

get
fit

eat
well

enjoy
life!

with uncle chris

SUPERFOODS

Separating the chaff from the grain

Hello folks

We live in a society that's increasingly searching for 'superfoods'. Perhaps humans did this way back when they lived in caves ... as cartoonist George Haddon would have us believe!

So what are these 'superfoods'? Essentially they have a high content of certain nutrients that make them worth including in our diets.

Blueberries, lentils and legumes, kale and broccoli pack a punch when it comes to healthy eating. We all know that!

Then there are some (I would suggest) hard-to-find 'superfoods' ... or are they 'super-fads'? To list a few of the latter: pine pollen powder, noni juice from Cook Island, chaga mushroom extract from Siberia. Perhaps they are the bees' knees for health; I just don't know.

Three 'superfoods' that have recently taken off in Australia are quinoa, chia and goji berries.

Quinoa (pronounced 'keen-wa') and chia are known as 'ancient superfoods'.

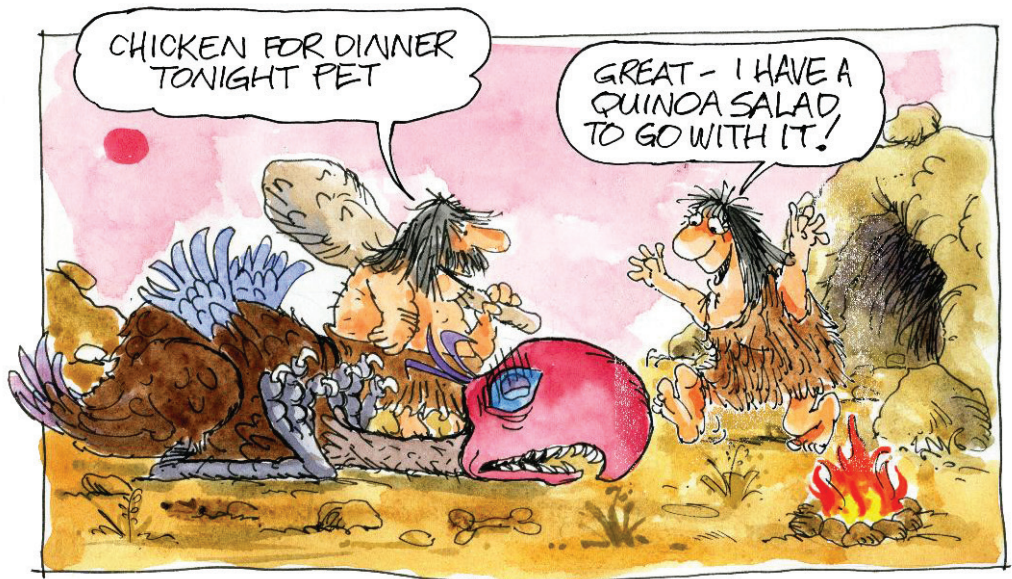
They have been consumed in South America for up to 4000 years.

Recognising quinoa in the 21st century, the United Nations named 2013 as the International Quinoa Year, a tribute to the crop's high nutrient content.

As the Western world has recently discovered the nutritional benefits of quinoa, the price for the crop has trebled in seven years. It is now 10 times the price of wheat on a per-tonne basis.

Consequently the producing nations in South America – Bolivia and Peru – have found they cannot afford to buy their own dietary staple. And so the residents of those two countries are increasingly sustaining life on junk food – the Western world's 'thank-you' to the providers of this 'superfood'! Ironical and sad.

Now to the benefits of quinoa – it is a



great wheat-free alternative to starchy grains. It can be substituted for most cereals and is a good replacement for rice.

It has twice the protein content of rice and barley and is reputed to be among the least allergenic of all the grains and is a complete protein source. Consequently, quinoa is perfect for vegans.

Cooked quinoa becomes fluffy and creamy, but retains a mild nuttiness. It can be used as a breakfast cereal, with or without additives, and is great in a salad or cooked meals.

Chia is a species of the popular blue-flowering salvia plants and was first grown in Central America – especially in Mexico and Guatemala.

