

S3E41b Transcript

Ask Jack #4

Geoff Allix (2s):

Hi, I'm Geoff Allix, host of Living Well with MS, the podcast for Overcoming MS.

Jack McNulty (7s):

Hi, I'm Jack McNulty. I'm a professional chef, and serious OMS foodie. Welcome to Ask Jack, a special Living Well with MS podcast series where I'll be answering food and cooking related questions submitted by you, our Overcoming MS community.

Geoff Allix (25s):

If you'd like to submit a question for a future episode of Ask Jack, please email us at podcast@overcomingms.org. That's podcast@overcomingms.org. And now, let's rev up our appetites and dig into this episode. So welcome back to Ask Jack, where we ask professional chef Jack McNulty food related questions for people following an Overcoming MS Diet. So, welcome back, Jack.

Jack McNulty (52s):

Thanks, Geoff. It's great to be here for another episode. I looked over some of the questions earlier and I must say there's some excellent questions to dive into this episode.

Geoff Allix (1m 3s):

So, yeah, this episode we've not got a specific topic but we're going with general questions that have come up in the forums and that have been asked of us by listeners. So, if we jump straight in, we've got a question from Rebecca in Scotland. She said I've been wondering about making a fermented cashew cheese and any tips -- that I had to be honest, I've actually followed Jack's tips to make a fermented cashew cheese. So, it was pretty good, but I'm quite interested whether I was doing it right or not. Everyone survived. So that was the main thing. So, she said, "I have probiotics or could buy cider vinegar, or my flat mate makes Kombucha, which I could use."

Geoff Allix (1m 51s):

My main concern is to know if it's gone bad or could make me ill. I'd also love test tips on eating out, and how to make decisions on what to compromise. I know obviously in an ideal world, I would never compromise but if I'm stuck out somewhere and one option contains coconut, and another option contains palm oil, and another is fried. It has a small amount of vegetable oil. How am I supposed to make the wisest choice? At the moment I don't take any dairy ever and will never take anything deep fried. But with oils versus say a skinless chicken fillet which is the least bad option for a once in six months compromise. So, let's start off with the fermented cashew cheese.

Geoff Allix (2m 31s):

How would you go?

Jack McNulty (2m 32s):

Yeah.

Geoff Allix (2m 32s):

I mean cheese is one of the big things. I think with dairy there's alternatives for milk, there's alternatives for yogurt, but cheese is a tricky one. Because the cheese in the supermarkets tend to be very high saturated fat.

Jack McNulty (2m 47s):

Um-hmm.

Geoff Allix (2m 47s):

Coconut oil-based cheeses. So, there are also cashew cheeses. So how would we go about making a cashew cheese?

Jack McNulty (2m 57s):

Yeah. First of all, Rebecca outstanding questions you kind of get in at the heart of a lot of concerns that probably a lot of newcomers are going to have. So, why don't we dive into that. With respect to the cheese question. Yeah, so many people are really interested in plant-based cheeses and what to do about that. So many people are trying to experiment at home and making plant-based cheese mostly from cashews. Let's take a look first at what's going on there. In order to make sort of a cheese out of cashew nuts, there's a couple of things that need to happen.

Jack McNulty (3m 44s):

And the first thing that needs to occur is bacteria or an enzyme for both from a living culture needs to be introduced in order to coagulate the proteins in the cashews, and also to ferment the mixture and convert the starches to a lactic acid. This is going to release these flavors, this acidic component but also start to create cheese-like flavors. It's very mild, so it's nothing like a normal cheese that you would be maybe familiar in eating but it goes a little bit in that direction.

Jack McNulty (4m 28s):

So, in order to make a cashew cheese: the first thing you need to do is you need to grind the cashew nuts very, very fine. And then I found that it's best heating the cashew puree or ground cashew mass straightaway as it sort of helps with the proteins to coagulate once you introduce the bacteria, which is the next step. And that needs to be a live culture. So, something along the lines of perhaps a soya yogurt, or a water kefir, probiotic capsules.

Jack McNulty (5m 12s):

I think Rebecca mentioned that. Or something else called Rejuvelac, which is something I experimented with. Now, Rejuvelac is another process and something you can make easily at home and it's basically fermented whole grains that you just basically are soaking in water, leaving at room temperature for a couple of days. And the grains began to ferment and take on sort of a cheesy aroma. It's quite an interesting process and it works really well in terms of creating these live cultures and enzymes to help with the cashew cheese. So that helps the process.

Jack McNulty (5m 54s):

That gets the process started. And it creates a sort of lactic acid and the cheesy flavor with the cashew nuts. But what really is necessary is to add further enzyme at this point. Something like from Koji, or vegetarian rennet, or nigari, which is often used to set tofu, soya milk converted into tofu. And this is going to bind the proteins together. And this is what's going to create a more firm, or semi firm cashew cheese. If you leave that process out, your cashew nut that's been fermented is going to be more creamy.

Jack McNulty (6m 37s):

It's going to be more of a thick dip if you will rather than a cheese. So just to clarify that a little bit. So, that's the process. We'll put in the show notes a link to what I do, and also some other places on the internet, if anybody's interested in going out and experimenting with making their own. Which gets to the second part of the question, how do you know if you're doing it safely or if it's gone off? Or if you're going to make yourself sick?

Geoff Allix (7m 12s):

Before you go on to that, I mean I think, because I have experimented a bit.

Jack McNulty (7m 16s):

Yeah.

Geoff Allix (7m 16s):

And I think you can because you're mentioning that sort of yeasty flavor.

Jack McNulty (7m 22s):

Yeah.

