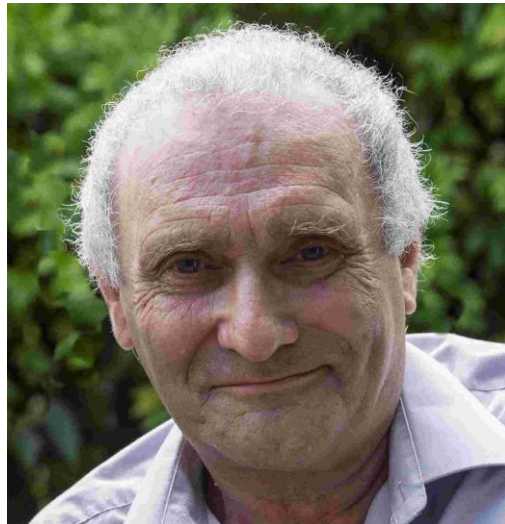


Portfolio —

General

John Coutts



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My name is John Coutts. I write for a living, and I have been doing so professionally for over 22 years. My first language is English, and I have a passion for proper grammar, spelling and punctuation, as well as for producing creative and imaginative writing.

Over the years I have co-authored three books with the manager of a museum; for 12 years I wrote a weekly column for a newspaper, and also worked as a reporter; I have had various poems and short stories published in

magazines; and I have written thousands of web content pieces and articles, for hundreds of satisfied clients, in dozens of countries, on every continent (except Antarctica), all over the world.

Examples of my writing ability can be found in this ebook, and also on my website at: www.WriteSystem.com.

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I should point out here that I am not Spanish. My first language is most definitely English. I live in Spain because it is a beautiful country and I enjoy the way of life here.

My services and rates are available on request as they may vary, depending on what you require:

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Please contact me to discuss any writing requirements you may have. I am normally available during working hours in my time zone, which is Central European Time (CET) (+1 hour GMT), Monday through Friday.

The following pages contain various samples of my writing in various niches:

Why Face to Face Networking Beats Email

When Ray Tomlinson hit the send button to initiate the transmission of the world's first email in 1971, little did he know what he had started. Today he can't remember exactly what that first email message was, but remembers thinking it was "a neat idea" at the time.

Over 205 billion email messages are sent out every day; 2.4 million per second. The popularity of email as a communications medium stems from its simplicity and ease of use. Anyone can send an email. It's much easier than writing and posting a letter. It's more immediate, it's convenient and it's virtually free. There's no doubting the popularity of email, but when it comes to networking, can it achieve the same results as can be expected from a face to face meeting?

Email, like any other messaging system, suffers to a large degree by being impersonal. The writer can inject a personal "voice" to some extent, but cannot fully compensate for the simple fact that it is still a remote electronic message that is essentially lacking in real human personality.

“...no body language to read in an email ...”

Perhaps the biggest downfall of only using email as a networking tool is the social aspect. Eventually we suffer from the lack of integration with other people. We feel isolated and alone, and this can lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretations; there is no body language to read in an email.

Face to face networking allows no such escape. The participants are exposed to every subtle move made, every faint smile, every raised eyebrow, every stiffened muscle and awkward shift. We can exchange business cards directly and even write email addresses on the back of them, and we can shake hands.

Annual conferences are perhaps the best places to conduct face to face networking. People attend conferences because they know they will meet others who work in the same field. At a conference everyone is tuned in to the same basic topic. They expect you to be passionate about it, they expect to be invited to discuss it, and they expect to encounter promotions.

“...more likely to listen attentively ...”

You can improve your face to face networking skills by simply showing more interest in the person you are talking to than about whatever it is you wish to promote. Put them first and their first impression of you will be a good one. Then when you mention what you are doing, they will be much more likely to listen attentively.

Before you go to a conference, do some basic research about the key people you will be meeting there. When you can show that you are aware of their achievements, aware of what they are currently involved in and aware of their future plans, you will impress them and they will be much more likely to pay closer attention to you.

