



NEWSLETTER AUGUST 2026

Kia ora koutou - warm greetings to the Millhouse community and other readers.
Welcome to this winter newsletter from the clinic.



As we move through midwinter, respiratory illness remains active in Auckland. The most recent surveillance data collected up to 2 July 2026 showed that Auckland hospital admissions for respiratory illness had increased, with metapneumovirus the most detected virus in general practice testing. Influenza activity remained low, and COVID-19 activity was also low, with wastewater surveillance indicating low levels of circulation. This means that while flu is not the main driver at present, several winter viruses are still causing significant illness in the community.

Don't forget to support your immunity, especially when on vacation. Consider vitamin D, which helps modulate immune function. Keep some Betadine (10% povidone-iodine) on hand; dilute 1:20 for an early gargle or nasal rinse at the first sign of any infection, including Covid and hantavirus. When I travel, I take a 100 mL bottle of Betadine, tightly wrapped in two plastic bags, ready to use if needed at the first sign of respiratory illness. Zinc and quercetin may also enhance innate defences.

This simple infection-prevention measure also serves as a powerful reminder that the everyday lifestyle habit - outlined clearly in the text box - offer a straightforward path to extending your healthy lifespan.

Diabetes

From 1 July 2026, the HbA1c thresholds used to diagnose diabetes in New Zealand have changed.

The diagnostic cut-off for diabetes has been slightly lowered (to ≥ 48 mmol/mol), and the prediabetes range has been narrowed (42–47 mmol/mol). This means some people may now be classified as having diabetes even though their HbA1c result has not changed. In other words, the line in the sand has moved, not you. The aim of this change is to support earlier recognition and management, helping to reduce the risk of long-term complications.

If this change applies to you, our **Practice Nurse, Maree**, may contact you to arrange a follow-up blood test or discuss your results. You may also choose to talk this through with your GP at your next visit. Our **Health Coach, Rebecca**, may also be in touch to offer lifestyle support for those newly diagnosed with diabetes.

This is particularly important for both prevention and management of diabetes. Diets high in ultra-processed foods (UPF) are consistently associated with an increased risk of type 2 diabetes and poorer blood glucose control. In this newsletter and the next, I will explore how the rise in ultra-processed food consumption has contributed to increasing rates of obesity, diabetes and chronic disease. I will also explain what ultra-processed foods are, how to recognise them, and simple steps you can take to make healthier choices.

BIRDWATCHING IMPROVES BRAIN HEALTH

Recently, the *Journal of Neuroscience* reported on a study from the Rotman Research Institute in Toronto that explored differences in the brains of expert birdwatchers and novices.

The researchers recruited 58 adults, half of whom were expert bird identifiers and half of whom were less experienced. Participants underwent MRI brain imaging while identifying birds.

Compared with novices, expert birdwatchers showed more compact brain structure in regions involved in attention and visual perception. This small, non-interventional study suggests that birdwatching to the point of developing expertise, may help reshape the brain.

A separate recent study in *Nature Communications* also found that people with greater creative experience had more youthful-looking brains, with the effect linked to the level of creative expertise.

The broader message is that birdwatching and other creative pastimes may support brain health, especially when they include social connection and regular exercise.

Joining a creative group can add both enjoyment and cognitive stimulation.

MILLHOUSE NEWS



Liz Menzel, our new Health Improvement Practitioner, is now well settled and already a valued member of the team. She brings extensive experience from many years working across both health and social services.

Liz is passionate about helping people better understand their health and wellbeing, and to develop practical strategies for creating balance in their lives. She works with patients to improve emotional wellbeing, reduce unhelpful thought patterns, build resilience and inner calm, and foster greater day-to-day balance. Liz is available daily, with extended hours on two evenings each week, at no cost.



Our **Health Coach, Rebecca** - who has experience in naturopathy and lifestyle medicine - provides additional support for patients seeking help with sleep, stress management, weight management, diabetes control, and blood pressure management. To book an appointment with either Liz or Rebecca, please contact Reception. These consultations are also provided at no cost.

'15-min Appointment' A standard 15-minute appointment is designed to address one complex issue or two or three minor issues. If you have multiple problems or more involved concerns, we recommend booking a longer (double) appointment. While there is an additional cost, this allows us to explore your concerns thoroughly, stay on schedule, and provide the best possible care. Thank you for helping us keep appointments running smoothly.

Please note:
A 15-min Appointment
Allows time for only
1 complex problem
OR
1-3 simple issues
Thank you



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ULTRAPROCESSED FOODS

Recently, TVNZ began airing the four-part series *What Not to Eat*, with King's College Professor Tim Spector and UK GP Dr Kandi Ejiofor unpacking the truth about ultra-processed foods, how they affect our bodies, and practical ways to make healthier everyday choices. Their message connects with a much bigger story about how the modern food environment has changed — and why that matters for our health.

