Your Health

Health Partners

AUGUST 2026 MAGAZINE

Nourish & Embrace Your Body

MAKE THE MOST OF SUMMER

Breaking Free

From the Comparison Trap and Embodying Who You Are

With expert insight from **Counselling Psychologists, Dr Ana Silvestri** and **Dr Emma Clarke.**

Have you ever scrolled through social media and felt a sinking feeling, looking at other people's holiday photos with smiling selfies and "perfect couple" pictures? You're not alone. As the temperatures rise and the days get longer, comparison can sneak in.

But here's the thing, summer can present an opportunity for joy, freedom and making memories instead of comparing ourselves to others.

So, in this article, we're going to talk about why these pressures often feel amplified during summer and, more importantly, how you can shift your mindset to embrace a carefree, confident and happy summer that's all about YOU.

Where Does the **Summer Pressure** Come From?

The idea of the "summer body" reflects a wider cultural tendency to treat appearance as something to be judged, improved, and compared. Social media and beauty culture often encourage people to measure themselves against highly curated and frequently unrealistic standards. This can lead to increased self-scrutiny and comparison, sometimes reinforcing feelings of insecurity rather than confidence.

Rather than embracing a wide range of body types and appearances, idealised images can create cycles of self-monitoring that are often reinforced by industries built around appearance and self-improvement.

While social media has intensified this environment by making comparison more constant and visible, the roots of appearance-based pressure go back much further. Researchers have long argued that beauty standards can act as powerful social influences, shaping how individuals perceive themselves and how they believe they are perceived by others. Over time, people can internalise these expectations, monitoring their appearance as if they are being observed and evaluated.

"From a psychological perspective, these pressures can contribute to body dissatisfaction and negative self-image. In some cases, this may be linked to challenges such as disordered eating, body dysmorphia, or persistent feelings of inadequacy."

Dr Ana Silvestri, Counselling Psychologist

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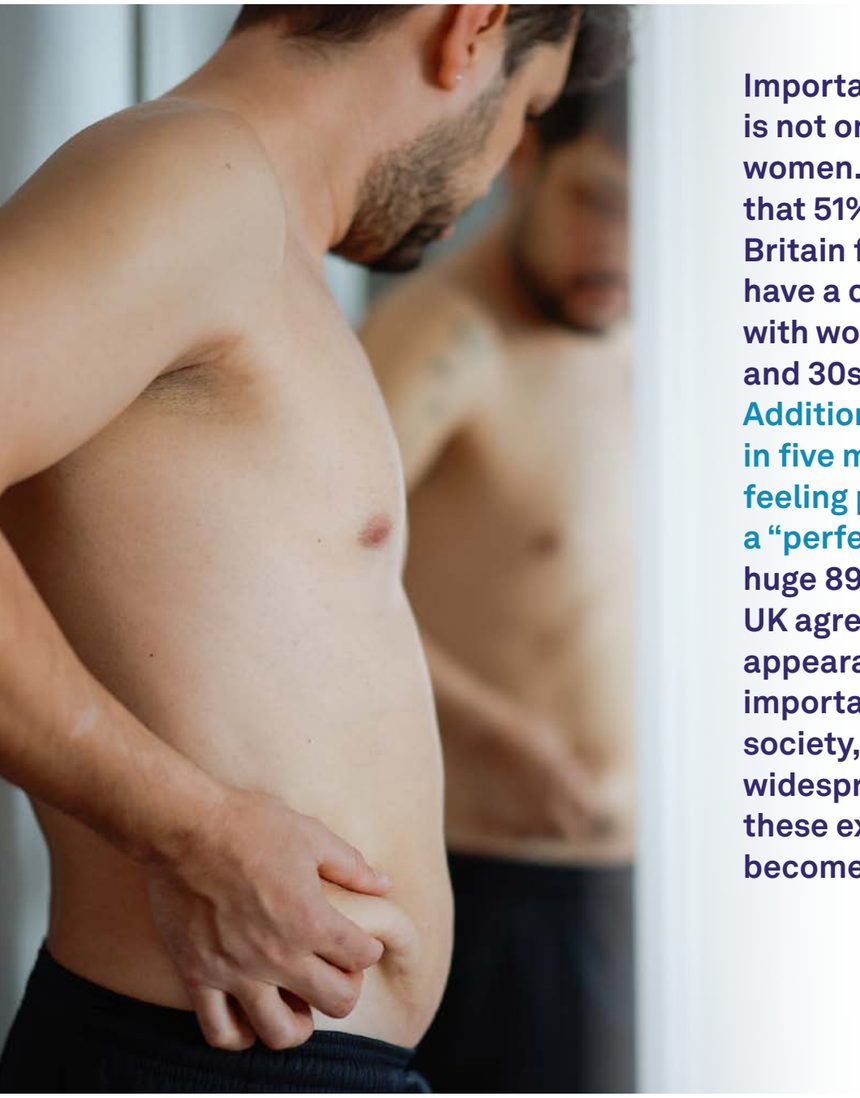