Geoff Allix (7m 23s):

And you can, I've tried with different things. I think kombucha was mentioned. I haven't tried kombucha. But certainly, I was making sauerkraut and using liquid from sauerkraut because it's a fermented liquid. That worked actually because it had those natural bacteria in it. So, I guess I get --

Jack McNulty (7m 45s):

And alpha has a lot of lactic acid which is very helpful in the process.

Geoff Allix (7m 49s):

Okay, so it could work.

Jack McNulty (7m 50s):

Yeah.

Geoff Allix (7m 50s):

I just saw that somewhere and you could try that. And the other thing to the thickening, I think, agar-agar, which is a sort of seaweed-based sort of gelatin type. I mean, the risk is it goes a bit rubbery if you overdo it, but then a small amount could bind it quite well. And so, there's different things you can do. There you can experiment. And try with like herbs and spices as well that's I think, you know, to give it the flavor. Now adding chives, adding something to make it more spicy, I think there's all sorts you can do. It's one of those things, if you like cooking, try stuff out.

Jack McNulty (8m 28s):

Yeah, exactly. The world is relatively open when it gets to that. And when you put a foot into the fermentation door, then you're really getting somewhere, because there's all kinds of possibilities out there for creating interesting flavors and tastes, and things that are really healthy. But you do have to be careful because you're playing around with things that can go bad if you're not careful. So, if you are getting into this world, it's very important to invest in a good thermometer because temperatures are very important.

Jack McNulty (9m 10s):

It's also very important to work extremely clean, which means understanding how to sanitize properly all of the equipment that you're using just to reduce the probability of something going off. Fortunately, when you're making cashew cheese, if it goes off it's going to let you know. So, there's a couple of molds that might appear on the surface of a cashew cheese. The general bluish-greenish mold, those are fairly harmless. Obviously, because you see blue cheese and that's basically just a mold anyway.

Jack McNulty (9m 55s):

So, if that develops on the surface, you can just wipe that away and carry on. The more dangerous, and more common with cashew cheese, you get the mold is reddish in color. And that is going to be harmful. And so, if something like that develops, you're going to want to just throw away whatever you have. But mostly what's going to occur is the smell is going to go off. And it will be fairly offensive at least it is to me. And that's usually a pretty good sign that I don't want to put something in my mouth. The other little taste test you can do is something just starting to go off. You can put a little on the tip of your tongue and if there's an immediate tingling that's going on, on the tip of your tongue, you know that the process has already started that it's going off.

Jack McNulty (10m 43s):

So that's usually when I'll just get rid of something. I like to err on the side of caution when it comes to that sort of thing.

Geoff Allix (10m 53s):

Okay, it's good advice. So, the second part of the question was about missing out and compromise. I mean I, prior to COVID, used to travel quite a lot.

Jack McNulty (11m 3s):

Yeah.

Geoff Allix (11m 4s):

So, different parts of the world are easier than others. Some like the US, have lots of people that have dietary requirements. France very, very hard. And then others in between. So, Thailand, I found was one mentioned of coconut here, which was certainly a compromise that I made there because lots of things contained coconut. But what is the compromise you'd make? If you've got possibly coconut, you've got maybe some palm oil, or you've got some vegetable oils, which are -- is there a less bad option?

Jack McNulty (11m 51s):

I love the way that question is phrased as less bad off. First of all, I think it's harder to make good decisions today than say, a dozen years ago. Primarily because there are just so many other options that are out there. There's so much stuff on the internet that is promising this or that. And people move around quite a bit more. And they get right to this situation that you were describing just now, Geoff, when you're out traveling. But in my mind, I think it's -- well, I don't like using terms like compromise, or allowances, or treats because I think this plays tricks on the mind.

Jack McNulty (12m 34s):

And it's best to stay away from letting those terms sort of infiltrate the mind. They lure you into thinking what you miss in your diet instead of promoting what is possible. It's kind of like, it's a what you cannot versus what you can do, kind of mentality. I found that the trick really is to minimize the impact and try to use different strategies. So, if you're out just going to a restaurant, maybe calling ahead, researching the restaurant beforehand is always helpful. Maybe even eating before you even go out so that you can stick to lighter options on the menu, and you have a lot more control on that aspect.

Jack McNulty (13m 22s):

I think anytime that you go out to eat, you have to recognize that you're already going to make sacrifices because you're leaving yourself open to whatever is in the restaurant. And most restaurants are not going to be living on the safe side, when it comes to what we expect. They're going to be using ingredients that are not necessarily the best ingredients. For us, they're going to use cooking techniques, not necessarily the best for people following an OMS diet. And so, you're already going to be a little bit behind on that. In terms of going out, yeah, when you're traveling, I think it's really, really important to just understand before you leave and take off what you're getting yourself into and understand that, well, I'm not going to stress if I have -- if I'm in Thailand, and I want to eat because I have to eat.

Jack McNulty (14m 22s):

And if I have to eat there might be a little bit of coconut milk, but this is a week-long adventure, and I'm just not going to stress about it. When I get home, I'm going to live in the good health lane for a good long time and make sure I get plenty antioxidants and all those sorts of things. I know when I travel, and I follow a pretty strict 100% plant-based diet. When I travel, I do make allowances and say okay, it's just easier for me. If I'm in an ocean environment that I'm going to order a little bit of fish here and there. And I just don't stress about it. I take care of myself when I get home.