Face to face networking beats email for the simple reason that there is no substitute for real human contact. We are more likely to trust the people we can see. We know we are communicating with the right person and not a receptionist, and face to face meetings are always more memorable than any email message is likely to be.

[530 words]

Joint Pain Relief - 3 Simple Tips to Ease Pain and Help Mobility

Joint pain relief is the single most important consideration for arthritis sufferers. A reasonable degree of mobility is essential for normal living and relief from pain in the joints can allow this to happen. Is there any easy way to achieve it? Yes, there are many simple and natural ways that can achieve joint pain relief that don't involve mind-numbing drugs. Here are a few.

1. Joint Pain Relief - Exercise in Water:

A study in England found that two 60-minute sessions a week spent doing easy and enjoyable exercises in a community pool resulted in a considerable improvement in a study group compared to another group who had just spent the same time being educated in joint pain relief for themselves.

Being immersed in water removes much of the stress from our joints. The lessened stress and strain leads to joint pain relief in most individuals. Regular aquatic therapy can result in greater mobility and flexibility with considerable joint pain relief for most individuals.

2. Joint Pain Relief - Devil's Claw:

This substance has been used in the treatment of joint pain relief with good effect in many cases. However, you should consult your doctor if you intend to try it. There are many who swear by its ability to ease painful joints and increase mobility. If you are seeking arthritic joint pain relief, perhaps it would be worth your while to investigate Devil's Claw further.

3. Joint Pain Relief - Glucosamine:

This has been tested in double blind studies and found to be remarkably effective in relieving arthritis pain. There are some side effects from glucosamine in some cases, and different kinds of arthritis needs different preparations of the substance to achieve effective joint pain relief in most people. However, further investigation into this potent product may be rewarding in individual cases, though again, medical advice should be sought from the outset.

Joint pain relief is not always an easy thing to achieve for those suffering from any form of arthritis. The disease can be very debilitating and can lead to a low quality of life. If you don't want to take strong drugs to ease the pain, then perhaps a fresh look at alternative medicines and simple practices will yield joint pain relief benefits. The bottom line is this: explore and enquire about everything you can related to joint pain relief - you never know what you might discover!

[415 words]

What Is Mitral Valve Prolapse?

The condition is not named after anything medical or anatomical, but simply because the mitral valve in the heart resembles a Bishop's Mitre in shape. Around 2% to 3% of the population suffers from mitral valve prolapse, but it is not usually considered a life-threatening condition. In some cases, however, it can be very serious, especially when there are complications in classic mitral valve prolapse.

The mitral valve is found between the atrium, the upper left chamber of the heart, and the ventricle, the lower left chamber. When it doesn't close properly, but billows or bulges in a concave fashion back into the atrium, it is said to be in prolapse.

The mitral valve leaflets need to displace 2 millimetres or more above the high points of the mitral annulus before a prolapse of the valve is considered to have taken place. Below the 2 millimetre displacement threshold, no prolapse occurs.

Alternative names for mitral valve prolapse

The condition is also commonly known as Barlow's syndrome, after John Brereton Barlow who was the first to describe it in 1966. Dr. John Michael Criley, Professor Emeritus at UCLA, is credited with subsequently coining the more popular and more commonly used term, mitral valve, to which prolapse is added to describe what is taking place.

It is also known under several other names. These include: floppy mitral valve syndrome, balloon mitral valve, myxomatous mitral valve, click-murmur syndrome, prolapsing mitral valve syndrome, billowing mitral valve, and as already mentioned, Barlow's syndrome. To confuse matters even further, the mitral valve is also, and more properly, known as the bicuspid valve.

Subtypes of the condition

There are a number of subtypes of mitral valve prolapse. The primary subtypes are classic and non-classic. The subtypes of symmetric and asymmetric depend on the primary subtype of classic being present, and the further subtypes of flail and non-flail depend on the secondary subtype of asymmetric being present.

How does mitral valve prolapse develop?

The mitral valve has two leaflets, or flaps. One is anterior and the other is posterior. When the left ventricle contracts, they both close. The leaflets are made up of three different layers of tissue, known respectively as spongiosa, fibrosa and atrialis.

