

get
fit

eat
well

enjoy
life!

with uncle chris

AVOID THE ADDITIVES

...because you are what you eat

Hello folks

As the old saying goes, you are what you eat. That doesn't mean, of course, that if you are vegan you'll go nuts. Vegans thrive on many products that are grown, not just nuts.

Now I love hoisin sauce, a flavouring staple used in many Asian dishes. I throw in a dash when I braise broccolini with halved cherry tomatoes. Hoisin sauce is dark and rich and sticky – great for marinating meat dishes or adding to a stir-fry ... or broccolini.

This week I was about to sauce up my broccolini when I read the label. Flavour enhancer 621 had been added by the Chinese manufacturer to my bottle of hoisin. And folks, I have to report that flavour enhancer 621 is monosodium glutamate, often un-affectionately known as MSG.

That bottle is now in the bin, but this week I have found other hoisin sauces without MSG, so life goes on. What caused my initial concern?

Many years ago a friend literally passed out when we were eating in a Chinese restaurant in Melbourne. He was a robust fellow, but something he ate suddenly floored him. He recovered, but the problem was put down to MSG.

The flavour enhancer was discovered by a Japanese chemistry professor more than a century ago. It occurs naturally in seaweed, a Japanese culinary speciality, and is responsible for a savoury taste in many foods. Now MSG is produced to enhance certain foods.

Let's hear it from foodstandards.gov.au –

a Canberra-based government authority. It says: "MSG is considered safe and is an authorised food additive in the European Union and Australia and New Zealand in line with good manufacturing practice. This means that a food manufacturer can use a food additive only up to the limit that achieves its specific purpose."

Then it adds: "A small number of people may experience a mild hypersensitivity-type reaction to large amounts of MSG

yellow, and chefs and dietitians are generally well disposed to using and recommending it. You can buy it loose in good supermarkets and greengrocers – it looks somewhere between a dessicated orange caterpillar and a chunk of fresh ginger.

But as for item 1522 – calcium lignosulphonate – on the foodstandards.gov.au website ... well folks, I can only paraphrase what Wikipedia says:

"Lignosulfonates, or sulfonated lignin, are byproducts from the production of wood pulp using sulfite pulping ...

"The single largest use for lignosulfonates is as plasticizers in making concrete ... also used for the production of plasterboard ...

"Oxidation of lignosulfonates from softwood trees produces vanillin (artificial vanilla flavour)."

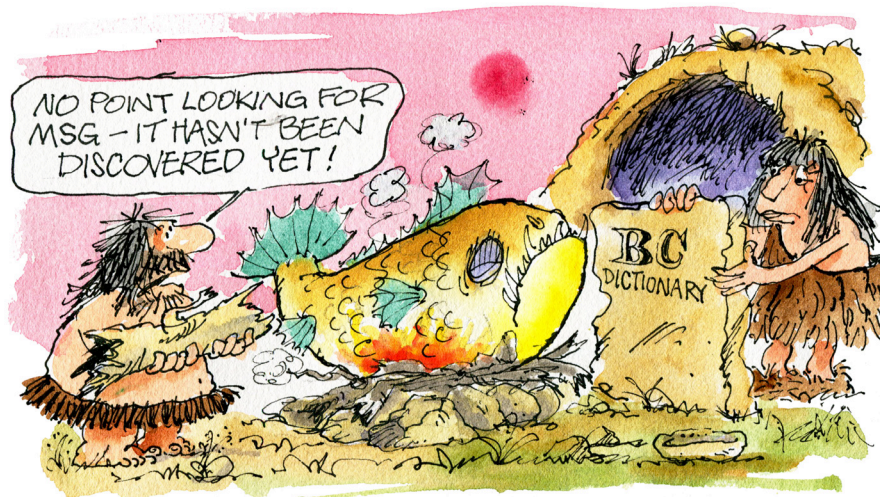
So then I looked up vanillin on trusty Wikipedia. It says:

"Synthetic vanillin is now used more often than natural vanilla extract as a flavouring agent in foods, beverages, and pharmaceuticals.

"Artificial vanilla flavouring is often a solution of pure vanillin, usually of synthetic origin ... because of the scarcity and expense of natural vanilla extract."

So as I said earlier, you are what you eat. When – or seriously, if – you have time, check out the 1400-plus food additives listed on the foodstandards.gov.au website.