Jack McNulty (15m 4s):

So, I think it's understood, especially when you're starting off on the OMS diet that you're going to make mistakes along the way. There will be situations that come up that are out of your control, and just accept them as part of, "Well, hey, that's just life." And it's, you know, as long as you don't make a habit out of it or don't say, "Well, this is a treat or a compromise because that allows you to do that again at some other point." Just let it -- I just said, "If I find that I've made a mistake somewhere along the line, or mistakenly eaten something that I'm not supposed to eat, or not wanting to eat, I just let it fall off my shoulder and just move on."

Jack McNulty (15m 54s):

I usually have a good laugh about it and carry on. That's I think that's just the best way to approach it.

Geoff Allix (16m 0s):

Yeah, I certainly, I think that the saturated fats side of it may be the one -- so I would have a situation where I definitely wouldn't have any dairy. I definitely wouldn't have anything that had been fried. Certainly, absolutely not deep fried because you know that. I mean, to be honest, it would, it doesn't appeal to me at all. I think you just get out of the habit. But saturated fats, I sort of think, which is where the sort of coconut comes in. You sort of think, Well, okay, if literally that day or that, you know, I'm basically eating everything very clean. And I've had something which has some coconut.

Geoff Allix (16m 41s):

And I think, okay, saturated fats and that will have gone up a bit. But that I'm sort of, I know, we don't really count them. In the early days, certainly, when I first met you, Jack, I was counting saturated fats for the day. Now, that's discouraged. But it's certainly still a situation where we're trying to keep that down. It can't be zero. So that's just contributing towards saturated fats. And so that's where I would think, "Okay, there's a bit more saturated fat in that than I would like, but actually, the rest of the day I'm keeping to almost zero saturated fat." So, there I would compromise. And yeah, maybe compromise is the wrong word.

Geoff Allix (17m 22s):

But you're sort of thinking, OK, within a day, or certainly within a week, my allowance is a fine. I haven't had any dairy.

Jack McNulty (17m 29s):

That's right.

Geoff Allix (17m 30s):

And so yeah, you can always find something to hone always, but mostly find something to eat.

Jack McNulty (17m 38s):

That's right. It's creating a balance, you know. And I found that there's -- you know, when you're out and about, and you're looking for that quick snack whether you're traveling or just in the city somewhere or something, you know, everybody's looking for, what kind of quick little fast food can I get? And people often forget, like you can just go into a supermarket. And supermarkets have so many healthy things that you can just grab. Grab a banana, grab an apple, whatever. You know something like that. I know when I was in Australia traveling around and kind out in the outback is not necessarily the haven for good healthy food and those locations that oftentimes we would just slip into a grocery store, grab a piece of bread, get an avocado.

Jack McNulty (18m 29s):

At that time, I was eating a little bit more fish, maybe some smoked salmon or something. Go have a picnic somewhere and enjoy it. It was just so much easier than stressing out, what can I possibly eat in a restaurant? A supermarket is a fantastic place to go find food.

Geoff Allix (18m 45s):

And we mentioned earlier before the call about going to Italy, and pizza is great -- yeah, pizza is almost ubiquitous around the world. Now you can get pizza pretty much anywhere. And if it's a decent pizza restaurant where they're making it fresh then a pizza without cheese on, you can say, "What's going to be on it?" Assuming you're not gluten intolerant that would be the only issue. But other than that, I properly made pizza without cheese, a vegetarian pizza should be absolutely fine.

Jack McNulty (19m 18s):

That's right. That's right. And there's always options. Even a Japanese restaurant to go have some sushi or something like that.

Geoff Allix (19m 24s):

Yeah, just watch out with sushi. Sushi is a <crosstalk>

Jack McNulty (19m 28s):
Yeah.

Geoff Allix (19m 29s):
Because a Japanese sushi shouldn't have mayonnaise. But they've decided to <crosstalk> Yeah, I was, we were eating sushi just the other day, we made that at home. We just, we like to make sushi sometimes just as a fun thing to make with the family as well.

Jack McNulty (19m 45s):
Yeah, that's right.

Geoff Allix (19m 46s):
You can make, yeah, fantastic sushi. But yeah, you're right. But yeah, just watch out for the mayonnaise but other than that. And the other thing I was going to say there's a -- I don't want to overly promote an organization, but there's an app called Happy Cow, which is on Android or iPhone. And if you look up the Happy Cow app, it's free to install it. And it works globally. I've not been to a country where they don't have restaurants. And basically, it's about listing vegan places. You can do vegan, vegetarian, or places that have vegan choices on the menu. So, you can go to places fully vegan. I think it's more for ethical vegans there.

Geoff Allix (20m 28s):
They don't want to go anywhere that would possibly have any meat products. But I mean, those sorts of places, and everywhere I've had places listed on there. And then you can find some amazing things where your countries that you might think you almost had nothing, there will be something on Happy Cow. And because it's an app on your phone and just lives on there, on the phone somewhere, and need some food, have a look and almost certainly there'll be somewhere nearby that at least has options that are vegan.

Jack McNulty (20m 58s):
And I would just throw one caution out there just because a restaurant is calling themselves vegan doesn't necessarily mean it's going to fit within the OMS lifestyle. Because in today's modern vegan world, let's face it, there's just simply a lot of unhealthy food being served under the guise of vegan is healthy no matter what it is. And that's not true. That's just simply not true. And so, you still have to exercise a little bit of caution.

Geoff Allix (21m 30s):
Yeah, French fries deep fried in palm oil are vegan.

Jack McNulty (21m 35s):
Yeah, exactly.

Geoff Allix (21m 36s):
I think, but yeah, it's a bit of normalcy. If it's a vegan restaurant you can then sort of, you think, "Okay, that's one thing out of it. So then if I mean things which are not obviously fried, then you're most of the way there, so you can _"

Jack McNulty (21m 48s):
Yeah.