Chia seeds are used primarily to enrich smoothies and breakfast cereals.

There have been some interesting comparisons between the benefits of chia and quinoa. They are both high in protein and omega-3s.

Some nutritionists argue that chia seeds are more 'nutrient dense' and have a higher fibre content. These figures are on a gram-for-gram basis. But we would consume more quinoa than chia in an

average meal.

And now, finally, to goji berries. I love 'em straight from the pack. The Chinese first harvested them around 700 years ago, but even before then they were used in medicine throughout Asia.

They are often known as wolfberries and also as 'red diamonds'.

Back at the start of the 21st century, Canadian and US farmers began cultivating goji berries on a commercial basis for fresh berries, juice and processed products.

The fruit is tender oblong red berries, not unlike cranberries. They are traditionally dried in the sun or by mechanical dehydration.

There have been some unverified claims about the health benefits of goji berries. There was a story, in a booklet with a series of falsehoods, that a Chinese man, who died in 1933, had lived for 256 years on a diet of goji berries. Swallow that!

Whatever the 'superfoods' you digest – and I'm sure some are excellent – don't forget the tried-and-true products so readily available: green vegies (especially kale and broccoli), lentils and other legumes, and fruit (especially blueberries).

SUPERFOODS

TRANSFORMED INTO SUPER MEALS

HOW TO COOK QUINOA

1 cup of quinoa

1 ½ cups of water or stock

Combine 1 cup of rinsed quinoa to 1 ½ cups water or stock and place them both into a pot.

Add a small pinch of sea salt and bring to the boil. Reduce the heat to very low and place on a lid.

Simmer quinoa over a low heat for 12-15 minutes or until all the water has absorbed, then turn off the heat.

Asparagus, fetta and quinoa salad

375g water

150g quinoa, rinsed, drained

¼ teaspoon salt

olive oil spray

2 bunches asparagus, woody ends trimmed

1 large red capsicum, halved, seeded, diced large

75g crumbled low-fat feta

40g sunflower seeds

2 spring onions, trimmed, thinly sliced

2 tablespoons chopped fresh continental parsley

1 ½ tablespoons fresh lemon juice

2 teaspoons honey

2 teaspoons olive oil

100g baby rocket leaves

Combine water, salt and quinoa in a large saucepan over medium-high heat. Bring to the boil. Reduce heat to low. Cover and simmer for 12-15 minutes or until the liquid is absorbed. Transfer to a large bowl. Set aside to cool.

Meanwhile, preheat a BBQ on high. Spray lightly with oil. Cook the asparagus for 2-3 minutes or until tender crisp (a grill in an oven can achieve the same result).

Add the asparagus, capsicum, feta, sunflower seeds, spring onion, rocket leaves and parsley to the quinoa.

Whisk the lemon juice, honey and oil in a small bowl until well combined. Add the dressing and rocket to the quinoa mixture. Season with pepper and toss to combine.

Quinoa mushroom risotto

2 shallots, finely diced

2 cloves garlic, crushed

2 tablespoons olive oil

100g button mushrooms, sliced

70g quinoa

500g vegetable or chicken stock

1 tablespoon dried thyme leaves

100g baby spinach leaves

50g parmesan, extra for serving

black pepper and sea salt to taste

Sauté the shallot, garlic and thyme in olive oil until golden in colour. Add the sliced mushrooms to the pan, then sauté for a few minutes or until they start to colour.

Add quinoa and stock. Mix through, cover and cook over a low heat for 15 – 20 minutes or until stock has been absorbed and quinoa is tender. Add the spinach and season with salt and pepper. Stir through the parmesan.

Chicken, goji berry and quinoa salad

400g roast chicken, pulled apart

150g quinoa

½ cup goji berries, chopped

1 tablespoon chia seeds

375ml water

¼ teaspoon salt

200g snow peas, trimmed

1 bunch broccolini, trimmed,

2 tablespoons chopped fresh continental parsley

2 tablespoons chopped pistachio kernels

1 ½ tablespoons white balsamic vinegar

1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil

cracked black pepper

Pull apart the roast chicken from your local store.

