients and I have a multigrain porridge and I basically use muesli base, which gives you more of a range of grains, and more different types of fibre is great for your gut health. So, muesli or porridge with... throw in some berries, throw in some nuts and maybe a dollop of yogurt, that's fine. So then you've got your polyphenols in the form of berries and the fibre in there, so you're off to a good start. At lunchtime a bean soup, beans on toast, things on toast is always a good start: mushrooms on toast are really good source of fibre and B vits; sardines on toast, or, so yesterday I had potato salad. So, potato salad, a couple of slices of salmon and some greens. And so in that you've got the oily fish, you've got the leafy greens, but also you've got the cold carbs, which are also a prebiotic; they can feed your gut bacteria. So that was lunch. And then for dinner today, I'll be having ramen. So, I'll be making my own broth. So you're going to get some amino acids and some nice proteins in there. I'm going to use a little bit, just one slice of steak between two, so a little bit of meat, but get some B vits in there, and lots of fresh veggies – so sugar snaps, onions, throw some mushrooms in there as well, some pak choi. So it doesn't have to you know, it's not piles of raw vegetables. You don't have to spiralize anything.

Alison 34:15

You mentioned cold carbs. What are they?

Kimberley Wilson 34:18

Yeah, so when you cook and cool a starch – so potatoes, pasta, rice – what happens is that the structure of the sugar molecule changes; it shifts. And what happens is that it resists digestion in your stomach, so that's the resistant part, and it becomes available as a food source for your gut microbes. So that's why we call it resistant starch, it's starch that resists digestion, and then becomes essentially another form of fibre.

Alison 34:46

So if you're listening to all this advice and thinking, actually, I've not been eating like that, is there a cut-off point where any changes to your diet won't have any effect?

Kimberley Wilson 34:56

This is one of my favourite questions, actually, because the answer is incredibly hopeful and optimistic. Because I know that a lot of this information can feel quite – especially if you haven't, you know, you've not been sleeping well, you've not been eating well, you can feel quite worried about your brain health. But we need to remember that your brain is plastic, it responds well, it shifts with experience and life, what's happening in your life. So your brain is always changing. And essentially what the evidence tells us is that up to and up until the point at which someone is diagnosed with moderate neurodegeneration – so early stages, that mild cognitive degeneration, even up to that point, you can make improvements to your lifestyle, and you can make improvements to your brain health such that you can slow delay and/or reverse early signs of neurodegeneration. So, it doesn't matter if you're in your 50s, 60s, 70s, you can do things right now, this moment, whether it's going out for a five-minute walk, whether it's adding some berries to a smoothie, whether it's you know, having a cup of tea – tea has been shown to be neuroprotective. So all of these things are available to you. And it's essentially never too late. So get started now!

Yasmin Khan 36:17

I'm really glad you mentioned things on toast, because one of the things that I've enjoyed the most following you on Instagram, where your account is called 'foodandpsych' for anyone else who wants to follow you, is your real love of the sandwich. Can you tell us a bit more about that?

Kimberley Wilson 36:34

So it started as a lockdown project. So, I'd had this list of places that I'd wanted to go in 2020. You know, dumplings I wanted to try, noodle bars I wanted to seek out, places I want to go with friends, and then that didn't happen. That didn't happen. And so, as we came into 2021, we were still in lockdown and it was feeling very grey and very monotonous and quite miserable. I needed a bit of a project. And so I decided what I would do is create the year of the sandwich. So every week for the year I would create a different famous international sandwich. So, whether it was the banh mi from Vietnam, or a shrimp po boy from Louisiana, New Orleans, a stottie from Newcastle – to try a different sandwich and to make it from scratch. So making the bread, finding – making or finding the speciality ingredients and learning something about the history of the food. And what's been really lovely is that because sandwiches are street food, they are essentially the food of the people, they are the food of the working class and it tells you so much about the history of the economy, the geography of migration, of wartime, in the story of a sandwich, and I've loved it, and it's been really, really lovely.