Meanwhile, I'll go easy on MSG and try to avoid calcium lignosulphonate in my diet.



when eaten in a single meal. Reactions ... may include headaches, numbness/tingling, flushing, muscle tightness and general weakness. These reactions normally pass quickly and do not produce any long-last effects."

There's a list of food additives, numerically listed, on the foodstandards.gov.au website.

The numbers start at 100 for curcumin. They end at 1522 for calcium lignosulphonate. As the government authority says: "You can use this information to gain a better understanding of what is in the food you eat."

Well, I can report that item 100 on the food additives list is curcumin, aka turmeric.

It's the ingredient that turns curry powder

RICE AROUND THE WORLD

It's hard to imagine a single more versatile kitchen staple than rice – brown, black or white, or varieties with an Asian pedigree, or my personal favourite – arborio rice, the essential ingredient in Italian cuisine.

It accompanies curries from India to Indonesia or indeed anywhere in the world, stroganoff from Central Europe, paella from Spain. You can turn it into desserts, bulk up soups ... and even have it for breakfast (think rice bubbles). It's healthy and it's cheap!

Now for the varieties ...

Long grain rice is milled rice that has had its husk, bran and germ removed. After milling, the rice is polished, resulting in a seed with a bright, white, shiny appearance. Perfect for pairing up with stir-fries and curries and it won't become sticky when cooked.

Brown rice is a whole-grain version of white rice with the inedible outer husk removed. In the processing, the bran is retained, making it wholesome for your dietary needs. Much slower to cook, it is nutty, retains its vitamins and has a high fibre content.

Black rice has a similar amount of fibre to brown rice and, like brown rice, has a mild, nutty taste.

Basmati rice is a long-grain rice from India. It has a distinctive aroma and, when cooked, each grain should remain separate, giving a light, fluffy result. It is the perfect accompaniment to Indian curries and is used in biriyani and pilaf dishes.

Jasmine rice is originally from Thailand. This is a long grain variety of rice that has a subtle floral aroma and a soft, sticky texture when cooked. It teams with Thai dishes and coconut-based curries.

Arborio rice is an Italian short-grain rice. It's sticky, plump and creamy when cooked and is the base ingredient for all risottos.



Basic risotto

(to serve four)

1 litre of stock (chicken, fish or vegetable, as appropriate)
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 large onion, peeled and finely diced
2 garlic cloves, crushed
300g arborio rice
125ml white wine
sea salt

In a small saucepan put the stock on a low heat.

In a second saucepan on a low heat, add the olive oil, garlic and the onion. Gently cook for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally.

When the onion has softened but not coloured, turn the heat up to medium, add the rice and a pinch of salt. Continually stir until the rice becomes translucent.

Deglaze the pan with the wine and when absorbed add the stock ladle-by-ladle. Remember to make sure that the rice has absorbed all the stock of each ladle before adding another ladle.

Check the seasoning and adjust if needed. Cook until all the stock has been absorbed and take off the heat.

IDEAS TO REV UP YOUR RISOTTO

On the left is the basic risotto recipe and I will refer to it in recipes below. You can add and change many different ingredients to make yummy risottos. Here are some suggestions:

Fry some mixed seafood in a pan with some olive oil, then mix it through a basic risotto. You can keep it white or add sugo (tomato-based sauce), or infuse saffron into the wine for 5 minutes before deglazing the pan with it.

Fry different varieties of mushrooms, such as portobello, button, or soaked porcini mushrooms, add them to your chicken risottos or just keep it mushroom adding your favourite cheese.

Cheeses, hard or soft and all together, can make a three-cheese risotto – try parmesan, taleggio and gorgonzola.

Pancetta, prosciutto, speck, bacon, sausage spice up a risotto.

Herbs and peppers, pumpkin, asparagus with seafood are also great additions.

There are so many delicious combinations you can explore. With the basic recipe I've given you the world is your risotto!

Roast pumpkin & blue cheese risotto

400g butternut pumpkin
2 tablespoons olive oil, plus a drizzle for the pumpkin
2 garlic cloves, crushed
1 large brown onion, peeled and finely diced
300g arborio rice
125ml white wine
2 teaspoons rosemary, finely chopped
1 litre hot chicken stock
100g grated parmesan
100g danish blue
30g butter
140g baby spinach

Preheat the oven to 180C. Chop up the pumpkin into 1.5cm cubes. Put it on a baking tray, drizzle over some oil and

Continued over

seasoning, then roast for 30 minutes.