When classic mitral valve prolapse is present, there is an excess of connective tissue between the layers, which has the effect of thickening the spongiosa

layer. It also separates bundles of collagen, the main component in the connective tissue, in the fibrosa layer.

This has the overall effect of weakening each leaflet, as well as the other tissue in the immediate area. The chordae tendineae, which is mostly made up of collagen, becomes elongated, which often results in rupture. This most commonly happens to the posterior leaflet chordae. The leaflet, again most commonly the posterior one, can become folded and displaced towards the left atrium. This is the condition we call mitral valve prolapse.

Who are most at risk from developing the condition?

People with a low body mass index, a ratio between a person's body weight and height, tend to be found more often among patients with mitral valve prolapse. These are typically people who are lean and not overweight. The reason why people with a low body mass index should be more prone to developing this condition is unknown. It is merely an observation made over many years.

There are a number of diseases where mitral valve prolapse is found to occur in a significantly greater frequency. These diseases include Graves disease, polycystic kidney disease, Marfan syndrome and Ehlers-Danlos syndrome. The condition is also found in greater frequency in patients who have pectus excavatum, a deformity of the chest wall.

Rheumatic fever is known to sometimes be responsible for damaging valves in the heart. Rheumatic fever has become much less common in western developed countries, but remains a problem in many under-developed third-world countries. The prevalence of mitral valve prolapse in these countries, as a direct result of a higher incidence of rheumatic fever, also remains elevated.

Diagnosing mitral valve prolapse

Diagnosing the condition is usually done through indirect observation using echocardiography. This is a non-invasive technique that uses ultrasound to create an image of the heart and its workings. It is used in a similar way to the process that produces the more familiar ultrasound images of unborn babies in pregnant women.

Three dimensional echocardiography allows physicians to "see" the heart and to observe the mitral leaflets and their relative positions to the mitral annulus very accurately. The leaflet thickness can then be measured, as can their relative displacement with regard to the annulus.

If the leaflets are observed to be thicker than 5 millimetres, and displaced by more than 2 millimetres, a diagnosis of classic mitral valve prolapse will result. More careful observation using echocardiography can then determine whether the subtypes of symmetric, asymmetric, flail or non-flail are also present.

Should I worry that I might have mitral valve prolapse?

Unless you have worrying symptoms, such as shortness of breath, palpitations or chest pain, then there usually is nothing to worry about. The majority of people who have mitral valve prolapse have no symptoms, and are usually given no treatment either as they are deemed to not need any treatment. Their lives are normal and the condition does not impact them in any adverse way. They may not even know that they have the condition.

However, a minority of people with the condition may require medication to ease the symptoms, and an even smaller minority of people will require surgery to correct their heart valve problems.

It is possible for the condition to cause problems, such as an irregular heartbeat, or arrhythmias. It can also result in infective endocarditis. This is a condition whereby the inner linings of the chambers of the heart develop an infection.

For the majority of people with mitral valve prolapse, life on a day to day basis is perfectly normal. However, it is advisable for anyone with the condition who has no symptoms to give up tobacco, alcohol and caffeine.

[1,011 words]

The Weekend Stag Party

The weekend stag party has become one of the great British institutions, something that every young (or older) man must do before he gets married. Weekends are usually the time of choice as most people are working through the week. A Saturday and Sunday offers a window of opportunity for the kind of riotous stag party where happy lifelong memories are born.

Building on the fact that stag parties will happen, many popular spots have begun to cater for the events in a big way. Various locations on the continent have been very popular, but home grown British destinations are every bit as good, and those out for a good weekend stag party now know it. The advantages are many:

- You don't need phrase books, and all that struggling to be understood in a foreign language that comes with it.
- You can get all the information you need beforehand written or spoken in English.
- You don't need to change your currency as the good old British pound is accepted British-wide.
- You don't have to travel very far, so it's much more affordable and you save time too.
- It is home, so you're guaranteed (almost) to have fun!