Importantly, this pressure is not only experienced by women. Research shows that 51% of people in Britain feel pressured to have a certain body type, with women in their 20s and 30s feeling it the most. Additionally, around two in five men also report feeling pressure to achieve a "perfect" body. And a huge 89% of people in the UK agree that physical appearance plays an important role in today's society, highlighting how widespread and embedded these expectations have become.

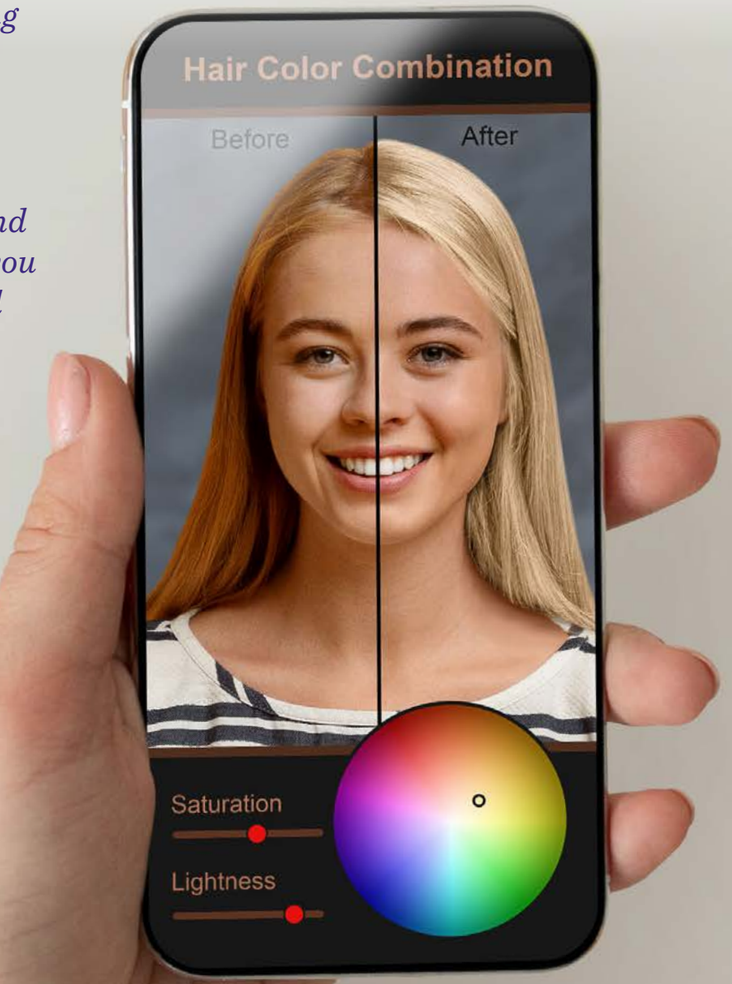
"Every body is summer-ready and there's no need to change your appearance to enjoy the sunshine or make the most of the season. After all, we never hear about needing an 'autumn body' so why treat summer any differently? Let's shift the focus to what truly counts – making memories, savouring the moment and making the most of the season in ways that bring you fulfilment."

Dr Emma Clarke, Counselling Psychologist

The Comparison Trap

The comparison trap is something we can all fall into from time to time, especially during summer. Social media often shows the highlights of people's lives: the exotic holidays, stylish outfits, and picture-perfect moments. What you see online is just a small, curated glimpse of someone's day - it's never the full story.

