



October 2026 - Avoiding Ultra-Processed Foods Part Two



Hello reader

Kia ora koutou - warm greetings to the Millhouse community and other readers.

We have experienced a particularly severe influenza season, with high rates of illness placing considerable pressure on hospitals and primary care hospitalisation. In response, Pharmac has extended funded flu vaccination to all children aged *6 months to under 5 years*, effective from September. Vaccination remains an important way to reduce serious illness and hospitalisation, particularly in vulnerable groups. Please continue to stay vigilant: remain home when unwell, wash or sanitise hands, cover coughs and sneezes, improve ventilation and avoid close contact with vulnerable people when experiencing respiratory symptoms.

Medical Certificates for Sick Leave

Employers in New Zealand can request proof of illness, including a medical certificate. For short absences (under three consecutive days), the employer generally covers the cost of the certificate. For longer absences, the employee typically pays.

Medical certificates confirm you have been assessed as medically unfit for work — not simply that you were absent. If you need a certificate for a past absence but weren't assessed at the time, the certificate will be limited to what the clinician can reasonably judge.

Imported Medicines and Supplements

We are often asked to authorise patients importing products such as ivermectin, hormones, peptides and multivitamins. It is a concern that these may not have been assessed by Medsafe for quality, safety or

In this month's newsletter

- Ongoing Flu Protection
- Clarity about Medical Certificates
- Dangers of Importing Medicines
- Change in protocols for Investigation Emails
- Research Summary - Antibiotics and the Gut
- Our nurses and coaches can provide helpful support
- Please help us keep appointments to 15 minutes.

and Dr Ric writes more about food as medicine in his second article about

Avoiding Ultra-processed Foods

effectiveness. Products can be contaminated, incorrectly-labelled, substandard or counterfeit. Please speak with your doctor before ordering or taking imported medicines. As a rule, our practice will not authorise [imported products](#) unless there is a clear clinical indication and sufficient evidence that the benefits outweigh the risks.

Millhouse News

A **change in protocol** intended to improve patient data security means investigation reports sent by MS Outlook can no longer have an appended comment from your doctor. (Manage my Health records a brief comment). Any immediate concern will be communicated by text or email.

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 in 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](#)** - experienced 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. Consultations are free.

Antibiotics and the Gut

A recent Nature Medicine study found that even a single course of tetracyclines, flucloxacillin, fluoroquinolones (ciprofloxacin & norfloxacin), clindamycin, trimethoprim-sulfamethoxazole (Cotrimoxazole/Bactrim), cephalosporins and macrolides (erythromycin & roxithromycin) may alter the gut microbiome for up to 8 years. The strongest associations were with clindamycin, fluoroquinolones and flucloxacillin. No significant long-term effect was found for extended-spectrum penicillins (amoxicillin or Augmentin), though absence of evidence is not proof of no effect. Antibiotics affect beneficial bacteria as well as pathogens. Clindamycin and fluoroquinolones may cause gastrointestinal symptoms and raise the risk of Clostridioides difficile infection.

Take-home message: Antibiotics are essential and lifesaving, but use them only when clearly needed. Choose the narrowest effective antibiotic for the shortest suitable course. A varied, fibre-rich diet supports gut health during recovery, and a diverse, resilient microbiome is increasingly linked to better immune function and healthy ageing.

Avoid Ultra-processed Foods - from Part 2 in October issue

In our last newsletter, I highlighted growing concerns about ultra-processed foods, how they may affect our health, and ways to make healthier choices. I introduced the work of epidemiologist Dr Carlos Monteiro who in 2013 noticed the move from traditional meals towards cheaper, highly-processed foods. He argued that fresh and minimally-processed foods should be preferred over ultra-processed products, and developed the NOVA classification, which groups foods according to their level of processing. His research has influenced public health policy by showing that higher intakes of UPF are associated with increased obesity and other health problems.

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

Practical ways to reduce ultra-processed foods

Small, realistic changes can make a big difference:

- **Check the ingredients:** Choose products with shorter, recognisable ingredient lists. Be cautious with items containing ingredients such as maltodextrin, hydrogenated oils, artificial colours, flavourings and multiple sweeteners.
- **Choose foods closer to their natural form:** Base meals around vegetables, fruit, beans, lentils, whole grains, nuts, seeds, eggs, fish and other minimally processed proteins.
- **Plan and prepare ahead:** Meal planning and batch cooking make healthier choices easier when time is limited.
- **Keep better snacks available:** Try fruit, raw vegetables, nuts, seeds or plain yoghurt instead of packaged biscuits, sweets and savoury snacks.
- **Reduce sugary drinks:** Choose water or unsweetened drinks most of the time.
- **Make gradual changes:** The goal is not perfection or avoiding every packaged food. Aim to make minimally-processed foods the usual choice and highly-processed foods occasional.

Ultra-processed foods are designed to be cheap, convenient and appealing. They are often high in sugar, salt and unhealthy fats, but low in fibre, protein and protective nutrients. Their intense flavours and soft textures can contain additives (emulsifiers, artificial colours, flavours, sweeteners and preservatives) which influence the gut microbiome. Regularly replacing nutritious whole foods with these products is associated with increased obesity. The powerful

global food industry makes highly profitable, convenient products and spend enormous sums on advertising: lobbying, political donations, attempts at self-regulation and legal action also influence policy and oppose marketing restrictions sugar taxes. [READ MORE.....](#)

If you experience compulsive eating or recurrent binge episodes, seek support from your doctor, Liz, Rebecca, or another qualified health professional.

Noho ora mai - look after yourself and stay well.

Ma te wa, Dr Richard J Coleman

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