Alison 38:11

Right, Kimberley, now's the time that we always have in each episode of Life on a Plate. The Kitchen Grill. It's quick-fire. There's no right or wrong answer and do feel free to elaborate. Tea or coffee?

Kimberley Wilson 38:47

Tea. I mean, I do drink coffee; I probably drink more tea. I like the varieties of tea. So, it's tea for me. So I will have it white. No sugar, but I like it just a little bit too hot. There's that very specific temperature and my range for how hot the perfect temperature is very small. Like, it's just a little bit too hot.

Alison 38:53

Oh, nice.

Yasmin Khan 39:03

I mean, I literally ask people when they're making me tea, you know, when you buy them in a café. I'm always like, 'Can I have extra-hot water?' Because sometimes you need to ask for that, it's so true.

Alison 39:03

There's nothing worse than a cold cup of milky tea. Porridge or cereal?

Kimberley Wilson 39:15

Porridge.

Alison

Mash or chips?

Kimberley Wilson 39:15

Oh, potatoes! Chips.

Alison

Bacon or smoked salmon?

Kimberley Wilson

Oh, my head and my heart! My head and my heart!

Alison

I love it – get out of therapist mode!

Kimberley Wilson

Bacon.

Alison

Bacon. Baguette or sourdough?

Kimberley Wilson

Sourdough.

Alison

Butter or olive oil?

Kimberley Wilson

Butter, delicious butter.

Alison 39:41
Spicy or mild?

Kimberley Wilson 39:44
Spicy, every single time. And don't tell me that it's spicy when it's really not because I will be angry.

Alison 39:52
Starter or pud?

Kimberley Wilson 39:54
Pudding. Sure, of course we're having pudding. Why have I gone out if there's no pudding? Don't waste my time!

Alison
There's the *Bake Off* coming out. Recipe or freestyle?

Kimberley Wilson
This one does depend: cooking, freestyle; baking, recipe.

Alison 40:12
Are you a grazer or a feaster?

Kimberley Wilson 40:15
Feast. But can you be both? Constantly feasting?

Alison 40:22
Does that mean you're, like, nibbling in between meals as well? Or does one feast just go into the next?

Kimberley Wilson 40:28
I think, no, I'm probably a feaster. Like, I do like to look forward to a meal. And I do like my meal to be perfect, like perfectly seasoned so I can sit down and really enjoy it. I think if I'm grazing, I'm not really enjoying what I'm eating, I'm usually probably just trying to get by until I can get to my next real meal.

Alison 20:46
Nice. That is it. That's the Kitchen Grill. Thank you.

Yasmin Khan 40:53
And I've just realised having, you know, mentioned *Bake Off* that you know, out of *all* the things that we wanted to talk to you about, we decided, like, *Bake Off* was the one we were least interested in. But, of course, you were a finalist on *Bake Off*. So, I think we should just throw that in there. And I'm going to, kind of, leave that as a teaser. So hopefully, we'll speak again, because it's been an absolute pleasure, Kimberley, I've learnt so much from this and you've actually really inspired me. You know, even earlier

this week, I was reading your book and then I, kind of, went out and I bought some trout because I thought, 'I just need to eat some more fish.' And yeah, trout. Why aren't we eating more trout? I just want to say that.

Alison

Trout is delicious!

Yasmin Khan

No one eats it... It's local to this island... But anyway, it's really been a pleasure. So, thank you so much for joining us on Life on a Plate.

Kimberley Wilson 41:42

It's been lovely. Thank you so, so much.

Yasmin Khan 41:49

You've been listening to Life on a Plate from Waitrose with me, Yasmin Khan. Thank you to my co-host, Alison Oakervee and our guest, Kimberley Wilson. If you've enjoyed this conversation, you can find more like it by subscribing to Life on a Plate wherever you get your podcasts. And to learn more about the series, go visit waitrose.com/podcast

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