



Nutrition Expert Sarah Percy Answers Farmers' Questions

Farmstrong asked Wairarapa-based, nutrition expert Sarah Percy to answer questions farmers sent on Facebook and Twitter about diet and nutrition. Sarah is a registered dietitian with over 15 years' experience helping Kiwis improve their health through better nutrition. Here's what Sarah had to say.

Farmstrong: Ok, Sarah, here's the first farmer question. *"I find I'm often hungry only a couple of hours after eating breakfast. What's the best thing to have for breakfast to keep me going?"*

Sarah Percy: Great question! It's really important to make sure you have adequate protein at each meal, as this helps you feel fuller for longer after eating. So, you can increase your protein at breakfast by including poached or scrambled eggs with wholegrain toast. Or, if you prefer cereal, add in some yoghurt, nuts and seeds to the cereal to 'amp up' the protein content. Having a milk, yoghurt and fruit smoothie with your breakfast is another quick and easy option for a nourishing drink that keeps you going for longer.

If your work is physically demanding, make sure you have snacks to keep you going between breakfast and lunch, and lunch and dinner as well. Snacking isn't a bad thing as long as we choose healthy options to fuel us.

FS: Here's another question about breakfast. *"Many dairy farmers operate on an empty tank and just grab a quick cuppa before heading off to milk in the morning and doing 2 or 3 hours work before breakfast. It can be even longer during calving. Any suggestions for changing this?"*

SP: After going without food overnight, it is important to refuel our body for the day at breakfast time so having a "grab and go" option before heading out early can be just the ticket. Something quick and small is all that is needed if another breakfast is due a little later. It's all about being prepared. I recommend 'mini bacon and egg cups' [recipe below] as a handy option to grab on the go if you're heading out early. Or a quick smoothie, peanut butter on toast or even a muesli or porridge pottle (pottles are essentially just muesli with milk and yoghurt or porridge ready to heat in a portable, small container to have on the go!), prepared the night before. Having it all ready ahead of time will streamline your morning and will make it more likely to happen. That's how you make eating well a daily habit.



FS: The next question is about fruit. *“Is eating lots of fruit ok, given its high sugar content?”*

SP: Fruit is good for us especially when we eat the whole fruit rather than just the juice, but you’re right, it does contain sugar. However, because fruit also contains fibre and a variety of other vitamins and minerals, it is still a good option. I recommend limiting your fruit serves to 2-3 serves of fruit a day (one serve is essentially what fits in the palm of your hand – for example one apple or pear or orange, or half a banana, or a handful of grapes, or a cup of berries, or 2 apricots and plums) and spread your intake out over the day so you aren’t loading up with lots of sugar at one time. If you’re still hungry, eat some veges – carrot sticks, beetroot in a sandwich, extra vegetables at dinner. That way, you’ll get the fibre and nutrients but not as much sugar!

FS: Farming can be hard yakka. Here’s a good one about staying hydrated. *“What is the best thing to drink to prevent getting bad muscle cramps when out working?”*

SP: Water is the best fluid to hydrate us, although if your work is very physically demanding and the weather’s hot, you may end up sweating out more electrolytes which aren’t adequately replaced by water. This can lead to muscle cramping.

Here’s what you can do about it. Eating plenty of vegetables and 2 to 3 serves of fruit throughout the day will help replace the electrolyte potassium you need to help prevent cramps. Magnesium is another nutrient that can help, so consider adding pumpkin seeds, almonds, bananas, avocado and leafy greens to your diet or take a magnesium supplement.

FS: What about sports drinks?

SP: Sometimes you might feel like a sports drink to adequately rehydrate, but as these are loaded with sugar, they aren’t usually required, or recommended, for most people.

FS: Farming is not a regular 9 to 5 job, so here’s an interesting issue. *“What time in the evening should I have my main meal?”*

SP: There is no set time, but you should aim to finish your meal at least 3 hours before you go to bed. So a good dinner time could be anytime up to 7:30-8pm. The reason for this is that if we eat too close to sleep time our bodies have to digest and process food when they should be resting, repairing and recuperating with restorative sleep. We need that sleep to stay healthy.

FS: Sarah, there’s a lot of information provided in food packaging these days. Here’s a query about that. *“When looking at the nutrition info on the back of packets what should I be looking for in terms of healthy guidelines for how much fat or sugar per serve?”*

SP: Great question and one that is asked often! Firstly, look at the 100g column on the Nutrition Panel and aim for less than 2g saturated fat and less than 10g sugar. A good rule of thumb for the fat content is to aim for less than 10g fat per 100g. I also recommend looking at the ingredients to see where the fat is coming from, so you stay clear of unhealthy fats. If the food has lots of nuts and seeds for example, it will be higher in fat, but will actually be providing some valuable nutrients. But if the fat is coming from palm oil or hydrogenated fat you would want to go for a lower content of fat or, better still, find a different product all together as these fats are not healthy for us.