Prepare the risotto as detailed.

Once the rice is cooked to al dente, gently stir in the butter, both cheeses, roasted pumpkin and baby spinach. Adjust the seasoning and serve.

Prawn, lemon and mascarpone risotto

1 litre of fish or vegetable stock
4 tablespoons olive oil
1 large onion, peeled and finely diced
2 garlic cloves, crushed
300g arborio rice
125ml white wine
24 raw prawn cutlets
2 lemons zested
2 tablespoons fresh parsley, chopped
4 tablespoons mascarpone
sea salt

Put the stock on a low heat, in a small saucepan.

In a second saucepan on a low heat, add half the olive oil, garlic and the onion. Gently cook for 10 mins, stirring occasionally.

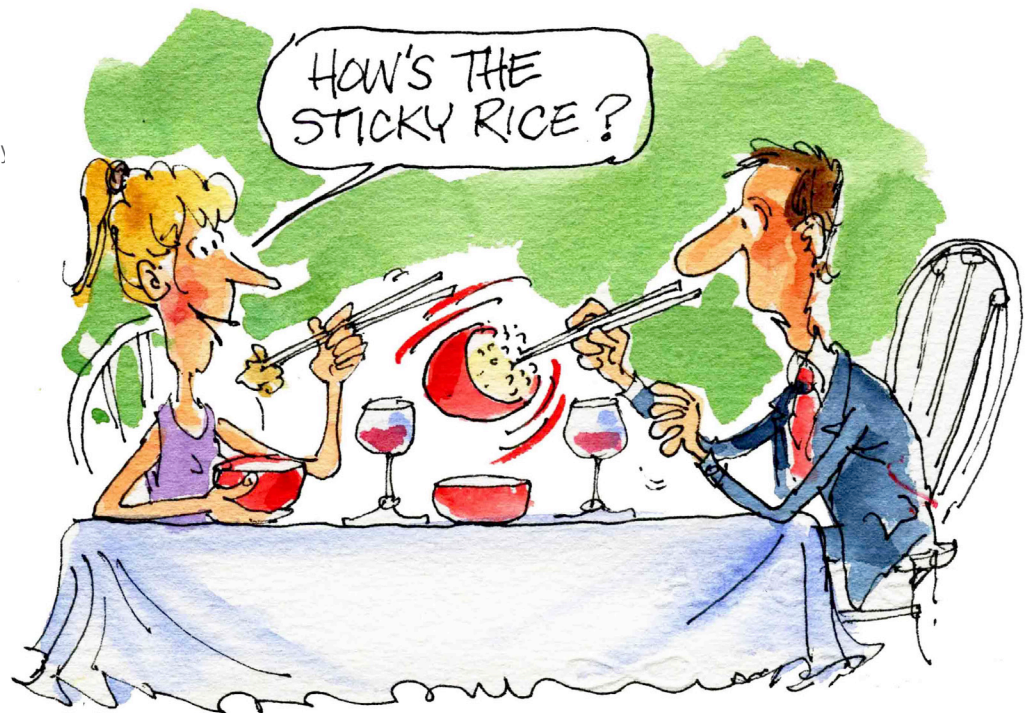
Continues the process as per the basic risotto recipe.

In another pan, heat the other half of the oil then fry off the prawns in two batches until they change colour. Set aside. Add lemon to the pan and then the risotto, heat the rice through and then add prawns, parsley and mascarpone. Adjust seasoning, fold through and serve.

Duck, orange and thyme risotto

1 duck breast
2 tablespoon olive oil
2 garlic cloves, crushed
1 large brown onion, peeled and finely diced
300g arborio rice
125ml white wine
2 teaspoons thyme, finely chopped
1 litre hot chicken stock
100g grated parmesan
2 oranges, zested
30g butter
140g baby spinach

Preheat the oven to 190C.



Score the skin of the duck breast 4-5 times with a sharp knife. Season with salt and pepper.

Heat a pan until you can feel moderate heat coming off it. Place the duck, skin side down into the pan for 5 minutes until golden. Turn the duck breast over and cook for 2 minutes.

