

If you want to be super healthy, follow me and become a vegan

Release the hidden power of apricots, potatoes, beetroot, carrots, garlic and wilted spinach

By Carol Westmorland



LOVE the eccentricities of those around us – I find them very attractive and I am grateful that we are not all the same.

I like extremes which is perhaps why I love long distances on the bike. When it comes to food, it could be argued, I am at odds and I can get genuinely excited by its purest form.

Not for me anything hidden under a sauce trying to avoid detection. My food has to be completely open and honest. I am convinced that to receive the very best, in the form of nutrients, our food should be as close to its natural self as possible.

As a female who moves a lot I need around twice the number of calories per day just to keep going but I will never calorie count.

I just make sure that I fill up on plenty of nutritious food. Fiddling around with flavours, in my opinion, dilutes the source of its effectiveness. I also find it is much easier to eat in quantity if you stick to low fat foods.

I will eat wilted spinach with fresh sliced tomatoes as a great source of iron. The majority of the food I eat can be eaten quite happily in its raw state.

I make a point of trying to eat my food in season. It makes sense to eat what nature intended us to eat. My diet is never dull. To eat the same old foods day in day out and not really notice what tastes good is an offence.

I eat an awful lot but I can't eat food for the sake of it. Food should be enjoyed and appreciated and not a poor and disappointing



Full of goodness: Potatoes, pure and mashed are best with, of course, garlic and a touch of olive oil

substitute. Undressed food has to taste fantastic. It is to be remembered that in the days of old, poor quality food would be disguised by heavy seasoning.

In one way it is convenient to be labelled as a vegetarian or vegan but in another it allows others to make assumptions. I'm a country girl but I am, through choice, a

vegan. I found the dairy produce in a vegetarian diet too unhealthy. I followed a vegetarian diet for over 10 years and found it increasingly difficult to eat socially without my food being covered in fat. Changing to a vegan diet allowed my food to be left alone.

Surprisingly few understand

that food is delicious when it is free of additional encumbrants.

I am not in the least bit surprised that the nation is getting bigger. Rich food is the norm in restaurants. My local restaurant, The Weary in Castle Carrock, is wonderful. Ian presents beautiful food without fuss and better than that, he presents 'in season and local'. He is a clever man.

I believe that my principle of keeping my choices down allows my body to tell me what it needs. I am utterly fascinated when I crave a certain food type. It always tells me so much.

If you listen to your body it will let you know exactly what you need and when you need it. Eating what your body needs will mean fatigue is a thing of the past. At home we eat when we are hungry. If I have too much energy and want a calming evening meal I always add lots of lettuce; remember *The Tale of Peter Rabbit!* If I want to have a mid-afternoon snack, for energy, it may be hummus with carrots.

My husband is always keen to make sure we have beetroot readily available as it's an aphrodisiac. It contains tryptophan which is also found in chocolate and promotes well being. We should all take an interest in our favourite foods.

Peas are fantastic they are full of protein, just 100g will provide more protein than a whole egg with no fat or cholesterol. Garlic is another source of pleasure for me. It fires up my circulation on a chilly day.

Apricots work for me too. I eat them ritualistically the day before a race as they are full of iron and vitamin C. I am convinced that when you push yourself to your

limits your immune system needs looking after and I believe the little fellows are in my corner fighting.

I would say that there will be few days when potatoes don't make an appearance in my diet. Pure and mashed are best with, of course, garlic and a touch of olive oil. When you consider what they do they are wonders. They produce more calories of food per unit than just about anything you can grow. A medium potato is full of vitamin C and, of course, carbohydrates – our fuel.

Bananas pack a punch and are fantastically pre-wrapped. I will always have a couple before a ride. As a breakfast drink I mix soya milk with honey and add a pureed banana.

The complexities of food nutrition mean that most of us need to put things into real terms. I know that without my approach to food and hydration I would not have achieved all that I set out to do. Being able to fight off all the bugs that will soon come our way involves a strategy.

Take a moment to think about how you eat and refuse to succumb to feeling anything other than invincible. Simply put, you get back what you put in.

■ Carol Westmorland is a champion cyclist who tries to ride every day for at least two hours.

She holds the 2004 National 12-hour Championship with 243.19 miles and the 2006 National 24-hour Championship with 445.41 miles. Her personal best for 10 miles is 23 minutes 18 seconds. Her best racing terrain is hilly.

■ Carol is also a qualified Pilates instructor who holds classes throughout the week. Further information from www.pilates-cumbria.co.uk

Wading through the mud in search of Uncle Monty's home

I HAVE to confess that my 'love of the great outdoors' has worn a little thin recently.

The dry, warm cosiness of the not-so-great indoors has held a lot more appeal over the last few weeks.

A washed-out August followed by a mostly sodden September has left the fell tops boggy and exposed rocks mossy and slippery. I find walking's a lot less fun when I'm calf-deep in peat half the time or constantly sliding on damp grass.

Add to that the fact that my boots just don't seem to be drying out after each subsequent soaking and maybe you will understand

Guidebook writer VIVIANNE CROW shares her love of the great outdoors



why my desk suddenly appeals more than the fells.

However, as my livelihood depends partly on me getting out there and devising routes for other walkers – I know! I know! it's a hardship, but someone's got to do it – I've recently been having to drag myself away from the central heating and freshly-brewed coffee to face the elements.

And it's just as well too... moan as I might about the weather,

some of the best days I've ever had on the fells have been ones where I've gone out despite the rain or the fog or the wind.

Last winter, I went in search of Crow Crag, the fictional home of Uncle Monty in the cult film *Withnail and I*.

Well, the clue to the sort of day I was to have lies in the name of the valley in which the old farm is located – it's called Wet Sleddale. And boy, is it wet!

With the rain hammering down on already waterlogged ground, I waded my way through mud in the valley bottom, leaping from one patch of dry-ish vegetation to another – or jumping from one

patch of vegetation to... well, more mud.

The fells weren't much better. Here, instead of simple mud, I was greeted by peat – and you can sink a lot further in peat.

Sloshing my way down the steep slope to 'Crow Crag' – in reality called Sleddale Hall – I ended up on my bum a couple of times. I was caked in mud and peat and a mysterious brown substance that smelled suspiciously like something that may have originated from a cow's rear end.

Just as I was about to lie down and give up, some watery rays of sunlight suddenly broke through

the seemingly impenetrable clouds and the most vibrant rainbow I have ever seen appeared against the black sky.

I'd like to say that it stopped me in my tracks, but I was actually sliding uncontrollably on my bottom at the time. When I finally slithered to a halt though, all the discomfort of the past few hours was forgotten – it was worth it for that one special moment. Truly amazing!

Of course, I still had to wade through that mud again to get back to my car...

■ Vivienne Crow is a freelance writer specialising in outdoor pursuits.