Meanwhile, place quinoa, salt and water in saucepan. Bring to boil. Reduce heat to low, cover and simmer for 12-15 minutes until water absorbs. Cool. Stir in chia seeds.

Cook peas and broccolini in a saucepan of boiling water for 2 minutes. Refresh under cold running water and drain.

Place chicken, quinoa mixture, peas, broccolini, goji berries, parsley and pistachio in bowl. Whisk together vinegar and oil in bowl. Add to salad. Toss to combine. Season with freshly ground black pepper.

Pumpkin and quinoa salad

600 g pumpkin, cut into large wedges

2 garlic cloves, crushed

1 red onion, peeled and cut into wedges

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 bunch baby carrots

1 cup cooked quinoa (see cooking quinoa recipe)

small bunch parsley chopped

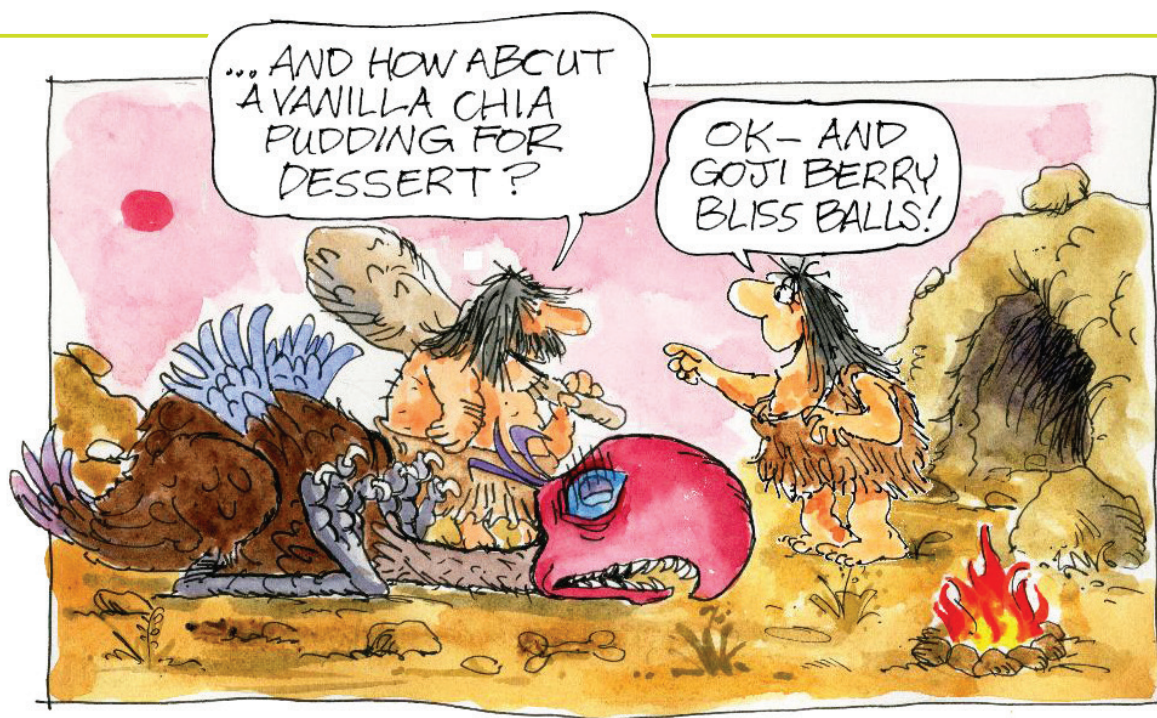
1 - 2 tablespoons basil pesto

100g danish feta, to crumble

Preheat oven to 200C. Combine pumpkin, red onion and carrots, drizzle with a little olive oil and season with salt pepper. Roast for 30 minutes or until vegetables are tender.

Remove vegetables from the oven. Add the pesto, parsley and quinoa. Garnish the top of the salad with feta.

A great accompaniment for red meat!