It's easy to forget that flawless photos are often the result of good angles, clever lighting and often a touch of editing. Rosalind Gill of City University London, found that 90% of young women report using filters to edit their photos before posting them online. Instead of comparing to this unrealistic ideal, try shifting your focus to what brings you joy this summer. After all, your life doesn't need to look perfect to be meaningful.



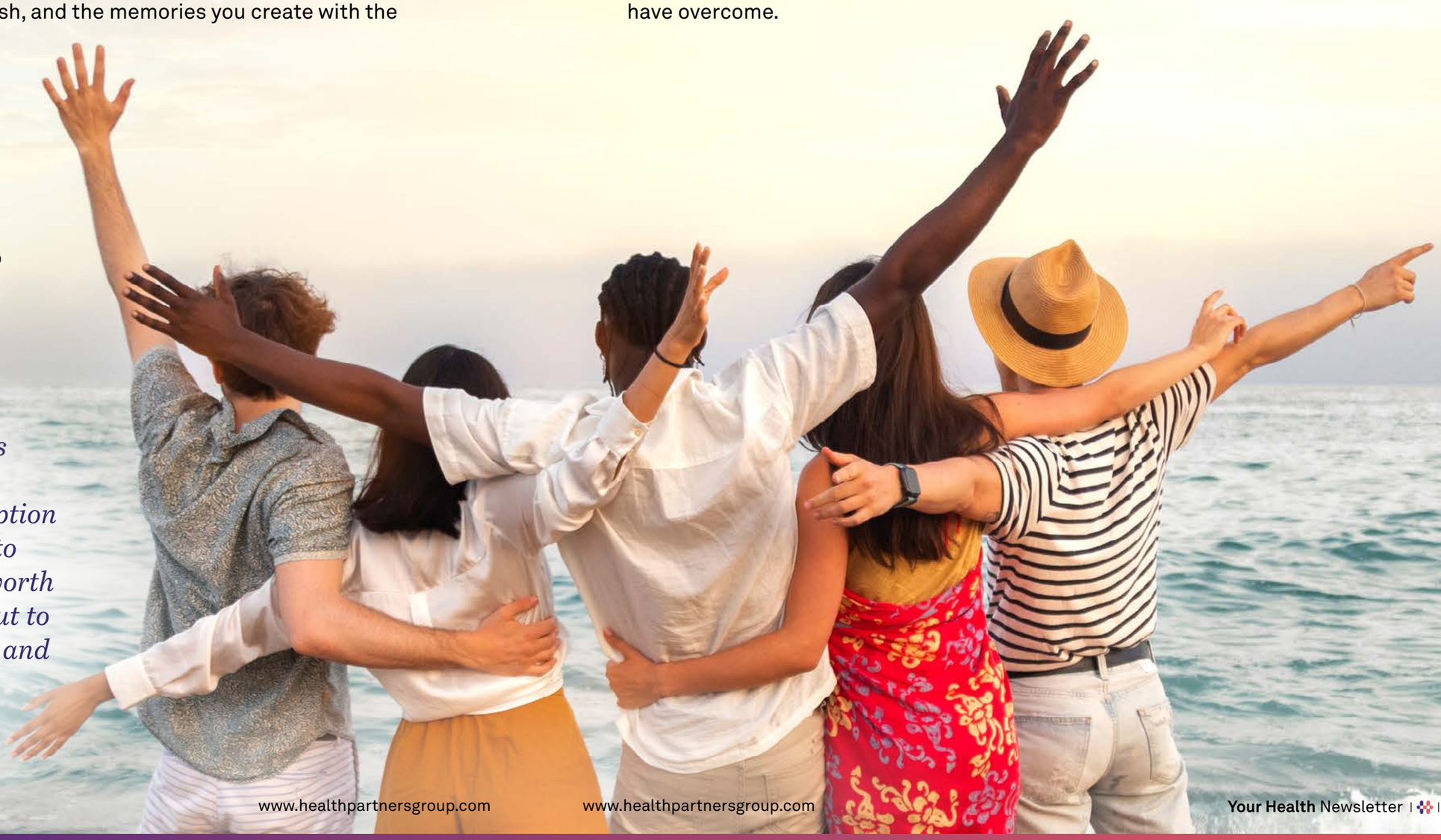
How to Avoid the Comparison Trap

- **Avoid Lifestyle Comparisons**
  It's easy to compare yourself to friends with different routines or priorities, but remember that everyone's circumstances are unique. Focus on what works for you and celebrate your own achievements.
- **Keep Perspective in Mind**
  Remember, everyone's life has its ups and downs, even if you don't see it online. Focus on your own journey and celebrate the moments that bring you happiness, no matter how big or small.
- **Celebrate What Truly Matters**
  Your worth is beyond appearances or social media. It's in the connections you nurture, the experiences you cherish, and the memories you create with the people you love.
- **Refresh Your Social Media Feed**
  Curate your feed to reflect the things that uplift and inspire you. Follow accounts that celebrate positivity, self-love, body positivity and authenticity. Ask yourself whether you are you following people with similar body shapes to you, and if not, why not? It's your space, so fill it with joy!

"Social media often presents a curated version of reality, which can distort our perception of ourselves. It's important to remind ourselves that our worth is not tied to appearances but to the meaningful connections and experiences we create."

Tips for Cultivating Body Confidence

- **Be Grateful for Your Body**
  Focus on all the wonderful things your body allows you to do (e.g., move, travel). Your body is your greatest ally, so show it some love and appreciation!
- **Wear What Makes You Feel Good**
  Forget the numbers on the label. If it makes you feel confident and comfortable, wear it proudly.
- **Speak Up Against Negativity**
  If you hear someone speaking negatively about someone else's body – or even their own – challenge them. Ask why they feel that way and encourage them to acknowledge all the things they have accomplished and the obstacles they have overcome.



Summer Is About Experiences, Not Appearances

Summer is about feeling good and making memories, often outdoors. Whether you're spending time with family, catching up with friends, or trying something new – focus on what truly brings you joy.