Geoff Allix (21m 48s):
So yeah, have a look around there's almost always choices. So, there's some connected questions that have come up from Kay in New Zealand. She said, "I used to love vegetable fritters of many different sorts. Some just with vegetables, some with flour, maybe herbs or spices. They were one of my favorite lunches. I've tried to make them by baking in the oven but don't really like the result which often seems to be a bit dry and a bit leathery compared to frying in oil. Plus, it doesn't often have that lovely crispiness. So, is there a solution or something I could do to

improve my fritters... And again, without even mentioning vegan things, because I saw the other day, we were in a place for lunch and they advertised...

Geoff Allix (22m 31s):

They had a vegan menu. And one of the things they had was deep fried vegetables which are vegan but yeah, not suitable."

Jack McNulty (22m 42s):

Yeah <crosstalk>

Geoff Allix (22m 44s):

That's the exact word I couldn't remember. It was <unintelligible>.

Jack McNulty (22m 49s):

Um-hmm.

Geoff Allix (22m 49s):

So yeah, any tips for Kay?

Jack McNulty (22m 52s):

Yeah, definitely. Kay, it's a great question. It seems like maybe you were spying on me yesterday because I just made vegetable fritters yesterday for myself. I too like having them. The problem of course, first of all, a vegetable fritter is sort of any vegetable that is bound in a batter or even breaded. And so, they're traditionally deep fried or pan fried in oil. Falafel, for instance, would be considered technically a fritter. Although we don't really think of it in those terms, but basically, that's what a fritter is going to be. I like to think of it as sort of a thick pancake batter with vegetables in it that's been deep fried.

Jack McNulty (23m 39s):

So yeah, obviously, the deep-fried portion is not necessarily going to be anything that we're going to want to eat, if you're following an OMS diet. It does give a very lovely crispy exterior and this little soft interior. So, what I found that's worked for me on making a vegetable fritter is I start by preparing the vegetables. So sometimes I'll even go ahead and precook the vegetables just in a pan with a little bit of water just to soften them, just to make sure that they've had a head start on the cooking process so that they're not crunchy in the middle, because I want that soft interior.

Jack McNulty (24m 24s):

Then I'm basically just going to make a batter. Much the same way that you would make like an American pancake or, a crepe powder or something just to make it thick. So, a flour of sorts. It doesn't have to be wheat flour. It can be gluten free as well. I happened to make a corn fritter the other day or yesterday with masa harina, and just polenta. Actually, it was lovely. So, you get that flour, probably a little bit of starch that always helps. The starch will help make the exterior a little bit crispy. And just enough liquid to hold it all together.

Jack McNulty (25m 7s):

So, I helped with the binding by incorporating as well a little bit of silken tofu. So silken tofu, a normal egg is going to weigh around 53 grams or something like that, that's a little less than two ounces. And so, I take the same amount in weight of silken tofu. Since about two tablespoons of soft silken tofu that all blend together with the liquid and then just create it to make a mix with the flour, put the vegetables in. Now the trick, is how to cook it? So, I again think in terms of an American pancake. I'll use a nonstick pan. I make sure it's heating for a good 10-15 minutes on the stove at a medium low temperature.

Jack McNulty (25m 54s):

So, for instance, medium low for me would be number 4 out of 10. And I'm just letting my pan get nice and hot. Without anything in it, it's not smoking away, it's just hot. So now I have some choices. Sometimes I use a little bit

of parchment paper. And I'll just put ice cream scoops of what I use as batter on the paper and lift the paper right into the pan. Or sometimes I just go directly into the pan, as I would by making a pancake. And I leave the temperature at medium low, sometimes maybe lifting it up to medium. And just basically watching the sides of the fritter when they start to turn a little bit of a golden color, you should be able to easily see that.

Jack McNulty (26m 42s):

You just gently flip them and then cook the other side. So, it takes maybe two to three minutes on the first side, and maybe about one to two minutes on the second side. I remove them, keep them on a pan with some baking paper on it and I continue the process until all the fritters are made. So that's part one of the cooking. What I will do, at that point you can actually by the way just freeze them for later use, or you can carry on. So, I set the oven temperature now to hot. So, by hot around 200 degrees centigrade or about 390 Fahrenheit.

Jack McNulty (27m 26s):

And I'm only using the top heat. So, in America, they call that broiling. In the UK, I think it's called grilling.

Geoff Allix (27m 33s):

Yes.

Jack McNulty (27m 33s):

So, I was just using the top heat in the oven, and I tried to set the rack as close to the heat as I possibly can. And I just slipped those cooked fritters just under the heat for about 3-4 minutes, take them out, flip them, pop them back in there. And they're very good. Develop a really nice crispy exterior and a really soft interior. And you're just delicious. So that's how I would recommend doing that.

Geoff Allix (28m 2s):

So, another question that's come in. This is a sort of multi-part question here from Emma in the UK. So, she starts off with, I was diagnosed with a relapsing-remitting MS a few months ago, and luckily found the OMS plan. What tips would you recommend to someone just starting out on their OMS journey?

Jack McNulty (28m 26s):

Be patient.

Geoff Allix (28m 28s):

Um-hmm.

Jack McNulty (28m 30s):

Well, I mean, that's actually a very common question to get. I'm assuming just starting the OMS journey on the food side. I think as a whole, you have to be patient with all of the steps and incorporate them as soon as possible. But if you're making major changes to the food, you have to really look at your whole situation and understand, what that impact is going to be in your life? I think that's one of the very first things that you want to do is understand, what are you willing to do to get your health back or to get you some degree of stability when you're using the diet?