NEW-STYLE DESSERTS

Vanilla berry chia pudding

60g chia seeds
200ml milk of your choice
250ml water
1 tablespoon cinnamon
2 tablespoons honey
1 tablespoon vanilla essence
4 cups mixed berries

Place all ingredients apart from berries in a bowl, stir until all combined. In four bowls or jars you need to divide the mixture, putting a layer of berries in the middle of each serve and a layer on the top. Refrigerate overnight to set.

Overnight raspberry, chia and quinoa pots

120g fresh raspberries or thawed frozen raspberries
80g chia seeds
50g cooked quinoa flakes
4 teaspoons maple syrup
370ml milk, of your choice
180g yoghurt, of your choice to serve
½ cup berries to serve on top

Place raspberries in a bowl and mash with a fork. Add chia, quinoa, maple syrup and milk. Stir to combine. Divide between 4 glasses. Cover with plastic wrap and place in the fridge overnight to soak.

Top with yoghurt and sprinkle with extra raspberries.

Goji berry granola (also for brekikie)

½ cup quinoa
2 cups oats
¼ cup coconut sugar or brown sugar
½ cup slivered almond
½ cup hazelnuts
¼ cup sunflower seeds
¼ cup pumpkin seeds
3 tablespoons linseed seeds
1 orange, zested
3 tablespoons coconut oil (melted)
2 tablespoons maple syrup
½ cup desiccated coconut
½ cup goji berries

Turn the oven on to 150C.

In a bowl, mix all the dry ingredients except goji berries and stir in the melted coconut oil, orange zest and the maple syrup. Mix until well combined.

Place the oats mixture in a lined baking tray and bake in the oven for 25 minutes, mixing the oats half way through.

Cook for 25 minutes or till lightly golden, add the goji berries and combine.

Let cool down before transferring to an airtight container.

Cherry ripe chia pudding

60g chia seeds
200ml milk, of your choice, full cream, light, coconut, almond, soy etc
250ml water

1 cup frozen cherries
2 teaspoons vanilla essence
2 teaspoons honey
1 tablespoon cocoa powder
granola to serve

Combine milk, water, vanilla, honey and cocoa in a bowl. Add chia seeds and cherries, stir till well combined and no lumps.

Divided into 4 bowls or jars and cover, refrigerate overnight to set. Top with a small amount of granola or nuts for some added crunch.

Goji berry bliss balls

50g almonds
12 pitted fresh medjool dates
30g goji berries
2 tablespoons cocoa powder
40g shredded coconut
2 tablespoons maple syrup
2 tablespoons chia seeds

Process almonds in a food processor until finely chopped. Add pitted fresh dates, goji berries, cocoa powder, coconut and maple syrup.

Process until almost smooth and well combined. Place chia seeds on a plate. Roll 2 tablespoon portions of almond mixture into balls. Roll in chia seeds to evenly coat.

Place on a lined tray in the fridge for 1 hour or until set.

OODLES OF NOODLES ... and other things

You can make carrot, sweet potato and pumpkin noodles, but let's start with zucchinis!

4-5 large zucchinis to make 4-5 serves

To make zucchini noodles you need to use a spiraliser or julienne peeler to spiralise the zucchini with. The spiraliser is a device that you twist the zucchini through to make long spirals of spaghetti. The julienne peeler cuts long strings of vegetable when you use it like a peeler.

You can use many forms of cooking these noodles – raw, microwaved, sautéed, boiled and baked. My favourite ways are raw and microwaved.

For best results when you microwave, place on a dish, microwave for 1 minute and then 30 second bursts after that so you don't overcook. Serve with your favourite sauce.

Meatballs and zucchini noodles

Meatballs

600g beef mince
½ cup dried breadcrumbs
½ cup milk
1 egg white
1 teaspoon garlic crushed
1 teaspoon dried basil
1 teaspoon dried oregano

Sauce

1-2 tablespoons olive oil
1 onion finally diced
2 teaspoons crushed garlic
1 punnet grape tomatoes
680g jar tomato passata
1 cup water
2 teaspoon dried Italian herbs
salt and pepper
zucchini noodles, see recipe above
parmesan cheese for grating over

To make meatballs: in a large mixing bowl, soak breadcrumbs in milk for 2 minutes. Place all the remaining meatball ingredients into the bowl, use your hands to help combine all ingredients. Roll mixture into 36 balls and leave to **one side**.