Place the duck in a roasting tray and cook in the oven for 8 minutes. Remove the duck and let this rest for at least 5 minutes before slicing into it.

Put the stock on a low heat, in a small saucepan and bring to the simmer.

In a second saucepan on a low heat, add the olive oil, garlic, onion and thyme. Gently cook for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Then follow the instructions above for making basic risotto.

Once the rice is cooked to al dente, gently stir in the butter, parmesan, orange zest and baby spinach.

Adjust the seasoning. Serve into bowls and top with the sliced duck.

Chicken and pork paella

60ml olive oil
1 large red capsicum, cut into thin strips
600g chicken thigh fillets, cut into cubes
200g chorizo sausage, thinly sliced
200g button mushrooms, thinly sliced

3 cloves garlic, crushed
1 tablespoon lemon zest
700g can diced tomato
1 tablespoon rosemary, chopped
2 tablespoons flat-leaf parsley, chopped
¼ teaspoon saffron threads, dissolved in 60ml hot water
440g short-grain rice
750ml chicken stock, hot

Heat oil in a deep fry pan over a medium heat. Add capsicum and cook until soft. Remove from pan.

Add chicken to the pan and cook for around 10 minutes, until golden. Remove. Add the sausage slices to the pan and cook until golden on both sides. Remove.

Add mushrooms, garlic, lemon and cook over a medium heat for 5 minutes, then stir in the tomato, capsicum, herbs, saffron mix, rice, chicken and sausage. Stir briefly then add stock. Do not stir at this point.

Reduce the heat and simmer for 30 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat, cover and leave to stand for 10 minutes. Then serve.

Paellas are not stirred right to the bottom of the pan during cooking in the hope that a thin crust of crispy rice will form. This is considered one of the best parts of a paella.



Lamb kofta curry

500g minced lamb
1 onion, finely diced
1 clove garlic, crushed
1 teaspoon grated ginger
1 small chilli, finely chopped
1 teaspoon garam masala
1 teaspoon ground coriander
50g ground almonds (almond meal)
2 tablespoons coriander, chopped

Sauce

½ tablespoon oil
1 onion, finely diced
3 tablespoons korma curry paste
400g can chopped tomatoes
125g thick natural yoghurt
1 teaspoon lemon juice

Combine lamb, onion, garlic, ginger, chilli, spices, almonds and salt in a bowl. Shape into walnut-sized balls with your hands.

Heat a large fry pan and cook koftas in batches until brown on both sides. They don't have to be cooked through.

To make the sauce, heat the oil in a saucepan over low heat. Add the onion and cook until soft and golden. Add curry paste, cook until fragrant, then add tomato and simmer for 5 minutes. Stir in the yoghurt and lemon juice to taste.

Place the koftas in the sauce. Cook, covered, over a low heat for 20 minutes. Serve over steamed rice and garnish with coriander.

Vegetable rogan josh

2 tablespoons olive oil
2 onions, diced
1 medium butternut pumpkin, cut into 1cm chunks
1 small cauliflower, cut into bitesize chunks
1 fresh red chilli, seeds removed, sliced
4 cloves of garlic, crushed
1 fresh bunch coriander, rinsed and finely chopped
140g Patak's rogan josh paste
400g can of chickpeas
100g baby spinach, prewashed
250g tub of natural yoghurt

In a large pan over a medium heat add olive oil, then onion and garlic cook until soft and golden.

Add pumpkin to the pan, then add cauliflower. If you want some extra heat, then add the chilli.

Finely chop the coriander (stalks and all). Reserve a few leaves for garnish and add the rest to the pan with ½ cup of boiled water. Add the rogan josh paste and the can of chickpeas, with their juices. Season and stir well, then put a lid on. Cook hard and fast, stirring

Adjust the consistency at this point adding more boiled water if needed, depending on whether you want it drier or wetter. Taste and add a pinch of salt, if needed, then add the spinach and stir through. Serve with the yoghurt and some coriander leaves.

Beef stroganoff

400g beef fillet, cut in strips
2 tablespoons plain flour
50g butter
1 clove garlic, crushed
1 onion, thinly sliced
250g swiss brown mushrooms, sliced
60ml brandy
250ml beef stock
1½ tablespoons tomato paste
185g sour cream
1 tablespoon Italian parsley, chopped

Dust beef strips in flour, shaking off any excess.

