

S4E51b Transcript

Ask Jack #7

Geoff Allix (00:00:02):

Hi, I'm Geoff Allix, host of Living Well with MS family of podcasts from Overcoming MS.

Jack McNulty (00:00:07):

Hey everyone, Jack McNulty here. Welcome to another exciting new season of Ask Jack, a special Living Well with MS Podcast series. I'm excited and honored to answer food and cooking related questions from you, the Overcoming MS Community.

Geoff Allix (00:00:22):

To submit a question for future episodes of Ask Jack, please email us at podcast@overcomingms.org, that's podcast@overcomingms.org. Please check out this episode's show notes at www.overcomingms.org/podcast and dig into additional information and links on what we'll cover.

Geoff Allix (00:00:41):

And now let's rev up our culinary curiosity and Ask Jack. And have we got a meaty topic for you today? The episode's topic is Meat Replacements. Jack has carefully crafted some questions around this topic and we've solicited some directly from the OMS community. With summer around the corner, at least for those in the Northern Hemisphere, we expect people will be cleaning off their grills and readying them for action. But since research shows that meat is a no-fly zone for people with MS, how do you capture that texture and flavor without the negative health consequences? So thanks to Jack McNulty, we're about to get some answers. Happy to chat with you again, Jack. And how are you?

Jack McNulty (00:01:21):

I'm doing great, Geoff. Thanks. It's certainly good to be back. I'm really looking forward to our conversation today and to answer as many questions as we possibly can get to about meat replacements.

Geoff Allix (00:01:32):

And I think this does come up a lot, doesn't it? I think on other topics we've touched on it because these are questions that do arise very often.

Jack McNulty (00:01:42):

Yeah. I was just reading some studies earlier today as the billions of dollars that are just being poured into the industry worldwide in terms of creating these vegan meat replacements. It's really astounding how much money is going into it.

Geoff Allix (00:02:01):

And even if it's not a meat replacement as such, synthetic meat is coming up now?

Jack McNulty (00:02:07):

Yeah, exactly.

Geoff Allix (00:02:08):

It's more than just our health on the line here. We're also talking about climate; we're talking about deforestation.

Jack McNulty (00:02:20):

Yeah. Animal rights, those sorts of things.

Geoff Allix (00:02:22):

So yes, absolutely. And so yeah, if people are going to eat meat, then if that can at least not affect the planet, then that's another benefit. We're not talking about that. We're being selfish and talking about ourselves.

Jack McNulty (00:02:35):
That's right.

Geoff Allix (00:02:35):
The health benefits. But yes, I don't want to say it is an evil thing, there's certainly benefits to not chopping down huge amounts of Amazon rainforest.

Geoff Allix (00:02:46):
So we've got audience hungry for some advice on this episode's topic. So we'll dig right in.

Jack McNulty (00:02:52):
Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Geoff Allix (00:02:53):
So Jack, some people can give up meat, but they really want the taste or the texture of meat. So are these meat replacements okay in general with people following the OMS program and if someone does choose to use meat replacements, what should they be looking for in the ingredients? Are there specific ones they should avoid? Are there good go-to meat replacements they could use?

Jack McNulty (00:03:21):
Yeah. I think meat replacements can have a positive role in an otherwise healthy OMS lifestyle and diet. Obviously and pretty much like most everything else, there's a certain degree of personal responsibility involved. And that begins with a thorough understanding of a few things, ingredients, serving size, that sort of thing when you're purchasing something off the shelf in a supermarket. And I think that there are some reasonable factors to consider, for instance if you're looking at the nutritional content in the labeling, I think one of the first places to look is the sodium content. Like any processed or convenient type food, sodium is a big problem. And as we know from the HOLISM studies that have been done, high salt intake is not necessarily a good thing for people with MS, it should be a lower sodium intake. And so I always look at the sodium amount if I'm considering buying something off the shelf.

Jack McNulty (00:04:34):
I like to aim for on a per serving basis, anything that's certainly less than 400 milligrams per serving. Now that's taking into consideration, otherwise healthy lifestyle, and diet, which I do follow. And generally I have a very low sodium intake anyway, and so that's my top amount there. Per serving would be about 400 milligrams.

Jack McNulty (00:05:04):
I take a look at the saturated fat, obviously that's a big consideration for anybody following the OMS program. And so for me again, if anything is less than say two grams per serving, I'm generally okay with that. And that's again with the caveat that, that's for someone that's following an otherwise healthy lifestyle and diet where your saturated fat intake is relatively low.