Some of the best moments come from being fully present – whether it's a picnic in the park, a beach walk, or getting lost in a good book under a tree. So take it slow, pay attention to the activity you are doing at that time, and enjoy the little things.

"The most important thing is enjoying the memories you'll create – people are busy with their own lives and no one is paying you as much attention as you may think!"

Practical Tips for a Confidence-Boosting Summer

Take a Social Media Break (Even a Mini One)

Take a step back and give yourself a break. Whether it's a full detox or simply limiting your scrolling time, this can help you focus on yourself. Use that extra time to do something that brings you pleasure and fulfilment – read a book, take a walk, or spend time with loved ones.

Feel Good for Your Holiday, Inside and Out

Focus on feeling your best. Nourish your body, stay active, and prioritise your mental wellbeing.

Introduce Positive Affirmations

When those pesky self-doubts creep in, try to flip the script with some positive affirmations.

For example, instead of thinking, "I can't wear this, it shows my stomach," remind yourself, "My body is strong, capable, and deserves to enjoy the sunshine."

Write down a few affirmations that resonate with you and repeat them when you need a confidence boost.

Steer Conversations Towards Positivity

If body talk comes up and feels uncomfortable, gently shift the focus. You have the power to guide conversations in a way that feels uplifting and enjoyable for everyone.

Step Into Summer with Confidence

Summer is all about feeling good, creating memories, and being kind to yourself. Embrace the longer days, the sunshine, and the little joys of the season.

Your body, your wardrobe, and your presence are already perfect for summer. Be present, enjoy the moment, and let your confidence shine. So, throw on your favourite outfit, grab your sunglasses, and step into summer with a smile. You've got this!

How to Master the Art of Mindful Snacking

Discover how to make better food choices, curb cravings, and nourish your body and mind with every bite.

With 58% of the UK population snacking daily, and 23% snacking more than three times a day, it's clear that snacks play a significant role in our diets. But how often do we stop and think about why we're snacking, or what our bodies truly need?

Too often, snacking becomes a mindless activity – something we do out of boredom, stress, or even habit. The good news? By adopting mindful snacking habits, we can transform the way we approach food, making healthier choices and supporting our overall wellbeing.

