# Women’s Health Week Podcast Day 5 – Nutrition

**Alicia Loxley:** Hello and welcome to the Jean Hailes podcast. It is day five of Women's Health Week 2024. We've almost come to the end and we are here to talk about nutrition and trusting your gut on the final day. I'm your host, Alicia Loxley, and I'm joined today by the CEO of Jean Hailes, Dr Sarah White. Sarah, we're coming to the end.

**Dr Sarah White:** I know. I feel a little bit sad about it, Alicia.

**Alicia Loxley:** There's so much more to talk about.

**Dr Sarah White:** There's so much more to talk about. And I tell you what, the response we've had over the week has been absolutely extraordinary. So there are a lot of women out there who also want to continue the conversation.

**Alicia Loxley:** Well we've wanted to spark conversations. So we are hoping that you all at home have been having many conversations with your friends about all of these topics. Now, we're talking about nutrition, we're talking about food, what you should be eating, and where you should be getting your information from. Sarah, there's so much information out there, and a lot of it is on social media. How do we know who to trust? Where should we be going to get information about our diet?

**Dr Sarah White:** That's a really tricky question in some ways because, as you say, there's a ton of information out there. We also know that there are, I guess, fads. Sometimes one thing is good for you and sometimes another thing's good for you.

**Alicia Loxley:** Constantly changing.

**Dr Sarah White:** Constantly changing. Going to credible sources. So we can look at government websites, Jean Hailes website, there's lots of websites from really credible organisations that are providing evidence-based information. And I think a critical look at who's giving you the information. If they're trying to sell you something, they may not have your best interests at heart. So staying away from those people who have a vested interest in what they're telling you.

**Alicia Loxley:** Do you think you should ever look to social media for health advice, as far as what you should be eating?

**Dr Sarah White:** Only if you're going to the social media of one of those trusted sources we're talking about.

**Alicia Loxley:** Because otherwise—

**Dr Sarah White:** Otherwise—

**Alicia Loxley:** Often they're selling you something.

**Dr Sarah White:** Absolutely. Or they're just not qualified. There are some really good nutritionists and dieticians out there who sometimes use social media to get their messages across, and that's fine. But we really do need to look for those qualifications. And as I said, if they're trying to sell you something, run a mile. Because those credible organisations, using the very best evidence and the most recent evidence, they're giving that information away for free, they're not selling it. So someone who's trying to sell you something is trying to sell you something probably different.

**Alicia Loxley:** No vested interests.

**Dr Sarah White:** No vested interests.

**Alicia Loxley:** Do you think people have lost sight of the basics when it comes to food?

**Dr Sarah White:** I think they really have, and one of the things we do at Jean Hailes when we produce health information is we actually test it with women out in the community to make sure that they understand it, that we're using language that makes sense, it works in the context of their lives. And so often when we've put out information on food for this, what we call 'consumer testing', we have women say to us things like, 'So what's protein again? Where do I find protein? I think it's something to do with meat, but maybe I'm vegetarian or maybe I can't afford the meat. What I do then?' So we know that some of those basics aren't well understood by some people.

**Alicia Loxley:** Well, let's talk about protein, because we are being told at the moment to eat more protein, and it feels like there are different things in focus at different times. For a long time, people were told, don't eat full fat dairy, make sure that you're eating low fat, and then carbs were the devil. Whereas now, carbs, it seems like carbs are okay again.

**Dr Sarah White:** If you eat them at the right time.

**Alicia Loxley:** That's right.

**Dr Sarah White:** Standing on one leg. As long as you've starved overnight and you only had a black coffee in the morning.

**Alicia Loxley:** Yeah, that's it. So let's start with protein, because we've got lots to talk about. Where are you finding protein and how much protein do you need, and why do you need it?

**Dr Sarah White:** Okay. So protein's really important for muscle building and keeping those muscles healthy and well. Lean red meat is a really good way of doing it, so cutting that fat away. Chicken, turkey, seafood, good old eggs. Eggs are relatively inexpensive. They sort of go up and down a little bit, they're more affordable. Whole soy foods, so tofu, edamame, things like that. Dairy, we have proteins in dairy. And legumes, which is just the big fancy word for things like chickpeas and lentils and beans. Nuts and seeds. So there's a whole range of ways we can get some protein, and we sometimes don't quite think intentionally enough about our food, even when we are preparing it. So if you are preparing a bowl of something, maybe you're doing a little simple stir fry. Put in your lean meat, sure. But sprinkle something over the top, right? So you could put some sesame seeds on top, things like that.

**Alicia Loxley:** That makes a difference?

**Dr Sarah White:** Yeah, absolutely. So adding these pieces, really thinking about food as the fuel your body needs.

**Alicia Loxley:** And what about calcium, for example? Because we know that women in particular are told as they get older that we need more calcium, but then on the other hand, you might have the impression that you shouldn't be eating full fat milk or you shouldn't be having lots of cheese. So what's your message to people about that?