So, where's the top destination for a weekend stag package that will blow your mind, where stag activities are many and varied, and where UK stag weekends are legendary? Wales is where it's all at these days. To be more precise, south Wales in the Brecon Beacons area, just north of the two major Welsh cities of Swansea and Cardiff. Here you have it all - mountains, valleys, rivers, deep plains, gorges, and gorgeous scenery whichever way you look. This is truly one of the best stag do destinations worldwide for whatever you have in mind.

Stag weekends need good activities. This is a daytime thing, something to whet the appetite for the evening frolics to come. Party ideas can be relatively simple, like hill walking, coastering, climbing, clay pigeon shooting or canoing, or they can be an adrenalin-pumping experience like paintball, quad bike racing, off road racing, abseiling, canyoning, 4 x 4 driving, or something called wet and wild. This involves being, well... wet and it gets a bit wild to say the least!

The evenings are a time for activities of another kind. This is the entertainment activity bit that resembles the more traditional weekend stag party. This bit involves bars and clubs and quite often girls too. That's where Swansea and Cardiff come into their own. Both cities can offer anything the discerning stag night party wants. These cities are perhaps the best kept nightlife secret of Europe, let alone Britain.

[445 words]

Pets Left in Cars

There appears to be no hard statistics of how many pets, mainly dogs, die in hot cars during the summer months in the USA, but the figure is most likely well into the thousands. That's sad, but it's even sadder when you consider that each death due to a pet left alone in a hot car is 100% preventable.

If it's a hot day outside, let's say in the 75 to 85 degree range, it will only take a matter of minutes for the temperature inside a car, even with a window cracked open an inch or so and the car standing in the shade, to rapidly rise to 100, or even 120 degrees or more inside. Yes, most pet owners who leave their pets in a car on a hot day only intend to be away for a few minutes, but that can be long enough to cause your pet severe suffering, possibly even death.

Dogs, cats and many other animals don't sweat in the same way humans do when they overheat. Cats and dogs sweat through their paw pads. They also pant to help release heat from their bodies. This works well in moderate heat, but the rapidly rising heat inside a car on a hot day can quickly overwhelm a pet, leaving them unable to dissipate the excessive heat, and as a result they experience extreme discomfort, pain, and even brain damage. Death in this situation is the result of suffocation or heatstroke.

The easiest way to prevent distress or even the death of your pet is to leave them at home where it is cooler and safer. Your pet may love a car ride, and most do, but you should restrict that treat to cool days, if you intend to leave your pet alone in the car while you run an errand or two.

When the temperature outside is below 60 degrees, and the risks to your pet are therefore reduced, it's usually all right to take your pet along for the ride, especially if it's overcast, but always take precautions and don't leave your pet alone for too long. The best advice, if you must take your pet with you in the car on a hot day, is to have someone else along who can stay with the pet to monitor the situation. Of course, the "someone else" you take along should not be a child. Children also die in hot cars; around 36 a year in the USA.

The signs to look out for in a pet that is suffering from excessive heat include glazed eyes, heavy panting, vomiting, a rapid pulse rate and disorientation. If you find an animal, your own pet or someone else's, displaying any of these signs, try to get them into a cool place like an air conditioned building as quickly as possible. If the condition is severe, find a vet immediately.

Most pet deaths resulting from being left alone too long in a hot car happen simply because their owners don't appreciate the potential dangers. Most pet owners are loving and caring, but it is important to know what can happen to your pet in a car on a hot day. Leave your pet at home when it's hot outside. It's the wise thing to do.

[548 words]

The Wonderful World of Fishing Spinners

Fishing spinners are an attractive type of lure. Unlike a fly or feather, the spinner can more easily be made to move in a way that suggests life. To the fish it will seem to be edible life, which means the fish will try to eat it, unaware that the spinner has a hook attached. Once caught in the hook, all the angler has to do is reel it in and lift it out of the water.

There are various kinds of fishing spinners. The in-line spinner is so named because it features a metal blade that revolves around a central wire axis. It is often attached by a clevis. The spinning nature of this kind of lure can cause problems with the line becoming increasingly twisted. Swivels are often therefore used to help overcome this problem.

