

FIT FOR LIFE with Carol Westmorland

Use your carbohydrates wisely for a longer life

I find Kirstie's *Homemade Home* irresistible TV. I don't bake, but with Kirstie's inspiration and my *Biscuiteers Book of Iced Biscuits* I felt ready to become seasonally creative and bake some iced gems. The biscuits from the recipe in question called for 250g of butter. I shaved a chunk of solid dairy off the block and put it on the scales. They barely moved. A bit more, and a bit more besides until, frustrated by lack of progress, I noticed the label on the pack read '250g'. Genuinely horrified, I pressed on, adding an equally outrageous quantity of sugar.

I produced a tin of bauble-shaped biscuits. I did my best, but it had lost much of its appeal. You don't need to eat the lot but, one way or another, treats disappear.

For 16 years, from my early twenties, I did not touch any kind of sweet treat and didn't miss it one bit until *Green & Blacks* promised that their chocolate was rather good for you and virtuously vegan. They forgot to mention that it might reignite my taste for all things sweet.

In the world of cycling, 'the bonk' is when the body has no more fuel, resulting in a very slow ride home. To avoid it, we fuel up on carbohydrates to release energy slowly with the knowledge that we will use up that energy during the ride.

I adore my carbohydrates and could not go without them. It is when you don't use them up that trouble begins. Understanding why our bodies behave as they do can go a long way to being able



to avoid the triggers of every-day temptation.

As we approach the festivities it can be almost impossible to resist gluttony and there is a very good reason why – sugar is a simple carbohydrate which becomes glucose, the body's fuel. The more you eat, the more you desire. Apart from the energy boost, sugar has no nutritional elements at all and contains 16 calories per teaspoon. Insulin converts sugar into

energy but problems begin when we become resistant by overwhelming our body with too much of the sweet stuff. In Britain we consume 2.25 million tonnes of sugar a year, and we're being advised to reduce that by 70 per cent.

In the world of science, Professor Cynthia Kenyon, a US geneticist, may well have discovered the secret of youth. You wouldn't normally make the association between roundworms and health but these little fellows have been getting their genes tweaked with extraordinary results. Normally a roundworm lives for around 20 days, at 18 days it becomes wrinkled, flabby and tired and around two days later it dies. Professor Kenyon discovered that by controlling insulin in her roundworms, they lived on to great age. She tested her discovery by adding a tiny amount of glucose to her tweaked roundworms and immediately the health gains were reversed.

It is accepted that keeping to a healthy weight prolongs life but this link between carbohydrate consumption and youth is a science that is moving fast. The key is balance, and not the sort you need after a few mulled wines. If Christmas wouldn't be Christmas without sherry trifle, don't deny yourself but instead, do something energetic to counter its effects. Merry Christmas to all!

■ Carol Westmorland lives in the Eden Valley. She is a Cycling Time Trials national champion, clocking up 445 miles in 24 hours. She also teaches pilates. www.pilates-cumbria.co.uk

LIFE COACH with Jo Hampson

Don't put yourself down – or they'll believe it

How confident do you feel walking into a room full of people? Would you prefer to curl up in a ball rather than stand up and speak in front of a group? I know the feeling!

However, I have learned to be more confident. I worked out that looking self-conscious, appearing tongue-tied and putting myself down all show others my lack of confidence. What is more important is that it reinforces it for me as well.

I once watched a woman give a talk. She was bright,

confident and articulate. I put her in the 'super confident' box in my mind. When she sat down, she asked me: "Was that OK? I was so nervous, I hate speaking in public." At that point I subconsciously reassessed her and found myself putting her in the 'not so confident' box. She had successfully behaved with confidence, but then had put herself down. It changed my view of her but more importantly she did not realise how well she had performed.

I used to cover my

embarrassment by giggling and saying: "If I had a brain I would be a goldfish!" I thought it was funny but what I didn't realise was that every time I said it people around me believed it, even though their first impression may have been that I was confident. I stopped when a friend said: "Don't put yourself down. There will always be others to do that!" I then watched the way he behaved. He was never arrogant or boastful but gently reminded himself and others that he was confident and capable. Of

difficult challenges he would say: "I really enjoy doing..."

So the moral of this story is never put yourself down. You do not have to boast, but you can use language that gives you confidence. The more you confirm your strengths to others the more you believe it yourself, and the better you become and the more confident you feel.



■ Jo Hampson and Georgina Perkins run life-change company Stepping Off, based in Shap