To make sauce: heat a large saucepan to medium-high and add oil, onion,

garlic and herbs and sauté for 2-3 minutes. Add the tomatoes, cook for a further minute. Add passata, water and seasoning to taste, bring to the boil stirring frequently then add the meatballs into the tomato sauce, shake the pot gently to coat them in the sauce. Reduce to a simmer and cook for 10 minutes. Stirring occasionally but gently so the meatballs don't break up.

Cook noodles according to the instructions on the packet (a great prepared product can be found in your veg department at your local Coles if not making your own.) Divide the noodles into bowls and top with meatballs and sauce. Sprinkle with the parmesan cheese.

Asian style chicken and noodles

1/3 cup oyster sauce
2 tablespoons cornflour
1 cup water
500g chicken thigh, sliced
1 onion, sliced
2 red capsicum, sliced
160g snow peas, top and tailed
4 garlic cloves, crushed
2 tablespoons sesame oil
2 large carrot, peeled and cut into half moons
400g konjac noodles
1/3 cup fresh coriander
1 red chilli, sliced

Dissolve the cornflour in water and set aside.

Slice chicken and coat in oyster sauce, slice vegetables. Prepare noodles as per packet instruction.

Heat oil in a frypan or wok over a high heat. Add garlic, capsicum, onion and carrot, stir-fry for 2 minutes, add chicken and marinade then cook for another 2 minutes.

Add cornflour mixture to pan, stir well and simmer for 3 minutes until sauce is thickened and chicken is cooked. Toss in the snow peas and serve over the noodles, garnish with chilli and coriander.

Prawn laksa

2 tablespoons sunflower oil
12 raw king prawns, peeled and deveined with tails intact
100g laksa paste
375ml chicken stock
250mls coconut milk
125ml water
2 kaffir lime leaves, finely shredded
1 tablespoon brown sugar
1 tablespoon fish sauce
2 tablespoons lime juice
200g dried vermicelli rice noodles
160g bean sprouts, trimmed
¼ Chinese cabbage, finely shredded
½ cup Thai basil leaves
½ cup coriander leaves
Fried shallots to garnish
Sliced red chilli, to garnish

Prepare noodles as per package instructions.

In a wok heat oil over medium heat, add laksa paste and stir-fry for 1 minute until fragrant. Add stock, coconut milk, kaffir lime and water. Bring to the boil, add prawns and bring back to the boil. Turn off and let sit for 5 minutes or until prawns are just cooked. Stir in cabbage, sugar, fish sauce and lime juice to taste.

Divide the noodles among 4 serving bowls. Ladle over laksa and top with the bean sprouts, basil, coriander, shallots and chilli.

Sticky chicken noodles

2 tablespoons Kecap Manis (sweet soy sauce, Indonesian style, from supermarkets)
1 tablespoon sugar
1 ½ tablespoons fish sauce
500g chicken thighs, thinly sliced
1 tablespoon coconut oil
1 red onion, cut into thin wedges
1 bunch broccolini, halved
1 tablespoon ginger paste
2 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
1 tablespoon lemongrass paste
1 long fresh red chilli, thinly sliced
200g snow peas, trimmed
1 red capsicum, deseeded and sliced
200g dried vermicelli rice noodles
1 small bunch fresh coriander, leaves picked

Combine the Kecap Manis, sugar and fish sauce in a bowl. Add chicken. Stir to coat the chicken and let marinate for 30 minutes.

Prepare the noodles as per package instructions.

Remove the chicken from the marinade, reserving marinade.

Heat 1 teaspoon of the oil in a wok over high heat. Add half the chicken. Stir-fry for 1-2 minutes or until browned. Transfer chicken to a bowl. Repeat with 1 teaspoon oil and remaining chicken.