Fishing spinners can have different designs of blades. This is the part that actually spins. Thin, slim blades tend to revolve faster than wide, larger blades. Larger blades also cause more vibration. This can be a desirable trait as the fish can mistake the vibrations as caused by a living creature that it wants to eat. Another important spinner factor is the flash. This is how it looks to a fish. A good flash can attract the attention of a fish. This factor is produced more through colour and texture than design.

Fishing with spinners is really not much different to fishing with other kinds of lures. The main idea is to attract a fish and cause it to bite on to the lure, thereby getting caught by the hook. However, it is well to bear in mind that fish only use sight in the last quarter of the attack. Up to that point they rely on their sense of vibration to locate their prey. Fishing spinners that produce a good vibration generally work best in murky waters where visibility is poor and restricted.

You should also bear in mind that fish attack from below and behind the direction of travel. Try working out how your fishing lures will appear from that angle, as that is what the fish will see just before it bites. If it doesn't like what it sees close up, it may decide to move on and find food elsewhere. The true art of spinner fishing lies in understand all the possible angle of the craft. If you think like a fish you will stand a better chance of catching one.

[412 words]

What Are The Causes Of High Blood Pressure?

The causes of high blood pressure are many and varied. However, there are certain recurring causes that will affect most people adversely. Knowing the causes of high blood pressure will mean that you are better placed to avoid them, or even to reverse the effects.

One of the causes of high blood pressure may be your family history and you can't really do very much about that. However, you can do something about most of the other causes of high blood pressure. In this article we will look at the effects of eating the wrong foods, of being overweight, and of being physically inactive.

Consuming the wrong kinds of food is one of the causes of high blood pressure. Too much salt can have an adverse effect on blood pressure. The remedy is simple; cut out salt in your food wherever possible. Watch out for processed foods too. They often already contain salt for flavor. The causes of high blood pressure can sometimes lie hidden.

Another of the prime causes of high blood pressure is excessive alcohol. Alcohol raises blood pressure and keeps it high. Smoking is also one of the biggest causes of high blood pressure, so cut down or stop.

Carrying too much body weight is another of the causes of high blood pressure. Many people are more overweight than they think. The heart has to work harder, and your blood pressure rises. Lose weight and one of the major causes of high blood pressure will disappear and your blood pressure will reduce.

One of the easiest ways to lose weight is through regular exercise. For many people that conjures up images of sweating in the gym - hard work, in other words! It needn't be so. It will take you around 15 minutes to walk briskly for the distance of one mile. That alone every day will make a huge difference in time. Physical inactivity is another of the causes of high blood pressure, so get active.

Consider walking more than a mile every day though. Just doubling that mile will leave you with plenty of time every day for the other things you need to do. For an able-bodied person, this is the easiest of the causes of high blood pressure to put right. So, exercise and be physically active for at least thirty minutes a day, every day.

There are many causes of high blood pressure. The easiest way to do something about it is to start by combating three of the most common causes of high blood pressure: consuming the wrong things, being overweight, and not being physically active enough. There are other causes of high blood pressure, but starting with these three is a step in the right direction.

[464 words]

Natural Falls State Park, Oklahoma, USA

You will find Natural Falls State Park at 19068 East 578 Road, Colcord, Oklahoma in the northeast of the state, close to the border with Arkansas, in the Ozark Highlands region.

The centerpiece of this beautiful park is undoubtedly the 77-foot high waterfall, known locally as Dripping Springs Falls, but renamed by the state to Natural Falls to avoid confusion with Dripping Springs State Park. When the movie, *Where the Red Fern Grows*, was made in 1974, the waterfall was known by its original name.

There are boardwalks set up to enable visitors to view the magnificent falls. It can also be seen from certain places along some trails and also on some overlooks. There is also an observation platform to be found both overlooking the falls, and at the foot of the falls.

“...a delightful diversity of plant and animal life ...”

Most visitors expect Oklahoma to be open, rolling plains and prairies. Parts of the state do indeed conform to that model, but in the region of the Ozarks, rugged beauty with a delightful diversity of plant and animal life should be expected.