Melt half the butter in a large frying pan and cook the meat in small batches for 1-2 minutes, removing from pan as you

go. Add the remaining butter to the pan and cook the onion and garlic over medium heat for 2-3 minutes, or until they soften. Add the mushrooms and cook for a further 2-3 minutes.

Pour in the brandy and simmer until nearly all the liquid has evaporated, then stir in the beef stock and tomato paste. Cook for 5 minutes to reduce the liquid slightly. Return beef to the pan with any juices and stir in sour cream. Simmer for 1 minute, or until the sauce thickens slightly.



Balti chicken

"Balti" means a bucket. The origins of the Balti sauce is believed to be in England where the chefs used to make a large batch of Balti sauce in a karahi (flat bottomed wok) or a bucket. This sauce was then added to whatever curry was ordered. This Balti Sauce is spicy and thick but can be made milder by adding water or cream.

1 tablespoon peanut oil
1 onion, finely diced
1 garlic clove, crushed
1cm piece ginger, peeled and grated
700g chicken thigh fillets, skinned, boned and diced
250ml chicken stock
1 teaspoon tomato paste
salt to taste
1 bay leaf
1 large tomato (sliced)

For the Balti spice mix:

½ teaspoon mustard seeds, crushed
2 tablespoons fresh coriander, chopped
1 teaspoon garam masala
4 curry leaves dried, crushed
1 teaspoon palm sugar
1 teaspoon ground coriander

1 teaspoon cumin
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1 teaspoon cloves
1 teaspoon turmeric
1 teaspoon nigella seeds
3 green chilies, sliced
4 cardamom pods

Gather all the spices together.

Heat the oil in a large pan. Once it is hot but not smoking, add the lightly crushed mustard seeds and cook for 30 seconds. Be aware they may pop and spit out of the pan. Add the onion, lower the heat, and cook for 3 to 5 minutes until soft but not coloured. Then add all the spices plus the garlic and ginger. Cook on a medium heat, taking care to ensure the spices don't burn. Add the chicken and stir well. Cook for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add the stock, tomato paste, a small pinch of salt and bay leaf. Stir again and then lower the heat. Cook gently for 25 minutes until the chicken is cooked through and tender. Then add the fresh coriander and tomato, stir and cook for another 3 minutes.



Leftover chicken fried rice

1 teaspoon vegetable oil
1 large free-range egg, lightly beaten
2 spring onions, sliced
2 cloves garlic, crushed
50g frozen peas
250g pouch microwavable rice
large handful leftover roast chicken (or shop-bought cooked chicken), shredded
1 teaspoon sesame oil
1 tablespoon dark soy sauce

Heat half the oil in a wok or large frying pan over a high heat until it just starts to smoke. Add the egg and quickly stir-fry until just under-cooked. Remove from the wok and set aside.

Heat the rest of the oil in the wok and add the spring onions, garlic and frozen peas. Stir-fry until the peas have defrosted.

Squeeze the rice pouch a few times to break up the rice, then add the rice to the pan with the shredded cooked chicken. Stir-fry until the rice has started to crisp a little and the chicken is hot through.

Stir in the cooked egg, sesame oil and soy sauce and serve.

Spiced lamb pilaf

500g minced lamb
30g butter
1 brown onion, diced
2 cloves garlic, crushed
2 teaspoons ground coriander
2 teaspoons cumin
1 teaspoon ground ginger
½ teaspoon turmeric
1 cinnamon stick
2 tablespoons tomato paste
2 ½ cups chicken stock
salt and pepper
2 ½ cups long grain rice
2 zucchinis, round slices not too thin
½ cup raisins
¼ cup pinenuts, roasted
Fresh coriander and natural yoghurt to serve

Melt butter and sauté onion and garlic until tender and translucent in a large saucepan. Add mince, brown well. Stir in the spices and cook for 3 minutes, stirring continuously.

Blend tomato paste and ½ cup of stock, add to the pan and stir well loosening all the stickiness off the base of the pan. Simmer covered for 20 minutes.

Add remaining stock and bring to the boil, season and then add rice and zucchini. Simmer until the rice is tender.