Heat remaining oil in wok over high heat. Add onion and capsicum. Stir-fry for 1 minute then add ginger, garlic, lemongrass and chilli. Stir-fry for 30 seconds or until aromatic. Add reserved marinade and chicken, broccolini, snow peas stir-fry for 1 minute. Add noodles and coriander stir-fry until well combined and just tender.

Pumpkin and almond couscous salad

120g couscous, uncooked
170ml liquid chicken or vegetable stock
1 clove garlic, crushed
1 teaspoon coriander
1 teaspoon cumin
3 tablespoon olive oil
480g pumpkin
2 tablespoons flaked almonds, toasted
1/3 cup currants
salt and pepper

Preheat oven to 200C.

Peel and dice the pumpkin. In a bowl coat the pumpkin with 2 tablespoons of oil and seasoning. Place on a baking tray and bake until golden and cooked.

Place almonds on another baking tray and roast for 5 minutes until just starting to colour.

In a bowl place couscous, spices, garlic, salt and pepper mix together. Bring stock and remaining oil to the boil and pour over couscous. Cover and stand for 5 minutes. Remove cover, then with a fork fluff to separate the grains.

Add pumpkin, currants and almonds. Toss well to combine then check seasoning and adjust as needed.

This salad is a great accompaniment to red and white meats.

CALL FOR CAULI

Cauliflower mash

500g cauliflower, broken into florets
1 brown onion, diced
½ teaspoon garlic, crushed
1 tablespoon olive oil
200ml vegetable stock or water
50-100g butter
salt and white pepper

Sauté onion and garlic in a large pot with the olive oil over a low to medium heat until softened. Add the cauliflower pieces and vegetable stock or water. Cover the pot completely with a tight-fitting lid and turn down to heat to a low simmer.

Cook for 5 - 10 minutes, stirring half way through and checking to make sure there is still enough liquid to steam the cauliflower. Cook until cauliflower is tender.

Remove from the heat and place into a blender or use a stick blender to puree the cauliflower. Add butter and season with a little sea salt and white pepper to taste. Blend again until smooth and creamy.

Serve hot as a side to meat dishes.

Prawn and cauliflower fried rice

2 ½ tablespoons sesame oil
3 eggs, lightly beaten
2 garlic cloves, crushed
2 small red chillies, seeds removed, chopped
6 spring onions, finely chopped
400g peeled green prawns, tails intact
300g cauliflower rice, pre-packaged cooked as directed
80ml soy sauce
1 teaspoon sesame oil
2 tablespoons sweet chilli sauce
120g frozen peas
salt and pepper

Heat 2 teaspoons oil in a wok or large frypan over medium-high heat. Add the egg and cook, stirring, for 1-2 minutes until softly scrambled. Remove egg from the pan and set aside.

Add remaining 2 tablespoons oil to the pan, then cook chilli, spring onion and garlic, stirring, for 1 minute or until fragrant. Add prawns and cook for 2-3 minutes until opaque. Add rice, soy, sesame oil, sweet chilli sauce and peas, then cook, stirring, for 2-3 minutes to warm through. Return egg to the pan, toss and adjust seasoning as needed.

Cauliflower rice

1 cauliflower, broken into florets
salt and pepper

Using a food processor with the grater attachment, process the cauliflower into rice. To use this, you can keep it raw or you can fry off in a large frying pan over a medium heat with your choice of oil or butter. Cook for around 4-6 minutes until softened. Alternately you can microwave until tender also, cook for 3 minutes and then 30 second intervals until tender.

Broccoli can also be used in substitute for cauliflower and Coles also has a great pre-packaged product in their vegetable department.

RUN INTO FITNESS

... but by being sensible

Dear Brighton.

With global warming seemingly in full swing (as witnessed by our bushfires and the floods in Queensland) I hope some of you are still getting outside in t-shirts and shorts.

I am proud to say that while I was on the gloriously long summer school holidays, my time without marking was spent getting back into some serious training with a middle distance running group. This was more fun than I assumed it would be, and what was even more rewarding was having the great pleasure of being joined by my lady friend. She ended up completing her first ever fortnight of full athletics sessions, while she was on her own summer break.

