

NO NUMBERS NUTRITION



In my long history of battling with Anorexia Nervosa and EDNOS (Eating Disorder Not Otherwise Specified), I have formed and bought into innumerable false beliefs regarding food and nutrition. Many of these erroneous beliefs and lies fed to me by my eating disorder have been promoted by a multi-billion dollar diet industry that sells false hope to the detriment of its consumers' health. Peers I have been in treatment with have frequently sought my advice, as I was a walking encyclopaedia when it came to knowing the numbers...how many calories, grams of sugar, fat, protein, and carbohydrates. I equated this knowledge with knowledge of 'nutrition'. Every 'nutritional' label was scrutinised and memorised and where no label was present, in the case of fresh food, the internet was a great source of information. Every grocery was reduced to a number and my decision to consume that food or not was based upon whether my eating disorder could justify the figures.

As I began the journey of recovery, I was monitored closely by my GP, dietitian, psychologist, psychiatrist, and counsellor. My treatment involved weekly blood tests to assess my deficiencies and these results were then taken into consideration when adjusting my meal plan. When my results consistently showed, for example, lowered potassium and phosphate levels, Dr Leanne Barron recommended that I incorporate dates and bananas into my daily diet. I was really trying to view food for its nutritional properties and not as a number and therefore abstained from looking up the numerical data. Focused on health and recovery, I went and purchased some dates and ate a few. The eating disorder cognitions and anxiety intensified and within a few hours, I had succumbed and begun my research on dates. Site after site talked about the number of calories in dates, how they contributed to weight loss or gain, and their sugar content. Initially, I freaked out! My mind started crunching numbers and frantically scrambling for ways to rid my body of that which I had consumed. 'Healthy Sarah' then reminded me that Dr Barron would not suggest I eat something detrimental to my health and well-being. So began the quest of searching for the value of dates...not the numbers, but their nutritional benefits. It was surprisingly challenging to find the information I was seeking, as the sites seemed to reflect our culture's obsession with weight loss and 'fear of fat', not only in their content, but the advertisements that featured alongside the information. I created a poster with the vitamins and minerals that dates contain and the benefits they have to my health and recovery. With this pinned to my wall, I read it through for several minutes every time I consumed a date. The numbers continued to swirl around in my head, but slowly this information was replaced with newfound knowledge. I focused on the potassium, manganese, magnesium and copper they were providing my body with, amongst numerous other vitamins and minerals.

Each week, I was given one or two new foods to introduce into my diet and encouraged to view them in light of their nutritional properties. As Hippocrates said, 'Let food be your medicine, and medicine be your food'. But each week I had to wade through triggering sites and information to

find that which I was after. I began to throw around an idea with my recovery friends for a trigger-free, no numbers, resource that listed the nutritional properties of key foods. As the idea gained momentum, it began to develop and expand. My treating team supported such a venture and clinical professionals and peers in recovery began to get involved. A project group was established and met regularly to research and compile the No Numbers Nutrition (3N) resources. Thank you to Ngareta Day for conceiving the name of this project and for her invaluable input.

Aside from the properties of individual foods, I began researching which foods, for example, were highest in potassium, in order to naturally restore my levels. Again, site after site listed the foods high in potassium but also mentioned calorie content, so when I discovered that avocado's, for example, were high in potassium, I immediately dismissed them as an option due to their caloric content and the belief that all fats are bad. During inpatient treatment, I had frequently been told by dietitians that fats are an essential part of a healthy person's diet, but could not and would not accept or believe this. As I began to research and discuss the micronutrients, the functions they perform, and foods dense in them, my understanding of macronutrients (carbohydrates, protein and lipids/fats) also grew. I began to realise just how little I understood of 'nutrition' and that calories and nutrition were not synonymous.