Fold in the raisins and roasted pinenuts and adjust the seasoning. Sprinkle with fresh coriander and yoghurt when you serve.

Pilau rice

200g basmati rice
2 tablespoons butter
3 cardamom pods
2 whole cloves
3 black peppercorns
½ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon saffron threads
400ml vegetable stock

Rinse the rice until the water turns clear, then leave to soak for 30 minutes. Drain and set aside ready to cook.

Heat a heavy based saucepan over a high heat and add the butter. Add the spices and stir-fry for 1 minute. Add rice and fry for another 2 minutes.

Add the saffron, salt and stock to the rice mixture and reduce heat. Cover the saucepan and leave to simmer over a low heat for 20 minutes until all the stock has evaporated.

Transfer the rice to a large dish and serve.



Coconut rice

3 cups jasmine rice, well-rinsed
3 cups cold water
400ml can coconut cream
3cm piece ginger, peeled, sliced

Place all ingredients in a large saucepan over high heat. Bring to the boil, stirring occasionally. Reduce heat to low. Simmer, covered, for 10 minutes. Remove from heat. Stand, covered, for 10 minutes. Discard ginger. Serve.

NOW FOR DESSERT!



White chocolate and raspberry risotto

200g arborio rice
400ml milk
150ml water
100g condensed milk
30g salted butter
1 teaspoon vanilla essence
100g white chocolate, broken up
100g fresh or frozen raspberries

Place the rice, milk, water and condensed milk into a pot and bring to a gentle boil over medium-low heat, stirring to mix everything.

Reduce heat and simmer for 30-40 minutes, stirring from time to time, especially at the end, to prevent burning.

Melt the white chocolate at 50% power in the microwave, in 30 second bursts, until melted. Set aside.

Take the risotto off the heat when it's dry. At this point, the rice will be cooked with still a bite to the grains. Pour half the risotto into a bowl.

Add the butter and vanilla into the saucepan, stir, then add the melted

white chocolate, stirring to mix. The white chocolate will seize but that's perfectly fine.

Add the raspberries to the risotto in the bowl and stir, mashing the raspberries up with a fork and mixing well.

Serve up warm in 2 layers in little glass bowls and top with the raspberries.

Baked rice custard

75g white rice
750ml full cream milk
70g caster sugar
4 eggs
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
45g sultanas
nutmeg
Preheat oven to 180C.



Cook the rice in a saucepan of boiling water following packet directions or until tender, drain.

Whisk together the milk, sugar, eggs and vanilla in a bowl. Strain the egg mixture through a fine sieve into a large jug. Stir in the rice and sultanas.

Line the base of a roasting pan with a tea towel, folded to fit, and place a 1.5 litre capacity ovenproof dish in the pan. Pour the custard mixture into the dish. Sprinkle evenly with nutmeg. Pour enough boiling water into the pan to reach halfway up the side of the dish.

Bake in oven for 40-45 minutes or until the tip of a small knife inserted into the centre comes out clean. Remove the dish from the roasting pan and set aside for 1 hour to cool slightly. Serve.

Chocolate lava puddings

200g dark (70% cocoa) chocolate, chopped
200g unsalted butter, chopped, plus extra, to grease
Cocoa powder, to dust
4 eggs
4 egg yolks
100g caster sugar
50g plain flour
15g cocoa powder, extra

Place chocolate and butter in a heatproof bowl set over a saucepan of simmering water (don't let bowl touch the water). Cook, stirring with a metal spoon, until smooth. Cool slightly. Lightly grease six 180ml dariole moulds with butter. Dust lightly with cocoa.

Using a balloon whisk, whisk eggs, yolks and sugar in a bowl until sugar dissolves. Stir in chocolate mixture. Sift over flour and cocoa. Fold until combined. Divide among moulds, filling to three-quarters full. Place in fridge, uncovered, for 1-2 hours or until chilled.

Preheat oven to 220C/200C fan forced. Place puddings on a baking tray. Bake for 12 minutes or until puffed and just set (centre should wobble slightly). Stand for 1 minute. Carefully turn puddings onto serving plates. Dust with cocoa. Serve with scoops of ice cream.



Continued over

HIT THE TRAIL

... Tassie has some real beauties

Dear Brighton

Thinking about what to focus on for today's article is trickier than usual. If I'm to be completely honest, I'm not in a phase where I'm loving my job as a teacher, and over here in London it is always so dark and wet before school or when I get home.