Jack McNulty (00:05:33):
Fiber is another thing to consider. Most of these products are pretty low in fiber. A lot of that's been stripped out. Some of them are better than others. I like to try to find something that's going to be greater than four grams. I think it's also important to understand that a lot of times, because this is a protein replacement in the diet, and a lot of times you're replacing fiber rich foods in your diet with something like a meat replacer. You're not eating your tempeh or legumes or lentils or something of this nature and replacing it with something else that's going to be much lower in fiber. And so I take that into consideration. So if I do that I either combine it with something that's fiber rich, or I choose a product that's going to have a higher amount of fiber in the first place. That's just something to consider.

Jack McNulty (00:06:27):

I also take a look at binders and emulsifiers. Now these are common ingredients in any meat replacer, or any sort of convenient product. The problem is there's not a lot of information that's been done, not a whole lot on the scientific side anyway that I can find that states whether these products that are being used are, "What's the long-term ramification for human health?" That question is still out there. So while that's dangling, I tend to say, maybe my intake should be a little bit less in those particular areas, so that's certainly a driving force in any decision I'm going to make. The lower the amounts of those binders and emulsifiers the better.

Jack McNulty (00:07:17):

I think it's also important to understand that meat replacements can work as a pretty good transition for some. So, some people that are new to the lifestyle, they're going to be coming basically to the program or possibly with a meat centric, dairy centric, convenience food centric, kind of diet. And to change that from that, to going into something full-blown plant-based that's going to be fiber rich, that's going to create some problems. That's going to create some digestive problems, that's going to create some bloating in the system and that sort of thing. And it's really recommended that the transition to help your microbiome should be three to six months, that sort of timeframe, and smaller portions as you ramp up as far as the information I've been able to find. And so, during this phase, sometimes these meat replacements really work as a nice transitional product to help get you on the right path towards plant-based.

Jack McNulty (00:08:37):

When you do have a lot of problems and you switch over to a plant-based diet and you have this bloating and discomfort, that is a put-off to a lot of people and they walk away from the diet and say, "I don't want to do this sort of thing because it makes me uncomfortable." Understandably so, but maybe it's just you need to allow for a little bit of time into transition into it.

Jack McNulty (00:09:02):

I think the bottom line really Geoff, it's not a meat replacement diet we're talking about, you have to look at this more in micro terms. It's more of a single use replacement. It works sometimes, especially if you're looking at products that have acceptable levels of sodium, saturated fat, fiber, use minimal amounts of binders and emulsifiers, that's probably going to be okay when viewed in context of an otherwise healthy diet.

Geoff Allix (00:09:37):

When we say meat replacements here, we're talking about things that use the trade names, like Beyond Meat.

Jack McNulty (00:09:45):

Exactly.

Geoff Allix (00:09:47):

We're not talking about soy, seitan, those sort of single-

Jack McNulty (00:09:52):

No, not necessarily although, some of those products used for convenience matter.

Geoff Allix (00:09:59):

Yes.

Jack McNulty (00:10:00):

You have to just imagine walking into a grocery store and every time I go into a grocery store, I look at the expanding array of offerings in the vegan section, which once used to be in the corner of the supermarket, now is pretty prominent and it's growing.

Geoff Allix (00:10:18):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jack McNulty (00:10:18):

And so if you look at those things and you see sausages, you see schnitzel, you see the Beyond Meat products, the cheeses, the vegan butters and on and on. It's basically all kinds of foods that are being replaced just more on the convenient side. That's what I'm talking about.

Geoff Allix (00:10:40):

And I would say actually from looking through those fairly extensively, the majority are not healthy on the OMS diet. They're-

Jack McNulty (00:10:50):

That's right. If you look at the sodium, saturated fat, and fiber, that's going to eliminate 75, 80% of the products available today anyway.

Geoff Allix (00:11:02):

Yeah.

Jack McNulty (00:11:02):

So that's a very good way to just sort of weed out all the things that aren't going to work for us. Just look at those three things, that's usually going to be enough.