What is Mindful Snacking?

Mindful snacking is the practice of being fully present while eating, paying attention to why and how you snack, and choosing foods that truly nourish your body. It's about recognising your body's hunger cues and responding in a way that supports both your physical and emotional health.

Rather than eating impulsively or thoughtlessly, mindful snacking helps you slow down and make intentional decisions about what you eat, how much you eat, and why you're eating. By doing this, you don't just satisfy your cravings – you also promote long-term good habits with benefits for your health and wellbeing.

Benefits of Mindful Snacking

Mindful snacking goes beyond just eating less or avoiding junk food. It can have a profound impact on your health, both physically and emotionally.

Improved Digestion

Eating too quickly, in awkward positions, or while distracted can lead to issues like bloating, wind, and indigestion. Mindful snacking, on the other hand, encourages you to think about when and where you are eating, eat slowly and chew your food thoroughly. This allows your digestive system to manage and break down food more effectively, improving nutrient absorption and reducing discomfort.

Nutrition Tip

Fibre-rich snacks can help improve digestion and keep you feeling full for longer. Try a homemade beetroot hummus paired with crunchy vegetables like peppers, carrots, or cucumber slices for a delicious and healthy option.

Better Portion Control

When you pay attention to your body's hunger and fullness cues, you're more likely to eat just the right amount of food, rather than overindulging. Mindful snacking helps you recognise when you've had enough and encourages you to stop eating when you feel satisfied.

Nutrition Tip

Prepare a variety of fresh vegetables, fruits and nuts in advance, dividing them into pre-measured portions. This not only helps you stay in control when you're on the go but also teaches you to recognise and understand appropriate portion sizes over time.

Healthier Food Choices

Mindful snacking helps you identify what your body truly craves. When you take the time to reflect, you can make thoughtful choices that satisfy your cravings in a healthy way.

- **Craving something sweet?**
  Try fresh fruit, which is rich in natural sugars and packed with vitamins like vitamin C. Or enjoy a small square of dark chocolate, which contains antioxidants that may benefit heart health.
- **Craving something salty?**
  Opt for roasted chickpeas, which are high in protein and fibre, or lightly salted nuts, which are a great source of healthy fats like omega-3s.
- **Craving something comforting?**
  Try avocado on wholegrain toast for a dose of healthy fats, fibre, and potassium, or make a smoothie with spinach, berries, and milk of your choice for a nutrient-packed pick-me-up.
- **Craving carbs?**
  Choose wholegrain crackers, oatmeal, or roasted sweet potatoes for slow-releasing energy.

Did You Know?

Craving certain foods can sometimes signal nutrient deficiencies. For example, a desire for chocolate may indicate a magnesium deficiency, as magnesium plays an important role in metabolic reactions that regulate blood sugar levels. You can also satisfy this craving with magnesium-rich foods like nuts, seeds, or leafy greens.

"Mindful snacking is about intention, self-awareness and enjoyment rather than restriction. Choose snacks that nourish your body and really savour every bite."

Reduced Emotional Eating

Mindful snacking helps you tune in to your emotions and assess whether your desire to eat is driven by hunger or an emotional need. Pause and assess how you are feeling before reaching for a snack. By identifying emotional triggers like stress, boredom, or sadness, you can address these feelings in healthier ways - such as through exercise, a hobby, or seeing a friend.

Nutrition Tip

Did you know that low levels of certain nutrients like B vitamins, vitamin D, and iron can affect your mood and energy levels? To keep your diet balanced and support emotional health, reach for vitamin and mineral-rich snacks like bananas, walnuts, or pumpkin seeds.

Practising Mindful Snacking for Restful Nights

Mindful snacking isn't just about making healthier food choices or recognising hunger cues, it involves being mindful of when you snack and understanding how your timing can impact your body in more ways that just satisfying cravings. One key area where timing matters is sleep.

Late-night snacking, especially on foods high in sugar or fat, can disrupt your ability to get a good night's rest. Sugary snacks cause blood sugar spikes and crashes, leading to restlessness, while high-fat foods are harder to digest, potentially causing discomfort or indigestion. If you're not mindful of your evening snack choices, you may end up sabotaging your sleep without even realising it.