As a result, the motivation to complete a teaching session becomes a real uphill battle at times. I've been blessed all my life with athletic talent. That brings me genuine joy when I achieve things in exercise that I view as impressive.

I can also see, however, how it would be really hard if people don't feel positive about themselves during a run or trip to the gym.

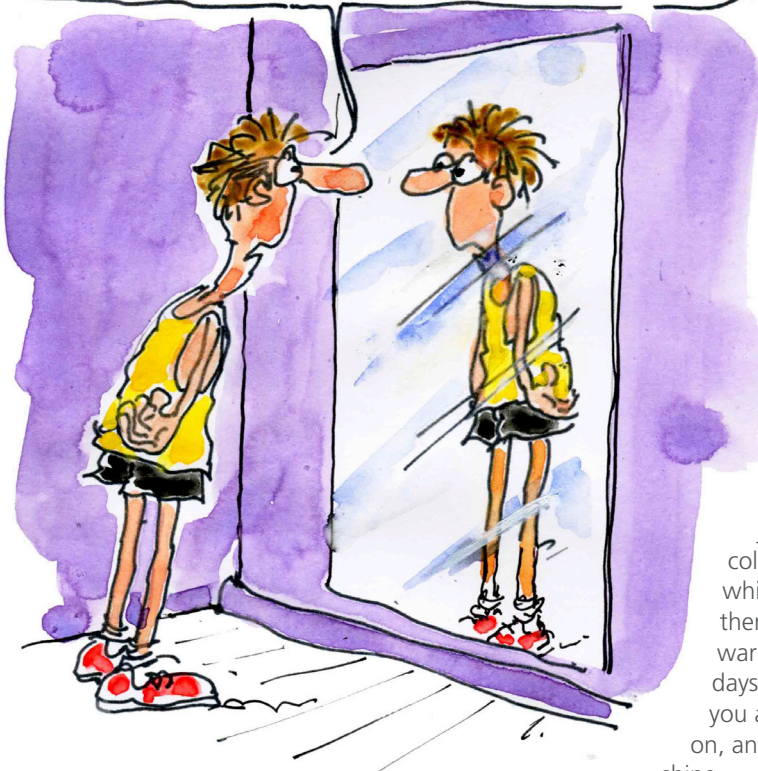
Lately I've found myself in particularly stressful teaching days and as a result I just come home and crash on the couch. This situation is increased by having a training group that trains over two hours away most sessions. So sadly I miss more days than I'd like. After a few days off, this just adds to the frustration.

I've always been very goal based so it is harder without something clearly defined. This is where I'll bring it back to you and again push you to consider setting yourself a goal to exercise towards.

It may feel impossible at first and the first weeks will often be embarrassing or less fun than Netflix, but the reward is ultimately worth it. Maybe you are like me in that there is frustration that you may not be able to do the things you once could do, but often you just have to shift the focus and try something completely different to test yourself.

Luckily for Tasmanians like yourself, our

HOW ABOUT THE GYM? ...
SOME WEIGHTS? ... PUSH UPS?
A JOG FOR AN HOUR? ...
IT'S FREEZING OUT THERE.
TOMORROW'S BETTER YOU THINK?..
GREAT IDEA. WISH I'D THOUGHT OF THAT!



'If you have never been to these places of pristine adventure and excitement and beauty, they are once in a lifetime experience

island state has some of the most amazing trails in the world, so maybe get fit for a pursuit at the Bay of Fires, at Cradle Mountain, or Freycinet. If you have never been to these places of pristine adven-

ture and excitement and beauty, they are once in a lifetime experience.

For those who get the bug there is also the annual Point to Pinnacle race, or even the Burnie Ten, which would make you and those around you super proud. I'll always remember the moment dad, who isn't the fittest man on planet Earth, finished the Burnie Ten and demanded we fetch him some water (to save him). This is one of the proudest moments I had in my childhood.

It is weird for me to be thinking: just fight through the cold and keep moving, while you in Tassie are there soaking up the warmth of those autumn days. I hope instead that you are outside, suncream on, and enjoying the sunshine.