Geoff Allix (00:11:15):

And it is possible to find some things. I mean, I have to say there was one recently I found it was actually in the frozen vegan section. They had veggie burgers, really if you think the original vegan burger from back in the 60s, 70s, mostly those contain huge amounts of ingredients, probably a lot of oils, but actually there was one that I found, which was really good, it was basically vegetables and because it was frozen, they weren't worried about things to prolong its life. And actually it was sort of held together because it was frozen. So you could grill it from frozen and the numbers were all good. And actually I thought, okay, there's a number of ingredients, they're all vegetables so if I'm going to eat a fast-food burger, that would be a convenient food that I think actually there's not too much wrong with that one.

Jack McNulty (00:12:22):

That's right. And as a chef, I'm just naturally curious about a lot of things anyway. I'm curious about making things myself, but I'm also curious about what's going on in this space, are some of these things really worth it? And as an example, just a couple of days ago, I was in there and I saw a new product that was basically a schnitzel that was made out of pea protein and that sort of thing. It fits within the guidelines of OMS, right? And the sodium content was relatively low. And all these factors I considered, and I thought, what the heck, I'm going to just try it and see how it is. And I came home and I prepared it and ate it. And I was just highly disappointed. I mean the breading fell off, the texture wasn't right, the flavor wasn't there. And so I thought, I can do this better myself using a kohlrabi schnitzel or a celeriac schnitzel or something like this, that's way better than something that's purchased off the shelf. So many times that's going to occur as well.

Geoff Allix (00:13:34):

And I think we [crosstalk 00:13:36], we mentioned taste and texture, and I think that's important as well, because if you were to eat a burger from McDonald's, Burger King, Wendy's, Five Guys, wherever, certainly the basic burger from a McDonald's or Burger King, I don't think it'll be very pleasant on its own well, not unpleasant. It just wouldn't taste of an awful lot. The flavor is coming from the other stuff that's in with the burger, their sauce, the vegetables, the salad, that's where the flavor comes from.

Jack McNulty (00:14:09):

[inaudible 00:14:09] also, yeah.

Geoff Allix (00:14:10):

Yeah. So actually we can still do the elements that make a burger nice. We can add a nice sauce, we can add tomato, we can add lettuce, we can add all these things and some pickles and whatever, all fine. And then it's the texture. So, it's not just taste, it's actually a lot of things like a burger may not have much taste, there's not an awful lot of taste of chicken. There's not an awful lot of taste of a basic burger. A lot of these things don't have a lot of taste and they're just vehicles really, but it's got that chew. And that's really what we're aiming for is the chew-

Jack McNulty (00:14:46):

That's right. We've become very used to the idea of meat in our food that has a certain mouth feel, has a certain texture, that has a sort of umami-type taste that comes from the cooking of the meat, which is the teenager proteins. So these are the things that if you just break it down and look at that, you can think of ways, "Can I replace that in a healthier way without having to turn to that meat or without having to turn to some factory produced product?"

Jack McNulty (00:15:30):

And that really becomes the key or the crux. And I think that it's far more important to develop this excellent eating and cooking habit or this understanding of ingredients, than it is to worry much about, how am I going to replace meat in this recipe that's calling for ground beef or something like that? There are tons of ways to do that. It's just that we have to get beyond that barrier. We have to move beyond that mindset of it needs to taste a certain way, the texture has to be exactly like this and et cetera. We can get it close in a plant-based world, it's never going to be a 100% the same, but my question is, does it really need to be? It's all part of an expanding viewpoint or way of looking at how we eat.

Geoff Allix (00:16:34):

Yeah. And one thing I wanted to bring up is to get that texture sometimes just not overcooking vegetables is one of them, because there's a meal that I've recently... Which I was mentioning to you earlier. Actually I think the Indonesian meal is nasi goreng, it's rice-based. So basically a rice-based meal, it's got a lot of flavor from chili and a nut butter, I think originally it would be peanut butter, but I use almond butter, which is actually quite easy to make yourself from almonds and nothing else but almonds. So it's relatively high saturated fat, because nuts are, but the small amount of that, and then not overcooking vegetables.

Geoff Allix (00:17:19):

So asparagus goes in there, tender stem broccoli, but they literally go in at the end of the cooking process. So there's a lot of chewiness, there's crunchiness from that. And there's flavor from the chilies and the almond butter and soy sauce and so on. But it has everything you need really; it doesn't lack suggest don't think this would be nicer with some chicken. [crosstalk 00:17:44]. It's a meal of itself that doesn't think, actually you've just given me a meal without the meat.