Jack McNulty (29m 9s):

So, I look at my cultural situation. I look at my capability in terms of cooking. I look at, how much time do I have with my lifestyle, my working 100%? How do I shop? So, you have to take all of those things into consideration and then just say, "Okay, where can I begin with all of those things?" And generally, what I like to tell people is take the time to learn maybe two or three really healthy things and start there. And you know, every month, maybe every six weeks or so, learn something new and just keep expanding.

Jack McNulty (29m 52s):

And looking at this adventure that you're now on as a way of really expanding what you're capable of doing rather than looking at it and just saying, "Oh, geez, I can't do this. I can't do that." And it's getting back to that same thing I mentioned earlier. It's that mentality of, "Oh, I can't versus Oh, I can." And I like to encourage people to take the

“Oh, I can” kind of route and say, “Well, look, I have this possibility. Now, I’m really learning a lot of new things and incorporating that.” Once you get beyond that, I think it's really important to look at your kitchen, get rid of anything that's going to tempt you.

Jack McNulty (30m 37s):

You know, when you restock your kitchen, look at perhaps what kind of equipment you have in the kitchen, what might be necessary, and set yourself up for everything that you possibly can do to make your life a little bit easier in the transition. And part of that is eliminating all those temptations.

Geoff Allix (30m 58s):

Yeah, I mean, I think there's a lot of cooking with a whole food-based diet. Actually, it just takes you back to cooking properly. And I found that there's, yeah, a lot of good food. I don't feel missing out. I'm actually cooking delicious food now because I'm not cooking ready meals. I'm actually cooking properly. And having a folder of recipes is really handy. Just when you find a good one, add it to the folder. If you find improvements, change that one. And it just gets bigger and bigger. And then you've got your own recipe book that is suitable. You know, images -- I know they're no brainers, they will work, they will do absolutely fine.

Geoff Allix (31m 43s):

So, I can always just go into my own recipe book. And when I find one, I mean, I know you're probably not supposed to photocopy recipe books. I'm sure there's copyright issues against that. But if I own a recipe book, then I'll add that I just photocopy. So, I add it to my, go to. Because in whatever book you get, there's going to be ones that work, ones that don't work. Vegan cookbooks as we've mentioned, there's going to be plenty of things you can't eat in there. There's a sort of a few very high-profile vegan chefs who've got lots of good stuff, but equally have some things are not compliant. So, it's just finding the good ones. So, to go on to her second -- I'm going to go to her third question.

Geoff Allix (32m 24s):

If you had to do takeaway, what would you choose? So, I think we've probably covered so. And so personally, I think it's a last-minute takeaway. Pizza is my pretty much go-to. But what would your takeaway be?

Jack McNulty (32m 35s):

Yeah, it kind of depends on the scenario of where I find myself. And again, it's kind of a little bit similar to what we were talking about earlier. But I can't emphasize enough. Don't forget about the supermarket. There's just so many different things that you can quickly go in there, and grab, and just go find a nice bench in a park somewhere and have a picnic. Generally, those are going to be much more pleasing and satisfying meals than sitting down and stressing in a restaurant somewhere and trying to have a discussion with someone that's totally not interested in your health. And just kind of take control of the situation and try to find something that you can enjoy.

Geoff Allix (33m 19s):

I thought the worst, the one time I've had a massive problem it didn't work was a long delay at an airport.

Jack McNulty (33m 26s):

Yeah.

Geoff Allix (33m 27s):

Literally there was nothing at the airport that I was comfortable with. There was no fresh food at all. It was basically, there was some fried chicken outlets. And the stuff for sale in the shops was massively processed. And yeah, so that's the only time I think that I literally went hungry. I just thought there was nothing I'm going to eat here. It was a small provincial airport, and a long delay. And so that's the only time really, let's say.

Jack McNulty (33m 59s):

Yeah, fortunately those situations don't come up so often. Generally, no matter where you are, there's always going to be some kind of option that you can look to. The real question there is, you know, satisfying that temptation.

Because when you're really hungry, you know, all your senses are out there and you're craving things that probably not going to be necessarily good. Because when you get to the point of hunger, biology sort of takes over and you're going to crave fats, and you're going to create salt.

Jack McNulty (34m 40s):

Salty kind of snacks or something that's fatty. And obviously those are the things you want to stay away from. So, you have to get over that at some point and just say, "Okay, look, I don't want to go down that road. So maybe I'll eat a banana instead."

Geoff Allix (34m 58s):

And the other thing is to be more prepared. I mean, I think, my daughter is much better at this than me. Although she's not got MS but she does largely follow the diet. And she's always got these, like homemade flapjacks or sort of protein bites. And that she's actually, you know, whatever happens, then she's got a load of homemade flapjacks that she can, which will fill her up. So, there is that. And yeah, I probably shouldn't have been going to -- I think I was coming back from the Alps. And it was, and so, yeah, so I hadn't had the opportunity to make something, but it's just one of those things. Like it's the only time it's happened. So, there's always something, otherwise. I'm going to go -- so I skipped her last question, but a second one, because this is a very difficult one.

Geoff Allix (35m 40s):

What is your best halloumi replacement?

Jack McNulty (35m 46s):

Yeah, well, for those who don't know, halloumi is a cheese that's from Cyprus. And it's made from a combination of goats and sheep milk. Traditionally, although some of the newer versions have cow's milk in them. And it's really beloved in the Mediterranean because it grills very nicely. And yeah, that sort of soft interior and the shape holds on the exterior. Then, there are some vegan versions that are around, but I would not recommend going down that path. I've looked at some of those. They're all really quite unhealthy.