Back in 2013, as Brazil faced a growing obesity crisis, public health epidemiologist Dr Carlos Monteiro noticed an important pattern: as diets became more modern, people were moving away from traditional meals and toward cheaper, highly processed foods. They were swapping their traditional home-cooked foods for ready-to-eat foods like packaged cakes, cookies, breakfast cereals, crackers, potato chips, and sodas. As they did so, their weight went up. What did these foods have in common that was causing the rise in obesity?

This was not just about eating more but about eating differently. It wasn't the calories or macronutrients (carbohydrates, proteins, fats) that defined these fattening foods; it was the ultra-processing. The packaged foods people were eating contained, or were made using, mostly highly processed ingredients, including artificial colours, flavours and preservatives. As a World Health Organization advisor, Dr Monteiro warned that traditional dietary recommendations, focused on calories and macronutrients, "muddle together fresh and minimally processed foods, processed ingredients, and ultra-processed products." He concluded: "What should be said above all is that consumption - and production- of ultra-processed products needs to be minimized." This was a revolutionary shift, changing how health professionals think about food.

NOVA CLASSIFICATION why it matters

He developed the NOVA (means NEW in Portuguese) classification, which groups foods according to the extent of processing, and this helped show that ultra-processed foods are linked to poorer diet quality, obesity, and other health problems. His research also influenced public health action in Brazil, including food guidelines that encouraged people to choose fresh or minimally processed foods instead of ultra-processed options, reminding us that this is not simply a matter of willpower, but of the food environment we all live in.

Brazil recently introduced a **selective health tax** that adds an extra surcharge on sugar-sweetened beverages (soft drinks, sweetened juices and similar), alcohol and tobacco, while reducing taxes on a basic basket of healthier foods (rice, beans, fruit, vegetables and other unprocessed/minimally processed items). Public health groups, drawing on NOVA evidence, have argued that ultra-processed foods should also face higher taxes, but the current legislation mainly targets sugary drinks, alcohol and tobacco, leaving most UPFs outside the tax.

WHY ARE THESE FOODS SO HARMFUL

Ultra-processed foods (UPFs) are engineered to be cheap, convenient and highly appealing, but they drive overeating and poor health. They are typically *energy-dense* (lots of calories in a small volume), high in added sugars, unhealthy fats and salt, and low in protein and fibre, so they are absorbed quickly, do not fill you up, and leave you wanting more soon after eating.

Their taste is *deliberately seductive* combining sugar, fat, salt and flavourings which activate reward pathways in the brain, making these foods feel irresistible and encouraging repeat consumption. Many UPFs are also *soft and easy to chew and swallow*, so we eat them faster and take in more calories before our gut can signal fullness. They are *low in protective nutrients* (fibre, vitamins, minerals, phytonutrients) and often contain *additives* such as emulsifiers, colourings and preservatives that are not used in home cooking. Early research suggests some of these additives may alter the gut microbiome and promote low-grade inflammation, which is linked to obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease and some cancers.

Because they are *cheap, heavily marketed and widely available*, UPFs displace more nutritious whole foods in the diet. Over time, this pattern is associated with higher risks of obesity, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, certain cancers, depression and anxiety, and even earlier death. In short, they are designed to be easy to overconsume and hard to resist, while offering little nutritional benefit.

More on Ultra-Processed-Foods in the next newsletter.

Ma te wa - yours in good health

Dr Richard J Coleman

NOVA			
GROUP 1	UNPROCESSED OR MINIMALLY PROCESSED FOODS		Unprocessed or minimally processed foods
GROUP 2	PROCESSED CULINARY INGREDIENTS		Processed culinary ingredients
GROUP 3	PROCESSED FOODS		Processed foods
GROUP 4	ULTRA-PROCESSED FOODS		Ultra-processed foods

Group 1 – Unprocessed or minimally processed - whole plant or animal foods with only basic physical methods (drying, grinding, pasteurising, freezing) and no added ingredients.
Examples: fresh fruit and vegetables; eggs; milk; rice, beans, oats; fresh meat and fish.

Group 2 – Processed culinary ingredients - substances extracted from Group 1 foods (or nature) and used in small amounts to cook or season.
Examples: oils, butter, sugar, salt, honey, vinegar

Group 3 – Processed foods - Foods made by combining Group 1 + Group 2, usually with simple methods (canning, salting, fermenting, baking) to improve shelf life or taste.
Examples: canned vegetables and legumes; tinned fish; cheeses; fresh bakery breads

Group 4 – Ultra-processed foods (UPFs) - Industrial formulations with many additives and ingredients not found in a home kitchen; little whole food.
Examples: soft drinks and sweetened juices; breakfast cereals; mass-produced breads; chips, lollies; instant noodles and soups; frozen ready meals; reconstituted meats.