I'm proud she overcame the mental barriers of being 'not good enough', and gave it a go. Emily is not a long-legged gazelle like sporty people you see on TV and, by her own admission, she is not even particularly speedy. Disregarding a notable gap in pace however, Emily was able to focus on her own goals and, by the end, she made considerable improvements.

Being able to ignore the urge to hide rather than risk embarrassment when you are new to something can be very hard. This is more evident in running due to Australians having to endure high school 'athletics' carnivals, where most people would be labelled as 'losers' when not winning the 100m. In my experience this is why most people never find joy in running to their own potential.

This shift in mentality is something I am now trying to rectify at my own school. Just this week I started a running group for volunteer students, where once a week, they will come and complete sessions that Olympians have literally done. This may sound overly ambitious, but what I can say about actual athletics training is that your ability is irrelevant.

Every session I will give to these kids is made up of repetitions where they will be in charge of their pace, based on what they believe they can manage. There are no races and no one will be branded as better or worse than their peers.

Within five minutes of our first lesson I had a student asking if we could do relays, but I squashed that chain of thought, explaining that a real athletics session should have participants not thinking about where they are relative to the person next to them. That is what I would love for you to be able

'You'll actually be amazed how quickly your body starts to improve'

to experience as well. By freeing your mind of expectations of being good, and instead just rewarding yourself for getting through the work, this is where the true happiness comes on a running track.

I will include a couple of the sessions below if you want to try.

As I continue to say during these editions, the benefits of giving running a go are far beyond physical gains.

Yesterday, I had a work colleague jog slowly to school with me, and he made a wise point at the end of the run. I had been worried that he would never join again - especially with the volume of his panting - but instead of whingeing, he only had positive things to say. He had viewed the run as a process of ignoring negatives and instead focusing on the benefits. Yes, he was tired at the end, but he also started his work day with

time to think, and walked into the school with a sense of pride in himself.

As he put it, the more he does this, the less he dwells on possible inconveniences in other areas of his life. By being a 'yes' man, he is so much more open to new experiences, and who knows what this can lead to for him, or anyone.

Before I finish up, I want to quickly address reactions you may feel if you give some of these sessions a go.

First, on the mental side, you are not going to be great the first time, and it may be easy to find yourself losing heart. You have to expect a tough start and not be hard on yourself.

You'll actually be amazed how quickly your body starts to improve. It is totally worth it.

Secondly, if you haven't done much running in the past, there are going to be muscles that are shocked, so make sure you go for a slow jog and light stretch (not to full stretch) before you start. You are better to start slowly, and not overdo it on day one. Rome - or Brighton - wasn't built in a day.

Finally, you will most likely feel fatigue or soreness in particular areas of your legs, that are not as strong, as you near the end of early sessions. As long as the soreness doesn't present in one sharp instance however (or relate to previous injury), it will most likely just be a matter of the body adapting, which will go away. The reason I say this is that the body will almost always be shocked by the first time running, but this will not continue, if you maintain regularity.

Next article I will return to documenting physiology, but I just wanted to share experience that non-runners have had, to show you that running is no less for you than it is for me. Anyway, hope this leaves a mark, and either way, the footy is back soon!!

... THE IDEA, HALL, WAS TO **RUN** 60 METRES
THEN **REST** FOR 45 SECONDS - **NOT**
TO RUN FOR 45 SECONDS AND REST
FOR 60 MINUTES!!



Some of the sessions I'll set for the students

Session 1

Run 60 metres then wait 45 seconds before running back to the start. Waiting 45 seconds between each run, repeat this anywhere between 6 - 10 runs. DO NOT SPRINT and instead run at a pace you can repeat for the reps you aim for.

Session 2

Run for 15 seconds, then walk for 15 seconds, then run for 30 seconds, then walk for 30 seconds, then run for 45 seconds, then walk for 45 seconds, then run for 1 minute, then walk for 1 minute, then run for 45 seconds, then walk for 45 seconds, then run for 30 seconds then walk for 30 seconds, then finish with a 15 second run. These runs are again not at full pace, and in early stages, you can do a slow jog at your pace as your run.