**Dr Sarah White:** Calcium's really important for everybody as they get older, but particularly women, we have osteoporosis. I think everybody's heard about where our bones get brittle. Men also get osteoporosis. They have a bit more bone mass, so they can afford to lose a bit more of that bone mass compared to women. So everybody should be having calcium.

**Alicia Loxley:** And you don't necessarily want to get that from a supplement, do you?

**Dr Sarah White:** No. Look, I think we've got to consider that things like milk come with other things in it. It's not just calcium. There's vitamins and minerals, there's protein as we've talked about. So these whole foods have a lot of good stuff in them. So when you take a supplement, you're taking just one thing with all the other good things stripped out of it.

**Alicia Loxley:** Do you think people are thinking about nutrients, particularly at the moment in a cost of living crisis, people are going to the supermarket and they're really getting what they can afford rather than having the luxury of perhaps being able to choose a lot of fresh fruit and vegetables, and meat, which we know is the most expensive part of the shop.

**Dr Sarah White:** Absolutely. Cost of living crisis is having a big impact. There are things you can do, there are good websites out there with lots of tips around, get the frozen vegetables instead of the fresh vegetables, usually cheaper, not less nutritious. We need people to worry about nutrients because food is really like medicine in many senses. It fuels our body. Our body needs some of these things, like protein and fibre and vitamins and minerals that we get from whole foods, to work well. So we do need people to be worried about nutrients, and, as I said, there's lots of information for people who are watching every dollar, as I know so many of us are.

**Alicia Loxley:** That's where tinned beans are excellent, aren't they?

**Dr Sarah White:** Tinned beans are excellent.

**Alicia Loxley:** Good for you, not expensive.

**Dr Sarah White:** Make up a dahl using lentils and vegetables. It is not at all expensive to make that up, and incredibly nutritious and filling, and I think that's important too. We often go for that convenience with the highly processed foods, but often that food's actually not very filling, and it's certainly not giving us the fuel our body needs.

**Alicia Loxley:** It's interesting, isn't it? There's been a couple of articles recently about bowel cancer risk, and it's diet a lot of the times, and environmental factors, that are leading to younger people getting bowel cancer.

**Dr Sarah White:** That's exactly right. So it's really important to have fibre. Fruit and vegetables, this fibre that your gut works on. And fibre is incredibly important for preventing bowel cancer, which is, as you say, increasingly affecting people under 50.

**Alicia Loxley:** And it's scary that, when you read those articles, hardly any Australians are getting enough fruit and veggies.

**Dr Sarah White:** Very, very few people. And look, I know there are absolutely days and possibly even weeks that I look back and I go, gosh, did I have my fruit and veg properly this week? Because I've been racing here, there, and everywhere. It's another one of those things where it's really easy to prioritise convenience because we've got busy lives. We do need as a society to reset a little bit our relationship with food.

**Alicia Loxley:** Yeah, it's great advice, isn't it? Because I think, particularly as women, the relationship with food is around our weight, around what we look like, rather than how strong our insides are.

**Dr Sarah White:** That's exactly right. We need that fibre to prevent bowel cancer, for example. We need that protein to keep our muscle mass up as we get older to prevent falls and remain healthy. We need that calcium for our bones. So we need to really think about food as nutrition. It's very okay to get pleasure out of eating food. It's very okay to have those times when you've reached for the chocolate bar, but we do need to think about food most of the time as being that really good nutrition.

**Alicia Loxley:** Yeah, absolutely. What are your key takeaways that women should be thinking about their diets?

**Dr Sarah White:** My final set of key takeaways. So the first one is, know what's right for you. If you eat something and it just doesn't quite feel right, doesn't sit right, do take notice of that, because sometimes that can be a little bit of a mild intolerance, for example. Get the facts from a trusted source. I think that's really important. And then don't take guidance from anyone trying to sell you something. Those credible organisations who are producing up-to-date evidence without selling anything, they're the ones to trust.

**Alicia Loxley:** Dr Sarah White, this has just been a fantastic week. I feel like we've covered a lot of ground. We've had lots of courageous conversations, covered lots of taboo subjects.

**Dr Sarah White:** And I've enjoyed it so much, Alicia, thank you so much.

**Alicia Loxley:** Oh, thank you. And I hope that this has sparked conversations for you at home with your friends, maybe with your parents, with your partner, and we look forward to hearing more about those conversations as well as part of Women's Health Week. You can find all of the articles and resources mentioned in today's episode by visiting womenshealthweek.com.au.

End of transcript

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**Information about Jean Hailes for Women’s Health**

Jean Hailes for Women's Health is a national not-for-profit organisation dedicated to improving the health of all women, girls and gender-diverse people. For free, evidence-based and easy-to-understand health information, visit [www.jeanhailes.org.au](http://www.jeanhailes.org.au).

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