I know I am not alone in the way I have thought about food, nutrition, health and diet and recognise that in order to truly recover from my eating disorder, I must relinquish my obsession with counting calories and viewing food as a number. That is the birthplace of this product. Information on macronutrients, micronutrients, and individual foods is made available in this booklet; as index cards; online; and through an iphone/android app. Each medium will contain basic information on why the macronutrient/micronutrient is essential; what happens when someone is deficient in it; how it will benefit recovery; and nutritious natural sources. They will also contain information on the primary vitamins and minerals of various foods. Given that many recovering from eating disorders find numbers quite triggering, we have refrained from using any numbers in our products, other than page numbers. We considered that some individuals may need to know what an appropriate serving size is, particularly if their hunger and/or satiety cues have been impeded. We contemplated whether we would therefore include recommended serving sizes/dietary intake/number of serves of macronutrients, and concluded that this information is irrelevant for the aims of this project, and is better left to the discretion of the treating dietitian, as individuals needs may vary depending on their level of malnutrition and stage of recovery. The purpose of this resource is to provide information that allows for a shift in how food is viewed, not to provide advice on meal plans or dietary recommendations or to substitute for the involvement of a qualified dietitian in one's treatment. We trust that an experienced dietitian will use discretion in communicating numbers with the individual working towards recovery and will modify meal plans according to their specific nutritional needs.

Regarding the numerical values of micronutrients within various food sources, I have attempted to reflect the density through the language I have selected. For example, spinach contains well beyond the daily recommended intake of Vitamin K and Vitamin A, over half of the daily recommended intake of Folate and Manganese, as well as varying percentages of Calcium, Dietary Fibre, Selenium, Iron, Zinc and numerous other micronutrients. This is translated in the information as providing an *extremely good* source of Vitamin K, an *excellent* source of Vitamin A, Folate and Manganese, and *small amounts* or *traces* of the remaining micronutrients listed.

The **3N booklet** (No Numbers Nutrition) is intended to provide a reference and compilation of information on the macro and micronutrients, various foods, and other articles that pertain to nutrition and recovery from an eating disorder. These pages may be photocopied and distributed to patients/clients as needed.

During the early stages of my recovery, I found books and large quantities of information overwhelming, as my level of nutrition resulted in poor concentration and diminished cognitive capacities. 3N has therefore also been developed into a series of cards within an **3N box**. They are categorised into their food groups and macro/micro- nutrients. It is intended that doctors, dietitians and other clinical professionals utilise this resource by selecting a few cards a week for their client/patient to introduce into their diet or focus on. For example, if an individual's potassium level is low, the card on potassium, bananas, dried apricots and pumpkin seeds may be given to them. These cards are small enough to place inside their diary or stick to their fridge or mirror and may be read whilst the source of the nutrient is being consumed, thus substituting disordered beliefs and rules about food with their nutritional properties and benefits.

The third medium for the resource is the **3N website** www.nonumbersnutrition.com. Initially, this site will contain all the information in the booklet; complementary resources; additional articles and links that are relevant to nutrition for eating disorder recovery; and contact details of qualified clinical professionals that specialise in the field of eating disorders. There will be no numbers on the site, except the phone numbers of contacts. The site is designed to be a trigger-free resource which anyone with an eating disorder (or general population) can access and know that they can learn about the foods they are consuming without focusing on weight or calories. The vision is to eventually expand this site to incorporate webinars and nutritional support and online consultation by qualified dietitians. Nonumbersnutrition.com will be continually updated as new evidence-based research emerges. You can also 'like' us on Facebook – search for No Numbers Nutrition.

The fourth medium for the resource is the **3N iPhone/android app**. It will initially contain features that allow the individual to search a macro or micronutrient, or specific food, and have the information displayed on their smart phone. Again, this information will be number and trigger free. The app will evolve over time to provide more comprehensive support and encouragement for those recovering from disordered eating.

I trust that this will be a valuable resource for both individuals recovering from disordered eating and the clinicians who treat them. I would love to hear from you, whether you have feedback on how we can continue to build on and improve the 3N resources and project; corrections to content; emerging evidence-based research; or whether you would like to share how this has supported your professional practice or personal recovery. Email: sarah@nonumbersnutrition.com.



Sarah Louise McKenzie

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