

Newcastle North
Primary Care Network
Limited

Why Variety Matters More Than Vitamins

Here's a calmer, more helpful way to think about food.



A long time ago, vitamins were discovered because people were getting very sick.



DID YOU KNOW?

Sailors with scurvy needed vitamin C.
Children with rickets needed vitamin D.
People eating only polished rice got beriberi (vitamin B1).
These were dramatic, life-threatening illnesses, so vitamins became famous.

BUT TODAY...

These conditions are rare.
Most of our modern problems - IBS, bloating, low energy, inflammation, weight changes - aren't caused by a vitamin deficiency.
They're caused by something else:
Low food variety, stress, and an underfed gut microbiome.

Your gut doesn't just need nutrients..

IT NEEDS DIVERSITY.

Your gut is home to trillions of microbes.

Think of them like a garden:

- different plants
- different soils
- different insects
- all working together.

If you only water one flower, the rest of the garden suffers.



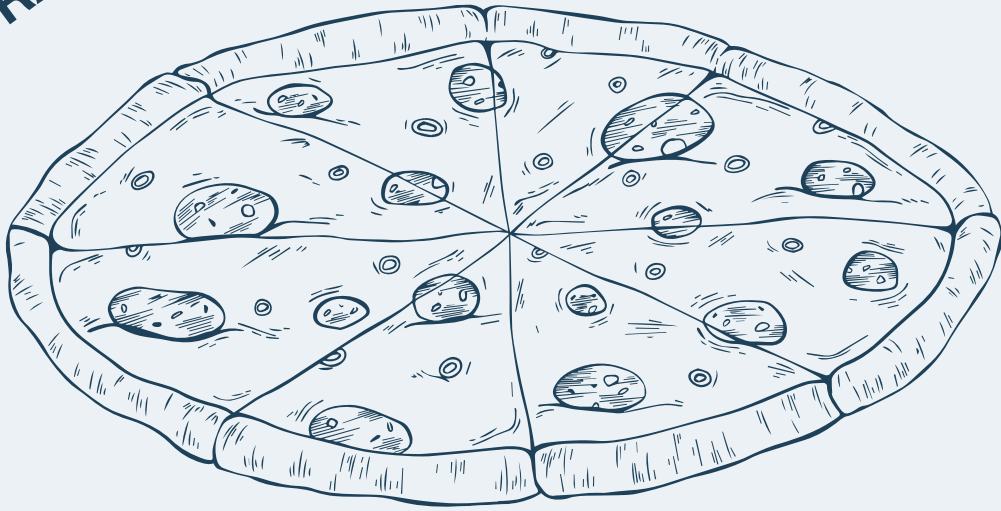
In the same way, when we eat the same few foods each week - bread, pasta, chicken, bananas - our gut misses out on:

- different fibres
- colourful plant chemicals
- textures
- natural antioxidants
- diversity.

These are just as important as vitamins, but they don't come in tablets.



UPFS (ULTRA-PROCESSED FOODS) ARE A PERFECT EXAMPLE



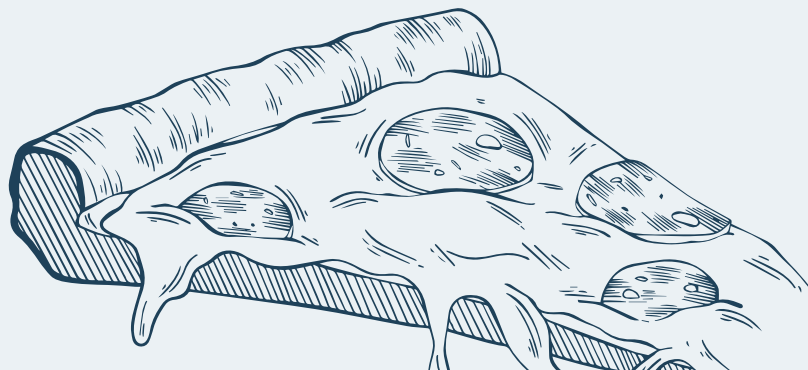
**Most are fortified with vitamins.
On paper, they look “complete”.**

BUT...