Jack McNulty (00:17:52):

Yeah. And if you can look at eating as a way to just please multiple senses, then you can be quite happy having something that has just many different flavors and tastes and something that's crunchy. So you get that feel of different texture and something that has a lot of aromas, and you are just playing with all of these different senses to create a wonderful experience. And it doesn't necessarily need to have meat to do that. And it certainly doesn't need to have a meat replacer to do that as well.

Geoff Allix (00:18:30):

And so you mentioned, so we've talking about meat replacements on the commercial side of it, but they are also closer to natural ingredients. So do you have any good ideas for creating meat-like OMS-friendly food with things like tofu and seitan?

Jack McNulty (00:18:51):

Yeah. I think the most important thing to consider when you're creating meat, like preparations using various ingredients, such as tofu, seitan, I'd throw tempeh into that mix or ground up mushrooms or these sorts of things. Jackfruit is another, a very good meat substitute. I think the keys here are to create umami and to create texture, and there's some tricks to doing this sort of stuff. So let me just give you some ideas.

Jack McNulty (00:19:25):

To create umami, the ingredients I like to use to create this sort of taste is things like yeast extract, which a lot of people would call Marmite. It's very similar to that. The yeast extract that I would get here in Switzerland is a German product, that's just basically a yeast extract. I know Marmite has some other things that go into it, but basically it works the same.

Jack McNulty (00:19:55):

I think soya sauce, tamari and liquid aminos are fantastic to use. And if you use those in combination with a vinegar, specifically a brown rice vinegar, or a Chinese black rice vinegar, which is fantastic, or even a balsamic vinegar, if you use the soya sauce tamari mixture and a vinegar in combination, it creates a lot of umami and it works wonderfully when you're working it into ingredients.

Jack McNulty (00:20:31):

Powdered mushrooms are another thing that I like to use quite a lot. And so you can buy powdered mushrooms, but I think it's just really simple to just go buy some dried mushrooms. I like shiitake or porcini, are the two that I would use the most. You just bring them home. I have a coffee grinder, so I pop them in the coffee grinder and I just grind them. And then I use that powdered mushroom as a seasoning. So I cut back on sodium and I'm increasing the umami by doing that. It's a wonderful way to bring additional flavor in. And of course, white and yellow miso also worked wonderfully to bring that sort of umami, that meatiness into a dish.

Jack McNulty (00:21:14):

And liquid smoke, which I think we've talked about on the podcast before. And again, liquid smoke will introduce a sort of a hickory or charred flavor to food. You do have to be a little bit careful, not all liquid smokes are healthy, but there are some that are quite good that basically just have water and the aroma that's been extracted. So it's perfectly healthy. There's nothing unhealthy about it. And you're just using a couple of drops to create a big punch of flavor.

Jack McNulty (00:21:52):

In terms of texture, so tofu and seitan come to mind as things that you can play around with, with texture. So tofu I find is excellent. And especially you can do a couple of things with tofu. So I'm talking about firm tofu, not something that's going to be really soft, but a really firm tofu.

Jack McNulty (00:22:19):

And so you unpack it, you drain it, you can pat it dry, cut it up in little chunks. And one thing that I found that works really great is, bring a little pot of water to a boil and then salt it and give it a good amount of salt. It should taste a little bit like the sea. And once it comes to a boil and you've salted the water, put your tofu in there and boil it for about three minutes and then just let that cool in the liquid for about 15 minutes off the heat, drain it, take those tofu pieces, put it out on a towel and just let it come to room temperature. Ideally, you'd want to do this a day in advance and put it in the refrigerator. And it turns into sort of a spongy consistency, that's very similar to paneer and it works great in curry dishes. So it's going to give you a really fantastic sort of experience in a curry dish.

Geoff Allix (00:23:19):

So I just wanted to go into a bit more about what these things actually are. So tofu is entirely made of soya beans, yeah?

Jack McNulty (00:23:30):

That's correct, yeah. So basically it comes from soya milk, so it's made from soya milk.

Geoff Allix (00:23:35):

I was going to get on to it. So is there a concern, because I know that some soya beans are very genetically engineered, genetically modified, and there are risks with soy, aren't there? So are you careful with, or do you worry

about having too much tofu because of too much soy that might have, there's all sorts of things aren't there, like potential hormones?