Jack McNulty (36m 26s):

So, I would say, there are no real replacements for halloumi. However, what you need to really ask yourself is, what is it that you're missing about the halloumi cheese? Is it the texture? Is it the flavor? Is that the sensation of eating something warm that sort of meltingly oozing? You know, and try to understand a little bit about what you're missing there, and then saying to yourself, or asking yourself, "What are the replacements for that?" So, with halloumi, first things that springs to my mind are: eggplant would be one, and tofu would be another.

Jack McNulty (37m 15s):

So, with eggplant, when you cook eggplant in a certain way, I mean even roasting it, you're going to have that sort of nice exterior but inside can be very meltingly oozing sort of like a cheesy experience. So, you can just dress it up with a little bit of oregano and a little bit of salt and have something similar. The same can be said with tofu, which people are afraid to use that for a number of different reasons. But there are different textures of tofu. So, anything from very, very soft to semi soft, to very firm.

Jack McNulty (38m 0s):

And what you can do is with any of them say with even a semi soft tofu, put it in a marinade for 30 minutes to an hour, something that's acidic and salty and that sort of thing. And then just simply grill it or pan fry it without any oil. And it's going to give you a crispy exterior and a nice soft interior as well. The thing about tofu is it sort of works like a sponge in many cases. It just sops up whatever flavors you add to it, and in the environment. So, if it's sitting in a marinade for a while, that's often a great way to do it.

Jack McNulty (38m 41s):

I often do exactly that with tofu, marinated first then take it out, grill it, and then I put it back into marinade and just let it sit overnight and it just takes on a beautiful flavor. There's something very similar in a lot of respects to chicken breasts if you can believe that. So, it's something you can replace if you ask yourself the right questions, and maybe

the right question in this case is, not necessarily how do I replace cheese, but how do I replace the characteristics of that cheese that I might be missing?

Geoff Allix (39m 18s):

I think, I mean, tofu for me, it's real. I'm discovering more and more about tofu because it's many different things.

Jack McNulty (39m 24s):

Yeah.

Geoff Allix (39m 24s):

You mentioned silken tofu, but actually having like a firm tofu that lately I've been just chopping it up into bite sized pieces, and just putting in the oven for 5 or 10 minutes. And it just gives it a texture sort of like that that bite texture of sort of a meat, and I'll do that. I was doing some sort of prawn-based fajitas, but there's an alternative to the prawns that you it just had that new sort of rather than just a vegetable fajitas I was doing it with tofu. But by putting it in the oven for a little bit, it just gave it that sort of not quite crisp, but a certain bite characteristic.

Geoff Allix (40m 8s):

And that you can make it, as you say, it basically doesn't taste of anything. So, anything, any spices or herbs you add to it, then it sucks up that flavor and it's got a very variable texture. So anything, any spices or herbs you add to it, then it sucks up that flavor. And it's got a very variable texture.

Jack McNulty (40m 20s):

That's right. I mean, it's one of the great things about following this diet, and if you really embrace it in the right way. You know, perhaps years ago, I would have been one of those people that said, "Oh, tofu, wave", that's for the hippie generation or whatever. It's not for me that kind of attitude. But now I look at it completely differently. And it's the same as what you were saying that the world is completely opened up to wonderful new flavors and textures, and different things. And when you get into tofu, you can understand that there are many, many ways to use it. And there's just a fabulous ingredient if you can tolerate the soya.

Jack McNulty (41m 6s):

Certainly, most people can and the Japanese have been using it for centuries.

Geoff Allix (41m 12s):

Yeah. And this is a personal question, what's the difference between Tempe and tofu, that's something you see in menus, in recipes?

Jack McNulty (41m 23s):

Yeah. So tofu, the process of making tofu, like a firm tofu, is basically you're making a rich soya milk first. And then that soya milk is set with an agent, either calcium or something like nigori, something like this. And basically, it's going to start to set the soy, or the soy and milk, in much the same way that cheese and the proteins will coagulate, and the whey will separate out until it's just strained and then it's pressed or eaten softer, or that sort of thing. So that's how tofu is made, it's made from soy and milk. Tempe is made in, comes from Indonesia.

Jack McNulty (42m 5s):

And it's basically made with whole soya beans. And those are pressed together in a cake like process so that it's a basically a cake of cooked soya beans, and then a mold is introduced or inoculated into that. And it creates a sort of white strand that you would see in Tempe. So, it's basically going to ferment the tofu, or not the tofu, the soya beans in this environment, so they have a much different flavor. But that's the general difference between the two.

Geoff Allix (42m 48s):

Okay, so, because you said you could use tofu as alternative. And add tempeh to that.

Jack McNulty (42m 54s):

Yeah.

Geoff Allix (42m 55s):

Try the two, yeah. And so, it's more of a different flavor there.

Jack McNulty (42m 59s):

Yeah definitely. It's a different texture, different flavor. Tempeh happens to work fabulously if you just take up a few slices off a block of Tempe and put it in a food processor and grind it up. It gets you really close to something like a ground meat sort of existence. And then you can incorporate that with other things to create veggie burgers or meatballs, that you know, if you work with lentils or something like this, and mix the two together, it's going to give you a fabulous sort of experience along those lines.

Geoff Allix (43m 38s):

Okay, and for a final question. From Nicola in Canterbury in the UK. Do you have any good ideas for béchamel type sauce? She has been trying to make a good lasagna but hasn't found any yet that tastes that great. It's one of the few meals I miss and have not been able to convert successfully. So, I'd be interested this <inaudible> because I know what I do for lasagna which is -- Lasagna is like a pretty common recipe we have in our house. So, there's something that goes down well with the kids.