Much of the park is dense forest, mostly consisting of white oaks, maples and chinquapin. The forest floor where it's cooler is covered by plants such as spicebush, pawpaw, redbud, sassafras, flowering dogwood, and coral berry.

There are a number of campsites throughout the park with a total of 27 sites for tents, and 44 sites for recreational vehicles, with seven of them offering full hookup. A comfort station with shower and bathroom facilities can also be found at the campsites.

Nearby the falls there is a small swimming area by the side of a creek. Swimming is not allowed at the natural falls themselves, however. The visitor to the falls will quickly realise why, as this is a rare sanctuary of peace with only the sound of the waterfall to break the serenity.

This scenic region became the Cherokee Nation in the 1830s, following the Trail of Tears, a time when the Cherokee people were forced to march west; a time when so many of them died in atrocious conditions.

“...mosses, liverworts and ferns grow in abundance ...”

The waterfall creates a moist, humid atmosphere where mosses, liverworts and ferns grow in abundance. The area was privately owned previously, and was open to the public for viewing. Subsequently the park was taken over by the state who currently run it.

Getting to Natural Falls State Park is not difficult. It is within a few miles south of US-412, and about eight miles west of West Siloam Springs, which is a town just inside the Oklahoma / Arkansas border.

There is an entrance fee of \$5 per vehicle to the park, which is open from 8.30 am to 5 pm. Seniors and honorably discharged veterans of Oklahoma origin are admitted free, but need to show valid documentation. There is a charge of \$12 at tent sites, and a charge of \$20 for RV sites where the hookup includes electricity and water.

For RV sites with full hookup including sewer facilities, the charge is \$23. On the Premium sites within the park there is an additional \$5 charge. You can contact Natural Falls State Park at 918-422-5802.

[523 words]

5 Valuable Winter Gardening Tips

Winter gardening may seem a strange concept. After all, it's in summer that a garden really comes alive. Flowers bloom and need attention, lawns need mowing and hedges need trimming. There never seems to be an end to it all. In winter it's different. There's not a lot to see in the average garden, but there's still plenty to do.

Plants and lawns need attention in winter. There are potential threats in the form of frosts and heavy rains to think about. It's a time for paying close attention to the things that are more vulnerable to the changes that are taking place around them. Just because your garden isn't looking its best in winter doesn't mean you should ignore it. Here are 5 valuable winter gardening tips to help you manage your garden better in winter.

- 1.** Frosts can be a problem right through the winter in any garden. Covering any sensitive plants with some netting or light sacking can help a lot. You should listen to your local weather reports on radio or TV to see if a frost is likely in your area. Err on the side of caution; it won't hurt to protect your sensitive plants if the frosts don't arrive.
- 2.** Your lawn is vulnerable at this time. After a frost, try not to walk on the lawn. Grass can be damaged by heavy footsteps while it is frozen and it may not fully recover from the experience. The frost alone shouldn't hurt the grass, but it's easy to simply stay off it when the grass leaves are glistening silvery white.
- 3.** Don't leave autumn leaves on the lawn. Choose a nice calm day for a spot of winter gardening to rake up the leaves off the lawn. If they rot where they lie on your lawn they could encourage the spread of moss. Don't dispose of the dead leaves either. They are a valuable resource. Gather them into large plastic bags, tie the tops and make a few holes in the sides. Store the bags in a quiet part of the garden and next summer you will have some lovely leaf mold to use.
- 4.** As part of your regular winter gardening, check your shrubs regularly throughout the winter. Frosts can have a heaving effect on soil that tends to lift plant roots. It can in some cases virtually uproot shrubs. For this reason you may need to re-firm the roots of any shrubs that have been affected in this way.
- 5.** Remember that weeds tend to grow faster than most other things in winter. Keep an eye on the weeds in your lawn, which is fairly easy to do as they will be the ones growing faster than the grass itself. Giving the grass on your lawn a bit of winter gardening attention at this time by keeping down on the weeds will make your lawn look all the better when summer finally arrives again.