NUTRITION INFORMATION		
SERVINGS PER PACKAGE: APPROX. 11½		
SERVING SIZE: 4 CRACKERS APPROX. 27g		
	QUANTITY PER SERVING	QUANTITY PER 100g
ENERGY	470kJ	1730kJ
PROTEIN	3.5g	13.0g
FAT, TOTAL	2.7g	10.0g
– SATURATED	Less than 1g	1.3g
CARBOHYDRATE, TOTAL	18.1g	67.2g
– SUGARS	Less than 1g	1.3g
DIETARY FIBRE	2.2g	8.3g
SODIUM	120mg	440mg

ALL VALUES ARE CONSIDERED AVERAGES UNLESS OTHERWISE INDICATED.
STORE IN A COOL, DRY PLACE. ONCE OPENED, PLACE IN AN AIRTIGHT CONTAINER.

FS: *“Why is fibre so important in our diet and what’s the recommended daily amount?”*

SP: Fibre [the plant components in food that do not get digested] plays an important role in our body by keeping our digestive tract healthy. A good intake has also been associated with a lower risk of bowel cancer, heart disease and diabetes. Fibre can help create a healthy environment for our gut bacteria, which has a huge impact on our overall health. The recommended amount of fibre to aim for each day is 25-30g for an adult.

FS: Juicing is all the rage these days. Here’s a question that picks up on that. *“What’s the deal with juicing and what are the benefits/pitfalls?”*

SP: You’re right, juicing has become so popular these days, and there are both pitfalls and benefits. Juicers that extract the fibre from the fruits and vegetables are not as healthy as those where the whole fruit or vegetable is processed up and consumed. We really want to eat the fibre with our fruits and vegetables as this helps us feel fuller, and helps keep our body healthy. Vegetables juices are actually healthier than fruit juices due to their lower sugar content, and homemade juices tend to be better too, as they do not have added sugar or preservatives. The best option of all though is eating the whole fruit or vegetable, rather than just the juice!

FS: A lot of farmers are busy and looking at ways to save time. So Sarah, “are protein shakes a good meal replacement?”

SP: Protein shakes can be an easy option when time is short as long as they are made correctly and have a good balance of carbohydrate, protein and fat. You should aim to add in extra ‘real’ foods to your shake to make it nutritious – fresh or frozen fruit, vegetables such as spinach and, milk, yoghurt, nuts/peanut butter as well as the scoop of protein powder.

It’s important to remember, our body is designed to eat whole foods that we chew, so while a protein shake is fine for an occasional meal replacement, we are better to go for solid foods most of the time.

FS: Here’s a question about keeping energy levels up throughout the day without having to rely on sugar kicks. “What are some foods farmers can eat to avoid the spikes and troughs that caffeine and sugar give, but still have energy to work a 15 hour day?”

SP: Eating a good variety of food with protein options at each meal will help stabilise your blood sugars and give you the energy to get through the day. Some people need 3 regular meals, while other people need meals AND snacks to get sufficient fuel.

The key is the protein and you can get this from meat, eggs, chicken, fish, dairy, nuts/seeds and legumes. So if you need to go harder for longer, here’s some good options to keep you going: a hardboiled egg; a smoothie; a handful of nuts; chicken, a cold meat or tuna sandwich; hummus on crackers; baked beans and an egg on toast; or a scroggin mix of nuts, seeds, dried fruit and a square of dark chocolate.

FS: The next question is about keeping an eye on our weight. “My weight fluctuates a bit during the year – I put on weight over autumn and winter when I’m not so active and then lose it again during spring due to the busy calving and lambing period. Is there any downside to this?”

SP: Ideally, we want to match our food intake with our exercise and lifestyle to keep a balance. Putting on weight when we are not as active can result in fat being stored around the belly area which can have negative health implications. On the other hand, if we lose weight too quickly due to inadequate food, we will deplete our glycogen stores (this is the fuel in muscles that keeps us active longer) and suffer fluid loss and muscle mass loss (so we feel tired and weaker).

The best option is to eat healthy food and get regular exercise. This helps lose stored fat while maintaining our muscle mass.

FS: Here is a question about fatigue. “What can I eat to give me energy? I always have a decent breakfast but am always really tired.”

SP: Aim to eat a balanced diet with a variety of foods so you are getting a good mix of nutrients, and ensure you have some protein foods – meat, fish, chicken, eggs, dairy, nuts, seeds, legumes – at each meal to stop your blood sugar levels from fluctuating too much.