Session 3

Run for 150m (roughly the straight line through a football field) 4 times with 3 to 5 minutes break in-between each run.



HOW to grow the best garlic

It's the stuff of legend.

The builders of the pyramids ate it for strength, Greek brides carried bouquets of it, Dracula feared it and lovers of Italian cuisine idolise it.

It's garlic, one of the oldest, yet at times most maligned, cultivated foods.

There's an old New York saying that "a nickel will get you on the subway, but garlic will get you a seat".

That pretty well sums up our love/hate attitude to this ancient, odorous herb.

We loathe its foul and lingering effect on our, and especially other eaters', breath yet we can't live without its magical ability to transform even the most mundane meal into something special.

The decider of course – or it should be – is that this clove with clout is so damned good for us.

For starters, most research agrees that eating garlic regularly helps ward off colds and flu.

With minimal calories, it is also claimed to reduce blood pressure, lower cholesterol levels and help prevent Alzheimer's disease and dementia.

Not a bad credits list for any food.

You probably don't want to know the reality is that in order to take up these benefits you must eat it regularly and in quite large quantities – which just might mean your garlic breath losing you a few friends along the way.

Then, what's a few friends when it comes to eating fabulously flavoured food! Just kidding.

The beauty of garlic is that it's so easy to grow – and now, as the weather cools, is the best time to grow it – and Tassie garlic, because of brisk winters, seems to taste just that little bit better.

It beats me why anyone would buy imported garlic that has likely been sprayed with goodness knows what chemicals to extend

its shelf life, and fumigated with possibly toxic methyl bromide to meet import requirements, when you can grow your own.

If you plant your garlic in the next month, you can expect ready-for-the-kitchen cloves by early summer.

Like most plants, garlic does best in rich soil that drains well.

It hates "wet feet", so if your soil is the least bit boggy, grow it in a large pot or planter.

If your soil is on the sad side and you don't have your own compost bin, buy in a bag of compost and work it through the soil as you dig it.

Sprinkling in a few handfuls of blood and bone (available from nurseries) will help the process.

To start off, it's important to buy certified healthy bulbs from a nursery or garden centre.

Break them apart just before planting to release the cloves.

Then simply plant individual cloves about 15cm apart with their pointy ends up and about 6-8cm below the soil surface.

There are more than 300 varieties of garlic grown around the world.

Working out your favourites is a long process but can be fun.

This time of year the hard-neck varieties that produce a flower stalk are the go.

Quite often the names change, depending on who is growing them, but popular ones are those in the Turban group.

From here on it's so easy.

Simply pull any weeds that appear (you can mulch if you like) and wait for the foliage to appear.

If conditions are dry, water the bed but don't get carried away.

Certainly don't water in the few weeks before harvest.

That's when rot can easily set in.



In spring, a hardneck garlic sends up what is called a "scape", or a green stalk.

Some cut this off to improve growth, but it is not necessary.

One of the most asked questions among new growers is how to tell when the garlic is right for harvest.

This is generally early to mid December when a few of the leaves begin to wither and die.

If uncertain, simply lift a plant and check.

Flowers might appear on hard-neck varieties before this but just ignore them

When harvesting, pull the garlic out by the stem or gently lift it with a garden fork.

Destroy any diseased looking bulbs.

There's no need to wash the bulbs clean (this can encourage rotting) but simply brush them of loose dirt.

Once extracted, the garlic plants with bulbs attached are best tied into bunches, maybe 10 plants to a bunch, and hung in a dry, airy spot indoors.

For a trendy look, they can be plaited and hung.

Once they are relatively dry, or cured, generally after a few weeks, the roots and much of the growth above the bulb can be snipped off.

Expect the stored bulbs to be good to use for about 8-10 months.

If you have produced a healthy crop, it's okay to save a few healthy bulbs to provide cloves for planting a new crop next autumn.

TRIVIA TIME

During World War I, garlic was used by the Russian army to treat wounds. Even after Alexander Fleming's discovery of penicillin it was still often used and known as "Russian Penicillin".

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