[497 words]

Finding a Suitable Diet for Gestational Diabetes

Gestational diabetes, as its name suggests, is a type of diabetes that women can develop during pregnancy. Usually, once the baby has been born, the condition goes away again by itself. However, the elevated glucose sugar levels that cause this type of diabetes can usually be controlled very simply and easily with diet and exercise.

In rare cases it may be necessary for a pregnant woman to have daily insulin injections, but exercising properly and eating a well-balanced diet can usually hold the condition in check. Of course, eating a well-balanced healthy diet is something everyone should do, though for gestational diabetes there are a few special requirements that are necessary to observe.

Is a special diabetes meal planning routine required?

People who are diagnosed with type 1 or type 2 diabetes often need to go through a special diabetes meal planning routine that suits their particular situation. Because diabetes in pregnancy is normally a temporary condition that rights itself once the baby has been born, most mothers-to-be balk at the thought of complicated meal planning and all it entails. They may have other children to deal with, often demanding toddlers, and their days are already filled with chores and things they need to do.

That's why ready-made recipes suitable for a woman with gestational diabetes work so well. They will, of course, need to follow any specific instructions provided by their own doctor or health advisor, but these kind of instructions are usually general guidelines that can apply to many readily available recipes.

Generally speaking, any recipe created for someone who has type 1 or type 2 diabetes can be used by women with gestational diabetes. You may need to make a few adjustments, but these types of recipes can be an easy to use blueprint, if you like, for creating a suitable diet plan.

What kind of food should be eaten?

Without going into too many specifics, your diet should consist of about 50% or less carbohydrates, as measured through calories. These are healthy foods such as fresh fruits and vegetables. Complex carbohydrates can also be found in foods such as cereals, rice, pastas and bread. In general, it is best to go easy on fat and protein.

Carbohydrate foods that are rich in fiber are usually best. High fiber foods are things such as whole grain bread and cereals, brown rice and beans. Using whole wheat or whole grain flour in baking is also a good idea.

Dark green leafy vegetables are good for anyone, and are especially good for women with gestational diabetes. These can be eaten cooked or raw, as preferred. Don't over-cook them as much of the goodness can be lost that way. Spinach and broccoli are especially good green vegetables, and carrots and peppers are also well worth considering as other types of vegetables.

If possible, buy fruits and vegetables fresh, and not processed. Processed foods often contain added salt and fats that are not necessary, and might even be detrimental to someone on a carefully controlled diet.

Dairy products are healthy, but they should contain as little fat as possible. Low fat yoghurts and cottage cheeses are especially good, providing plenty of protein and calcium. Avoid artificially sweetened yoghurts, as yoghurt already contains natural sugars and do not need added sweetening.

What kind of foods should not be eaten?

Foods that have high levels of sugar should be taken with care and consideration. It is usually not necessary to avoid sugary foods entirely, but common sense and caution is most definitely recommended. Remember, it is the health of the baby that is mainly at stake here. The mother's health is also an important consideration, of course, but the baby is more likely to be adversely affected if the mother eats the wrong kind of foods, or doesn't properly control her gestational diabetes.

Don't be fooled into thinking that artificial sweeteners are better for you than sugar, and therefore acceptable to use. They are not. Even low fat yoghurts can have artificial sweeteners in them, which will do as much harm as actual sugar. Get into the habit of reading food labels before buying them. It's the only way to be reasonably sure and confident of what you are getting.

Try to avoid full fat products and opt for low fat alternatives where possible. Reduced-fat milk, for example, retains all the natural goodness of milk, but has none of the bad effects that fat can give you.

While you should not cut fat entirely from your diet, you should think more carefully before using foods like butter, cooking oils and salad dressings. Limit the intake of fats, especially high saturated fat products, such as hamburgers, bacon and most cheeses, but having some fat in your diet will provide vital long-term energy.

Can diet alone control gestational diabetes?

In some women, diet alone may be all they need to fully control their gestational diabetes. However, most women with the condition will need to exercise as well. Even if exercise is not strictly required, it will always make good sense to combine it with a well-balanced diet.

Obviously an aggressive workout in the gym is not really an advisable option for a heavily pregnant woman, but there are plenty of easier, gentler exercises that will help to keep high glucose blood levels down.

