



August 2026 - Avoiding Ultra-Processed Foods



Hello

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 holiday. Remember vitamin D 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 an infection such as Covid. When travelling, I take a 100 mL bottle of Betadine, tightly wrapped in two plastic bags, ready to use if needed. Zinc and quercetin may also enhance innate defences. This simple infection-prevention measure serves as a reminder that everyday lifestyle habits can extend your lifespan.

Diabetes Classification

On 1 July 2026, New Zealand lowered its diabetes diagnostic threshold to ≥ 48 mmol/mol, and narrowed the prediabetes range to 42–47 mmol/mol. This shift aims to catch and manage the condition earlier to reduce long-term complications. It means some patients will now be classified with diabetes even if their actual blood sugar numbers haven't changed. If this applies to you, Practice Nurse Maree or Health Coach Rebecca may contact you for follow-up testing and lifestyle support, or you can discuss it with your

In this month's newsletter

- Winter infection protection
- New classification for diabetes
- Our nurses and coaches can provide helpful support
- Please help us keep appointments to 15 minutes.
- Birdwatching improves brain health

and Dr Ric writes about food as medicine in the first of two articles about
Avoiding Ultra-processed Foods

GP. This month's long article, and other newsletters to follow, will explore how ultra-processed foods contribute significantly to rising diabetes and obesity rates.

Millhouse News

Remember that at Millhouse, a **standard 15-minute** doctor appointment is designed to address one complex issue or two or three minor issues. If you have multiple problems or more involved concerns, please book a longer (double) appointment. While there is an additional cost, this allows us to explore your concerns thoroughly, and keep appointments running smoothly.

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.

Birdwatching and Brain Health

Recently, the Journal of Neuroscience reported research in Toronto that explored differences in the brains of expert birdwatchers and novices. The study team 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 at an expert level 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.

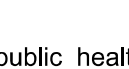
How about joining a creative or expert group? It can add both enjoyment and cognitive stimulation.

Noho ora mai - look after yourself and stay well.
Ma te wa, Dr Richard J Coleman

Avoid Ultra-processed Foods

The TVNZ series [What Not to Eat](#) explores the dangers of ultra-processed foods (UPFs), linking them to our modern food environment which is driving global obesity and chronic disease.

In 2013, Brazilian epidemiologist [Dr Carlos Monteiro](#) shifted public health thinking by demonstrating that weight gain is driven by ultra-processing—which relies on artificial additives, flavours, and preservatives—rather than just calories or macronutrients. Monteiro developed the [NOVA system](#) to classify food by its level of processing, successfully shifting Brazil's dietary guidelines toward fresh foods and inspiring new selective health taxes on sugary drinks.

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

UPFs are highly harmful because they are engineered to be cheap, hyper-palatable, and easily overconsumed. They combine high levels of fat, sugar, and salt to trigger brain reward pathways, while their soft textures allow people to eat them too quickly before feeling full. Low in fibre and protective nutrients, these products often contain industrial emulsifiers and preservatives that may disrupt the gut microbiome and cause low-grade inflammation. Ultimately, replacing whole foods with UPFs increases the risk of obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, depression, and early death.

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