Remember that food is just one factor in feeling tired. We also need to ensure we are sleeping well, managing stress, having downtime and exercising as these lifestyle factors also affect our energy levels. I would discuss your tiredness with your GP too as you may need to have some blood tests to check your nutrient levels. For example, low iron levels can cause fatigue.

FS: Here’s a question about energy and protein drinks. “A lot of my colleagues are using energy and protein drinks all day. That doesn’t sound healthy to me. What’s your advice?”

SP: As I mentioned earlier, our bodies were designed to eat whole, real foods – to use our teeth to chew and choose foods which contain a range of nutrients for good health. Energy and protein drinks are often designed and made in laboratories with added sugars, additives and chemicals, rather than what nature intended. The odd energy or protein drink may be ok, but as a rule, you should be aiming for more real, unprocessed foods and drinks.

FS: Sarah, we’ve saved the trickiest question til last. “What’s your advice on A1 milk and A2 milk? What are they and which is better?”

SP: The short answer is that the research on this topic is inconclusive. The terms A1 and A2 relate to the structure of the beta-caseins in milk. Normal milk contains A1 and A2 beta-caseins while A2 milk only contains A2 beta-caseins. Some people think A2 milk is better because the A1 beta-caseins may be more difficult for people digest, but there is no conclusive research to prove that. All I can suggest is that people look at what evidence there is and decide for themselves. ■



Sarah's Top Tips



- Don't start work on an empty tank. Here are some great pre-breakfast snack options for early morning milkers – smoothies, eggs, fruit, cereal, porridge, grainy toast with peanut butter. Prepare snacks the night before if time is short.
- Choose fresh, nutrient-rich food instead of processed foods.
- Stay hydrated. Keep water bottles handy where you are working.
- Snack between meals to keep energy levels high. Choose snacks low in fat, sugar and salt.
- Don't skip meals. Try and eat 3 meals and two lots of snacks a day.

The Benefits of Eating Well

A nutritious, well-balanced diet means:

- you'll feel fitter, stronger and enjoy improved energy levels
- you'll reduce your risk of heart disease, diabetes and cancer
- you'll boost your immune system and stay healthier
- you'll think more clearly and handle stress better.

If eating well is new to you, start off with small changes. Try a new recipe or two one week. Add more fruit or veges to your diet the next. When you make a change in small steps, it is more likely to be successful.

Find out what works for you and lock it in.

Check out Sarah's Recipes on the next page to start eating well today.

Banana and Nut Smoothie

– serves 1

1 banana

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup milk

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup Greek yoghurt

2 tablespoons peanut butter, almonds or LSA (linseed, sunflower and almond mix)

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon cinnamon

1 teaspoon honey (optional)

Blend all ingredients together and enjoy.



TIPS

- For a really creamy and ice cold smoothie, use a frozen banana (peel, slice and wrap before freezing overnight).
- If the banana is very ripe, the honey may not be required.

Mini Bacon and Egg Cups

– makes 6 muffin-sized cups

6 eggs

3 tablespoons milk

3 rashers of chopped bacon

1 cup of vegetables – cooked (eg potato, kumara, pumpkin) and/or raw (tomato, spring onion, mushroom, peas)

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup grated cheese or crumbled feta

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup fresh, chopped herbs

Salt and pepper

Pre-heat oven to 180 degrees Celsius. Grease or line a 6 cup capacity muffin pan with baking paper.

Whisk eggs and milk together, season well. Evenly divide bacon and vegetables between the 6 muffin cups. Pour equal amounts of egg mixture into each cup to cover vegetables and bacon. Top with cheese and herbs. Cook for 12-15 minutes until cooked through and lightly browned. Leave to cool in the muffin trays. Store in the fridge for up to 2 days or freeze. Serve with chutney or relish for extra flavour.



TIP – Great vegetable, cheese and herb flavour combinations to get you started:

- Caramelised onion, pumpkin, thyme and feta
- Potato, cheddar cheese and chives
- Tomato, mushroom, pea and parsley.

Muesli Pottle

1/2 cup rolled oats

2 tablespoons shredded coconut

1/2 cup milk

1/4 cup yoghurt*

1/2 apple, grated

1 teaspoon cinnamon

1 teaspoon honey

To serve- extra yoghurt and a sprinkle of almonds and pumpkin seeds

Combine the oats, coconut, milk, yoghurt, Apple, cinnamon and honey in a bowl. Refrigerate overnight, in the morning spoon on some more yoghurt and sprinkle on the nuts and seeds. Good to go!

* The lactic acid in the yoghurt will help prevent the apple from browning overnight in the fridge.



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