Your doctor or health advisor may suggest an exercise routine, in which case try to follow it, but otherwise, here are a few simple exercises that should be easy to do, and that will help to keep you in trim.

Walking is the easiest, simplest and one of the most effective exercise you can do. However, a gentle walk to the mail box and back every morning is not

enough. Try to walk at least 30 minutes a day, and more if you can. Try to walk briskly, but not to the point where you become exhausted. You should exert yourself a little, but don't overdo it.

Jogging is not a recommended exercise for a pregnant woman. Jogging involves too much hard activity that could affect the unborn baby. Besides, it is not at all necessary to exercise heavily to help control your blood sugar levels. Plenty of gentle, but highly effective exercise is all it takes.

Swimming is another excellent exercise. If you live near the sea, or if you have easy access to a pool, this is an extremely enjoyable exercise for a pregnant woman, as it relieves the pressure of the extra weight she is carrying. Again, swim for at least 30 minutes if possible, and try to end up feeling you have done something worthwhile.

Finding a suitable diet for gestational diabetes is not really difficult to do. There are plenty of options within the limits of the kind of foods you should eat. Rather than having a few large meals, try to eat several smaller meals a day. You can also have one or two small snacks a day if you like. You just need to be sensible about it.

Your doctor will most likely arrange for a weekly blood sugar monitoring test to check you have normal blood sugar levels. Adjust your diet if and when it becomes necessary to stay on track, and always be guided by your doctor's advice. Gestational diabetes is usually easily treated, and it should not affect your pregnancy in any bad way.

[1,240 words]

Why Exercise is Important to the Health of Your Dog

Health experts always stress the importance of regular exercise for us humans, so it should come as no surprise to learn that exercise is important for a dog's health too. Regular exercise should start right from puppy stage and continue into old age. There are many benefits to be gained from starting a healthy exercise regime when your dog is young.

Puppies love to eat, and they will often eat too much for their own good, if allowed to. Regular exercise is not only fun for puppies, but it helps to prevent obesity, it strengthens your puppy's cardiovascular health, and it can help enormously with housetraining too, as your puppy will quickly come to associate regular outdoor walks with toilet needs.

In dogs of all ages, regular exercise helps to maintain their optimal physical health, and it also helps to maintain their optimal mental well-being too. Dogs enjoy exercising. They love to run and explore, to fetch back a thrown ball or stick, or even just to walk quietly beside their owners. Regular exercise keeps a dog's mind active, preventing depression, which can easily set in with a dog that gets little or no mental stimulation.

Veterinarians in the US report that around 30% of all the dogs they see are overweight - some even clinically obese. There are many health issues that can arise with an obese dog, including heart problems, back problems, breathing difficulties, arthritic problems due to joints being overburdened, and the dog's risk of developing cancer is also significantly increased.

Your dog's ancestor, the wolf, ate as much as it could every day, but it usually had to trek miles and miles in search of food. And when it found its prey, it usually had to run as fast as it could for maybe five minutes or so before catching the prey.

Sometimes the intense effort was in vain and the prey managed to escape, meaning that the wolf had to go through the procedure of finding prey all over again. In this way, the wolf usually ate well, but it got plenty of exercise too, ensuring that it never got overweight. Wolves, by and large, stay healthy throughout their lives.

Regular exercise and a well-stimulated mind not only leads to a healthier dog, but it can help in solving many of the more common antisocial things your dog might do. Dogs who raid the garbage, chew the furniture, or bark or whine excessively are usually bored. The best cure for their boredom is to take them out for a walk. In fact, the more walks your dog has, the less likely he or she will be to do the things you disapprove of.

An adult dog should have at least one, and preferably two walks a day. Puppies can have increased exercise of five to 10 minutes for every month of age, twice a day. Feed your dog the right amount of balanced food each day, but

combine it with plenty of fun exercise, and you will have a healthy dog that thoroughly enjoys life.

[509 words]

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I look forward to hearing from you!

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'John Coutts', with a large, stylized flourish extending from the bottom left.

John Coutts.