They are:

- **Low in fibre.**
- **Low in natural plant compounds.**
- **Broken down so finely they don't feed the gut microbiome.**
- **Often eaten instead of real food, reducing variety even further.**

This is why a diet filled with UPFs can leave you feeling bloated, tired, or hungry again soon after eating – even if it contains the “right nutrients”.





SO.. WHAT REALLY HELPS?

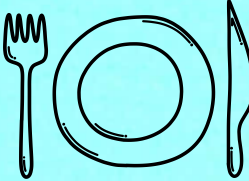
Variety. Calm. And real food.

1

Instead,



focus



on....

Add more colour to your meals
Different colours in fruits and vegetables mean different plant chemicals, fibres and antioxidants.
More colour = more diversity = more support for your microbiome.
Even one extra colour a day makes a difference.

2



Aim for a wide variety of different plant foods each week

This includes fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, herbs, spices, beans, lentils and wholegrains.

You may have heard “aim for 30 plants a week” – that’s optional, not a rule.

The real goal is simply to increase your variety.

Think of each new plant as feeding a different part of your gut’s ecosystem.

And the bonus:

*When you eat a wide variety of plants, you naturally get the vitamins and minerals your body needs – without having to chase individual nutrients**

3

Choose real foods more often than packaged ones
Ultra-processed foods can contain vitamins, but they lack the natural structure, and plant compounds your gut needs.
Real food – whatever version fits your life – supports digestion, energy and calmer gut rhythms.



4

*Include beans, lentils or wholegrains where you can
These foods are rich in fibres that your gut bacteria turn into helpful anti-inflammatory compounds.*

Start small if you're sensitive and build gradually - your gut will adapt.



5

Eat in a calmer way (it matters more than you think)

A tense body = a tense gut.

Slowing down, deepening your breath, or simply sitting down to eat helps digestion work smoothly.

Your gut is part of your nervous system - it responds to calm.

6



*Add rather than restrict
You don't need a "perfect" diet.*

Adding a handful of berries, some herbs, a sprinkle of seeds or an extra veg on the plate is enough to help your gut thrive.

Tiny changes, repeated often, change everything.

7

Mix it up week to week

Variety doesn't mean complexity.

Swapping your usual veg for something different, trying a new fruit, choosing a new grain, or rotating herbs and spices all count.

Your microbes love novelty.

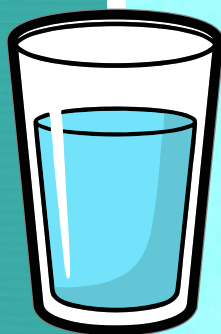


8

Stay gently hydrated

Water helps everything move more easily through your digestive system and supports your gut lining.

You don't need litres - just regular sips through the day.



A healthier gut and calmer body come from patterns



- NOT PERFECTION.

- 1 You don't need a perfect diet.
- 2 You don't need to avoid whole food groups.
- 3 You don't need to take lots of supplements.

Your body thrives when you give it:

*A mix of plants, regular meals, less stress, kindness, and time
Think of it as feeding the whole system, not chasing one
magic nutrient.*

*And if you're working on gut symptoms, we'll help you build
variety gradually, in a way your system can tolerate.*

*A small note:

Vitamin D is the one exception. In the UK, sunlight is our main source, and food can't provide enough on its own - so most adults benefit from a daily vitamin D supplement, especially in autumn and winter.

If you're taking prescribed vitamins or minerals (like B12, iron or others), continue as advised by your GP or specialist.

Diet helps overall, but prescribed supplements are still important when there's a medical reason for them.

If you've been advised to limit certain foods because of a medical condition (such as kidney disease, coeliac disease, allergies, or other specialist dietary needs), continue to follow the advice given to you.

You can still enjoy food variety - it just needs to be tailored to what's safe and right for your health.