Jack McNulty (44m 13s):

Yeah.

Geoff Allix (44m 14s):

And the base is fine. I mean that you know, a vegetarian, tomato, and vegetable base. That's fine.

Jack McNulty (44m 22s):

Yeah.

Geoff Allix (44m 22s):

The lasagna sheets are fine. But yeah, now it needs to have that sauce.

Jack McNulty (44m 28s):

That creaminess from the béchamel.

Geoff Allix (44m 31s):

Yes.

Jack McNulty (44m 31s):

But for those who don't know, let's just start there. So, a béchamel sauce is actually one of the classical French mother sauces that a <unintelligible> wrote about years ago. So, a béchamel sauce, the base sauce is the original one, is equal portions of fat, typically butter and flour melted together in a pan. And then milk slowly introduced into that mixture and allow it to just slowly simmer until it becomes this sort of thick creamy sauce.

Jack McNulty (45m 14s):

And then from that you can make any of a number of other different types of sauces. So, it's become a very important preparation in many, many different types of food in France, as well as in Italy, they use it a lot there. So, the way to do it in an OMS friendly or even a vegan method, the way I do it, is I will heat up my pan, nice and slow again. Medium low temperature. You're not going to want to use high temperatures for this. So again, around 4 out of 10, if you can picture that on the stovetop. Then I use either extra virgin olive oil or unprocessed rapeseed oil, which I'll measure out, which is important to measure how much it weighs.

Jack McNulty (46m 6s):

So, I usually typically will say that's 50 grams, so that's going to be two and a half tablespoons or something like that of oil going into the pan. Then I'll measure out an equal amount of flour. So again, 50 grams, so it's about two, two and a half tablespoons of flour. And I mix that in with the oil as the oil just starts to get warm. And then I'm just turning it with a spatula or a whisk, it will amalgamate really quickly into the sort of a very thick kind of paste like substance.

Jack McNulty (46m 47s):

At that point, you're just going to start wanting to add your liquid. And so, I use a combination of soya milk and water. For the amounts that I talked about the 50 grams of each of the fat and the flour, you're going to need at least one liter, about one quart of liquid. And so, I will go half and half, water and soya milk. And I just start to make sure that liquid is warm. And I just slowly add it to the mixture of the flour and fat while I'm turning it in whisking it. I'll add the liquid over the course of maybe 2-3 minutes and then it will just sort of start to thicken up.

Jack McNulty (47m 33s):

At that point, you're going to want to season it. So, I get my salt and pepper into it. Be careful with the salt, you don't want to over salt. I usually add some freshly ground nutmeg to it. And I'll chop up an onion and put a fresh bay leaf into the mixture. And I just let that slowly simmer and thicken. And it will take about 20 minutes. People want to make a béchamel too fast. If you make it too fast over higher heat, the starches will just expand too fast and sort of explode on you. And that's how the sauce won't ever thicken. At that point, it just kind of splits and look sort of ugly.

Jack McNulty (48m 16s):

But if you take your time and just take about 20 minutes or so it turns into this really creamy, nice sauce and you're cooking out all of the starch flavor at the same time. You can add a little bit more liquid as necessary if it becomes too thick, which it will over time. And then just when you're happy with the consistency, just strain it into a clean container. Cool it, usually with a piece of plastic wrap right on the surface. And you can refrigerate that for two to three days. So, you can actually make that ahead of time before doing the lasagna. So, if we wanted to do the lasagna.

Jack McNulty (48m 56s):

The way I would do it is I just get my baking dish out. Put a little fresh tomato sauce down on the surface of the baking dish. I get my uncooked pasta sheets on there. Put a little bit more tomato sauce onto the pasta sheets. So, I give it a good layer of béchamel. Whatever filling I'm using, typically I would do something with mushrooms and <inaudible>, or eggplant, however you want to call that. Make sure that's cooked first. And then I just create two or three more layers of that. Always finishing with a layer of béchamel on the top. And my final tip with the béchamel, the final bit on the top is I always add a little soy yogurt to the béchamel to loosen it up a little bit so it spreads evenly and it gives it a little bit of an acidic bite which is fantastic in the lasagna.

Jack McNulty (49m 52s):

So, in the OMS cookbook, there is a recipe for the fish lasagna for those that eat fish, on page 145. I know that recipe quite well, because my wife submitted it. I've eaten it plenty of times. And also, I know that there's an eggplant mushroom lasagna, one of the first recipes I submitted to the OMS website from years ago, and I know that's still on the website. So, you can just search for recipes there and look that recipe up.

Geoff Allix (50m 24s):

So, my béchamel and I'm curious what you think about because it's quite different how I create my béchamel.

Jack McNulty (50m 30s):

Oh.

Geoff Allix (50m 30s):

Yeah. So, I start with corn flour, and some oat milk is the milk I tend to use most. But I mean, any alternative milk would probably do. So, corn flour and just making a paste with oat milk, and then adding more and more oat milk and whisking all the way through but without any heat. So, I'm just starting with a paste and then end up with just a

liquid. And then I heat that until it gets the right consistency, once it starts to boil in the pan then it kind of becomes thick.

Jack McNulty (51m 1s):
Um-hmm.

Geoff Allix (51m 2s):
So that's kind of my base. So actually, I do it with zero oil and it just gets that thick. And then salt and pepper and bay leaf just mentioned. Nutmeg. Yeah, absolutely nutmeg. Quite a bit of nutmeg. But the other thing that I had is yeast flakes.