Jack McNulty (00:24:03):

Yeah, there's a lot of discussion about this. And without having to go into too much detail, maybe we just talk about soya as a whole on another podcast. But a lot of people do have concerns about it, but then on the other hand, there's a lot of well-respected doctors, nutritionist, et cetera, that are out there that really put that those concerns to [inaudible 00:24:24]. I think the most important thing with soya and soya products is to make sure that you're purchasing something that's not from genetically altered soya beans.

Geoff Allix (00:24:34):

Right.

Jack McNulty (00:24:35):

Which is increasingly difficult to do, but not impossible. And you can find that relatively simple.

Geoff Allix (00:24:42):

Like you said, I think there is a whole episode on soy because I've got load of questions. So tempeh, is that still soy, but has some beans-

Jack McNulty (00:24:55):

Tempeh can be made with a number of different whole beans, but typical typically made from soya. So it originates from Indonesia and basically, it's just the whole bean that's been cooked and then it's inoculated with a mold. It sounds great at this point. And then it's just allowed to age, that's why when you have it it's compressed and it has that sort of whiteness around it, that's actually just the mold and-

Geoff Allix (00:25:21):

And seitan then is-

Jack McNulty (00:25:24):

Yeah, so seitan is basically 100% gluten. So it's the gluten that's been removed from a wheat kernel and the starch has been washed away from it. And what you're left with is just pretty much a 100% protein and that can be utilized to create meat-like substances by combining the dry ingredient, the gluten itself, sometimes with another kind of flour, like a chickpea flour with an umami rich liquid, or sometimes even ground-up tofu. But basically, you're going to have a lot of soya in it, soya sauce or tamari, that sort of thing. Aminos work well and a lot of heavy flavoring. And then what's critical then is to think about it in terms of making a bread. So as you're kneading the seitan, the more you knead it, the firmer it becomes as an end product. So if you want to create something relatively soft, you just basically mix those ingredients together and don't knead it at all.

Geoff Allix (00:26:44):

So seitan is something you [crosstalk 00:26:46] you would typically make it yourself rather?

Jack McNulty (00:26:49):

No, not necessarily. You can buy a lot of seitan products. Personally, I find that it's really simple to work with. It's really not difficult to make it. And we can put some instructions up in the show notes on how to do that, but there's lots of variables. And so, once you get everything mixed together, then you have to pre-cook it. And so you can steam it, you can cook it in the oven, you can boil it. All of these things have an influence on how the end product or the texture is going to be. And of course, however much flavor you put into it and whatever liquid you're cooking it into, the more flavorful, the better. And that's going to have an influence on how it tastes in the end.

Jack McNulty (00:27:32):

But you can literally prepare a roast, prepare something that looks like a sliced turkey breast or something like this. You can prepare meatballs; you can make burgers with it. There's just so many different ways to think about it. And

it's an ancient technique and this goes back thousands of years to the ancient Chinese and Japanese that figured out how to do this.

Geoff Allix (00:27:59):

But would that have gluten in it presumably?

Jack McNulty (00:28:03):

It's quite a lot. [crosstalk 00:28:05].

Geoff Allix (00:28:11):

Good for protein?

Jack McNulty (00:28:11):

Excellent for protein. Not so good if you're watching your gluten intake.

Geoff Allix (00:28:16):

Right. So that's [inaudible 00:28:16], but not gluten. Tofu we're avoiding genetically modified, but good for protein?

Jack McNulty (00:28:25):

Yeah, excellent for protein. Exactly. And I was mentioning, you can boil it. There's another technique to change the texture and that's freezing it. So if you freeze a block of tofu and then defrost that, and let it come to room temperature, you'll find that the texture has completely changed. That has firmed up and in the internal bit, if you cut into it, it is very spongy. And so it's going to readily absorb flavor. But what's interesting is if you cook it, especially if you cook it in a liquid, it will hold its shape much better than if you didn't freeze it beforehand. And so that's just a technique to change a little bit the texture of using something like tofu.

Geoff Allix (00:29:10):

And is it worth getting a tofu press? Do you think to remove what, I see a lot of these things where they say, try and remove as much water. You can certainly buy it now in lots of different forms. [crosstalk 00:29:21].

Jack McNulty (00:29:21):

I don't know, I use double paper towel in the palms of my hand.

Geoff Allix (00:29:25):

Okay. That works.