Nutrition Tip

To support healthy sleep, avoid snacks that are overly sugary, greasy, or processed in the hours leading up to bedtime. Instead, opt for sleep-friendly options that can help your body wind down.

Sleep-Friendly Snack Ideas:

- **A small handful of almonds:** Packed with magnesium and melatonin, which can promote relaxation and sleep.
- **Banana slices with a spoonful of almond butter:** Bananas are rich in potassium and magnesium, which help relax muscles, while almond butter provides a dose of healthy fats.
- **A warm glass of milk:** Contains tryptophan, an amino acid that supports the production of serotonin and melatonin – hormones that regulate sleep.
- **Greek yoghurt with a drizzle of honey:** A source of protein and calcium, which can help your brain use tryptophan effectively.

Did You Know?

Caffeine isn't just in your coffee – it's also hidden in some snacks like chocolate or energy bars. Keep an eye on labels and avoid caffeine-containing foods in the evening to prevent sleep disruptions.

By making mindful choices that align with your body's needs, you can enjoy satisfying snacks while still prioritising a good night's sleep. After all, restful sleep is a cornerstone of overall wellbeing.

Want to learn more about the best and worst times to snack? In our June 2025 Your Health newsletter, we shared 'A Guide to Snacking Smart', which explores when snacks can help or hinder your health. Head over to our archives to read the full guide.

Here's a reminder of some healthy snack options you can reach for:

- **Fruit and nut mix:** A classic combination of natural sweetness and healthy fats, perfect for on-the-go energy.
- **Rice cakes with peanut butter:** Light and satisfying, with a good balance of carbs and protein.
- **Houmous with vegetable sticks:** A great way to boost your fibre intake while enjoying a creamy, savoury dip.
- **Hard-boiled eggs:** Portable, protein-packed and versatile.
- **Greek yoghurt with honey and berries:** A naturally sweet treat that's high in protein and antioxidants.
- **Mini snackable cheese:** Choose options that are low in fat and sugar for a quick protein boost.
- **Air-popped popcorn:** A low-calorie snack that satisfies the craving for something crunchy.
- **Edamame beans:** High in protein and fibre, these are a fantastic savoury snack option.
- **Apple slices with almond butter:** A delicious combination of sweetness and healthy fats.
- **Protein bars:** Look for options that are low in sugar and high in protein.

Frozen Yogurt Bites

Perfect to curb that sweet craving on a warm summer evening or even as part of your breakfast. The Greek yogurt is high in protein leaving you feeling satisfied, whilst the fresh fruit and chocolate gives you the sweet edge.

Ingredients

- 2 tbsp clear honey
- 300g/10½oz Greek-style yoghurt
- 300g/10½oz fresh fruit of your choice, such as strawberries, blueberries, banana or mango, chopped as necessary
- 100g/3½oz dark chocolate, broken into pieces (optional)

Method

1. Prepare a large baking tray that can fit in the freezer by lining it with greaseproof paper.
2. In a bowl, mix together the honey and yoghurt, then combine with the fruits.
3. Spoon the yoghurt and fruit mixture onto the tray and place in the freezer for 1 hour.
4. If topping with chocolate, after an hour, melt the chocolate in the microwave in 30-second intervals, stirring between or using a bain marie.
5. Once the yoghurt is frozen solid, drizzle the melted chocolate over the bites using a piping bag or fork and freeze for 20 minutes more.

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Resources – Summer Confidence

- The YouGov Body Image Study – YouGov
- Body Talks: Getting to grips with body image – CALM
- Beauty filtered selfies are more damaging than filtered photos of others – BPS

Resources – Mindful Snacking

- UK Snack Food Industry Statistics – World Metrics
- 15 healthy snack ideas – BHF
- 3 Ways Dark Chocolate Can Support Heart Health Naturally – Verywell Health
- How low magnesium affects your blood sugar – Holland & Barrett
- Can food boost your mood? – BHF
- What Drinking a Glass of Milk Before Bed Does for Your Sleep – Health

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At Health Partners we offer a wide range of workplace health services. In this issue we discuss topics around mental health, wellbeing and lifestyle, all of which are related to services we offer clients employees.

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September 2026

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