Getting fitter will make you better prepared for the rising temperatures of years to come. Writing this has reminded me of the joy in doing something when it feels hard to do, so I too might get up and push myself in a run. Yesterday we had a storm come through the city, so I'd better do it now before the next 50 kmh winds hit.

Til next time, push yourself and enjoy yourself.

Tristan

AUTUMN IN WONDERLAND

... it's Tassie's season of the spectacular

I rattle on a lot about the joy of growing backyard fruit and vegies and of the health benefits of fresh produce. Yet it's important to feed the mind as well as the body.

In the next couple of months there are few better mental pick-me-ups than taking in Tassie's autumn foliage spectacular.

As autumn progresses and the fiery reds, oranges, yellows and a zillion other tones explode in the trees, it's time to savour this natural phenomenon.

Few places in the world put on such a breathtaking autumnal show.

Of course, you can take some ownership of this show.

Growing a few trees of your own for seasonal colour is easy, providing a mind-blowing experience whenever you step outdoors in late autumn.

Now is the time to act if you want a place in the autumn parade.

Look around your neighbourhood, visit parks and gardens over coming weeks and pick your favourites.

If unsure of names, take a picture. Most nurseries will happily fill you in.

Many of the best autumn colour trees are deciduous, meaning they lose their leaves over winter when they go into semi-hibernation, so that's the optimum time to plant.

Besides, they are a lot cheaper than. They will be bare rooted rather than growing in pots.

While they might look like gnarled old sticks, they will miraculously transform into budded beauties once spring arrives.

But that is jumping ahead of the story.

Between now and then you need to prepare your soil.

Good soil is vital for good plant growth.

If yours is clay soil, a common local situation, you need to improve aeration.

Dig the soil to a good depth, break up any hard layers and work in some compost and coarse sand (not beach sand).

If you haven't made your own compost, buy a bag from your local nursery.

Again, a good nursery will generally be happy to advise and check the quality of a sample of your soil if you take it to them.

The range is immense but here are some of my favourites.



Maples

Their botanical name is Acer and they are colour-up marvels.

A standout is Acer rubrum 'October Glory', rightly considered by

many to be the best autumn-colour tree in the world. In tones from fiery oranges to dark pinkish reds, it gets to about 10-12m

high and 9m wide and if watered well over dry periods performs brilliantly. Equally stunning is another maple, Acer palmatum 'Osakazuki' that boasts rich crimson to fire engine red leaves and gets to about 5m high and 4m wide.

Cercis canadensis 'Forest Pansy'

This one is an all-time autumn winner with its heart-shaped green to velvety purple leaves that transform to striking oranges as the season progresses. It gets to 4m or so tall so is right for most gardens, performing best in deep, well fertilised soils.

Crepe myrtle

There are many versions of these perennial favourites but one of the best for mine is Indian Summer Sioux with its coppery brown to striking red foliage. An added bonus is its vibrant pink summer flowers. It gets to get about 3-4m high.

Maidenhair

Come late autumn its lime-green scallop shell leaves turn brilliant golden yellow and the effect is magic. Botanically



it's Ginkgo biloba and is from a family of trees that existed 200 million years ago. For much of that time it grew in treasured seclusion around Chinese temples, until 17th century western plant hunters recognised its beauty and snaffled specimens. It's a big one, getting to 20m tall, but thankfully is a slow grower.

Smoke bush (above)

There's little not to love about this one. In autumn it's a kaleidoscope of glowing reds and oranges, and at other times an intriguing moody purple, which takes on a beguiling smoky hue over summer. It generally grows as a bush less than 2-4m tall. The best of the bunch is Cotinus coggygia.

While planning your own autumn show, don't miss out on this year's extravaganza elsewhere.

Plan a visit to Hobart's world-ranked Royal Tasmanian Botanic Gardens (the maples in its Japanese Garden are mind-blowers in explosions of oranges, reds and yellows).

Or head to the hills for the scintillating rusty reds to vibrant yellows of Tassie's famous fagus (Nothofagus gunii), the deciduous beech.

A bush or small tree, this stunner is found no-where else in Australia and is the state's only native deciduous tree.

Every Tasmanian needs to see it growing in the wild at least once. It's at its dazzling peak toward late April and the place to view is Mt Field National Park, an hour north-west of Hobart.

You won't achieve such a show from it in your own backyard but the memory of just seeing it once in its massed glory will enrich your soul.