Jack McNulty (51m 15s):
Um-hmm. A bit cheesy when you do that.

Geoff Allix (51m 18s):
And it gives it yeah, that cheesy flavor. So, it thickens up a bit more. But quite a lot of yeast flakes added to it, I would say. And yeast flakes, are they fine to use to have that cheesy sort of flavor?

Jack McNulty (51m 33s):
Oh, sure. Absolutely. I do incorporate that into my béchamel at times when I want the sauce to have some sort of cheesiness to it. So, I would use that béchamel and put some yeast flakes in it if I want to make some kind of gratin for it.

Geoff Allix (51m 50s):
Um-hmm.

Jack McNulty (51m 51s):
And so, the vegetable gratin, I give a little bit of this béchamel right over the top, put it in the oven, and it works fantastic. I mean, it will, gratinate perfectly. But in terms of your method, it's an interesting method. I got to say I'm
—

Geoff Allix (52m 9s):
It's not bad.

Jack McNulty (52m 11s):
But I'm probably going to go try that this afternoon now. I've not done that before using a completely no fat method. I'm a little bit more of a traditionalist with my training as a chef. So, I've kind of stuck to the traditional method with béchamel. But it is interesting, it's intriguing. I'm wondering about the overall flavor and the creaminess of it. The risk when you're using just a starch rather than a flour, which has obviously starches in it. But if you're just using 100% starch, the risk would be with too much heat or when there's an acid involved, of that particular sauce splitting, or not holding its binding capabilities over time.

Jack McNulty (52m 57s):
So, I would have to look at that and see how that works. On the surface, it sounds pretty interesting.

Geoff Allix (53m 2s):
Yeah, no, it works. But it was done... without any skill, it was just experimentation to see what would work.

Jack McNulty (53m 10s):
Well, there you go. We've got the new Geoff béchamel recipe to send out.

Geoff Allix (53m 16s):

And then the other thing, you know, the only other difference we do is breadcrumbs on the top, to have the crispy top. So, adding breadcrumbs on the top before it goes in the oven, gives it a sort of crispiness.

Jack McNulty (53m 27s):

Yeah, yeah, it's fine. That's a good idea. I often do that actually with spaghetti, which is a classic way to do it in Italy, as well. In Southern Italy, they do that a lot. And with the tomato sauce or whatever, to put a little bit of toasted breadcrumbs on the spaghetti right at the end. It adds a fabulous little crunch to any sort of pasta dish.

Geoff Allix (53m 51s):

So, I think from this episode, I think one of the things we've gained really is that is you're not missing out with these diets. It's really, you can try things out, and you can learn a new way of cooking, and actually experience new flavors and delicious food. I mean, and I think that's it if you're cooking, if you're going back to actually cooking food rather than sticking something in a microwave, you'll actually find the food is better. Yes, there's a little bit more effort involved. But actually, it's healthier and it tastes really good.

Jack McNulty (54m 24s):

And it makes you an active participant in your own program, in your own life. I mean, you're taking a little bit more control over what you're doing with, what you're what the food that you're putting in your body. And I think anytime you take on that kind of personal responsibility, it's only going to end well.

Geoff Allix (54m 48s):

And finally, I just like to say, if there's any other questions, we have got a little bit of a bank of a few questions still. But if people do have questions, then please do email podcast@overcomingms.org with questions for Ask Jack because it'd be great to have some more questions.

Jack McNulty (55m 12s):

I believe our next one actually is scheduled for November. And we're going to talk about holiday food. So, it's never too early now that we're in September start thinking about Christmas already.

Geoff Allix (55m 21s):

It's literally when we're recording, it's the second of September already. So, you've decided summer's over. That's right.

Jack McNulty (55m 29s):

Move on to Christmas, let's go.

Geoff Allix (55m 30s):

Yeah. Okay. So yeah, but it's a good one. Because your tradition, whether it be Thanksgiving.

Jack McNulty (55m 35s):

Yeah.

Geoff Allix (55m 35s):

Whether it be Christmas, whether it be Hanukkah. You know, the meals that are served, are very non-OMS compliant. So yeah, it's really great to, you know, if people want tips for what to do to celebrate their holiday meal, whether it be Christmas, whether it be another celebration.

Jack McNulty (55m 53s):

Families involved and big gatherings and things.

Geoff Allix (55m 58s):

Absolutely. So, any questions about that would be, yeah, very well received. So thank you.

Jack McNulty (56m 2s):
Especially the pies. You know, let's talk pies for holidays.

Geoff Allix (56m 7s):
I was thinking that when you said Australia, my memory around Australia was a savory pie.

Jack McNulty (56m 13s):
Yeah.

Geoff Allix (56m 13s):
That's pretty much a go to for Australians, which again, very much non-compliant. So, with that, thank you very much for joining us again, Jack McNulty.

Jack McNulty (56m 22s):
Thanks, Geoff.

Geoff Allix (Outro) (56m 25s):
Thanks for listening to this episode of Ask Jack, the special five-part series where we dive into questions from our OMS Community about all things food. Please check out this episode show notes at www.overcomingms.org/podcast. You'll find all sorts of useful links and bonus information there. If you'd like to submit a question for a future episode of Ask Jack, please email us at podcast@overcomingms.org. You can also subscribe to the show on your favorite podcast platform, so you never miss an episode. Ask Jack is kindly supported by grant from the Happy Charitable Trust. If you'd like to support the Overcoming MS Charity, and help keep our podcast advertising free, you can donate online at www.overcomingms.org/donate.

Geoff Allix (Outro) (57m 11s):
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