Jack McNulty (00:29:29):

I don't get too... I know a lot of recipes say, "You got to get out as much water as possible." But I've found that if you get out the surface bits and especially then if you cut it and then press it again, once it's cut, you're going to get out enough and it's not going to have a huge impact. That's my experience as a cook discussing that.

Geoff Allix (00:29:52):

And just to mention you touched on jackfruit as well. That one it's just a single vegetable product, but that's low protein, isn't it?

Jack McNulty (00:30:05):

I believe so, I'd have to check the nutritional info.

Geoff Allix (00:30:07):

I'm pretty sure that one doesn't tick the protein box, but it does tick the other boxes.

Jack McNulty (00:30:12):

Yeah. And people have made a lot of different things with jackfruit, like taco filling, burrito filling that sort of stuff, mixing it with barbecue sauce and you can come up with some really interesting... I use it to make a Bolognese which is fantastic and it works great in that environment.

Jack McNulty (00:30:31):

Another thing you can do is just take an oyster mushroom, just a normal, raw oyster mushroom. If you can envision this, take a fork and just run the fork along the oyster mushroom, and it will break up into strands. And then if you cook that in some tomato-based sauce or barbecue sauce or something like that, once it's cooked and then working it into the sauce, you can really create something that's going to be like a pulled pork or something of that nature. It's really fascinating what you can do with mushrooms.

Geoff Allix (00:31:07):

In the vegan area of my local supermarket, they do a pulled mushroom. I didn't realize you could do it easily with a fork.

Jack McNulty (00:31:16):

Yeah, give that a try. It's really fascinating. It just pulls apart in strands. You don't even need to use a fork, sometimes I just peel it with my hand. It's pretty easy to do.

Geoff Allix (00:31:26):

So we've talked quite a bit about burgers. What would be your absolute go-to recipe for a veggie burger? What would you do if we are getting into hopefully, a summer season in the Northern Hemisphere, and you want something to stick on a barbecue or you want to create a burger, what would be your-

Jack McNulty (00:31:45):

Well, as I like to say, as a good American would always say, "There is no season for a burger, that's all year long." Well, let me give you two ideas. So the very simple idea, you can get like a portobello mushroom, which is in essence a giant chestnut kind of mushroom. You can cut off the stem, just work it in and marinate it in a little mixture of soya sauce and vinegar, like I said earlier, and then just wipe it off on a nice oil grate of a grill and just grill it and just use that as your burger. So there's no need to really form anything else. It itself has the shape of a burger. And then just put it between two slices of some nice whole wheat bun or something like that. I usually do that with a guacamole and a slice of tomato in there, and maybe some chili to spice things up a bit. And that's delicious. That's just a really simple way to do something that tastes quite meaty, surprisingly meaty.

Jack McNulty (00:32:56):

But if I were to make my own and I'll put this recipe up in the show notes, I use a combination of ingredients. So it seems at first like, oh my goodness, this is a lot of ingredients, but they're all doing something.

Jack McNulty (00:33:09):

And so I use cooked black beans, black rice, and chopped brown mushrooms, so that's the protein base. The chopped brown mushrooms are just like chestnut mushrooms, black rice, and the cooked black beans. I get all of that and puree it together. Then to give it a little bit of texture, I'm using ground walnuts and a half a beetroot that's just graded up. Then I start working in my umami flavors now.

Jack McNulty (00:33:36):

And so I use in addition to herbs and spices, I'm going to use a little bit of miso, usually I go white or a yellow miso, which is a little bit milder. I use soya sauce and balsamic vinegar, and to bind it all together I would just use chickpea flour, which works great as a binder. And then sometimes I do add a little bit of liquid smoke into the mixture. I just formulate it into burgers. And then what's really important is I refrigerate it and I refrigerate it for at least a couple of hours. So this is something you can actually do a day in advance, and then you can put it directly on the grill. It functions exactly like a burger would function. And the texture is surprisingly close to a burger.

Geoff Allix (00:34:22):

And chickpea flour, you mentioned that's that same as wheat flour, isn't it?

Jack McNulty (00:34:27):

Yes, exactly. I think that's about as far as I go with burgers. I mean, once I came up with that particular idea and recipe, I just thought, well there's no reason to develop further, I'm quite happy with that one. And the combination of the portobello mushroom with a guacamole or something, which is my wife's favorite, so that's usually the one that we go with.

Geoff Allix (00:34:55):

And you're saying, putting it in the fridge, I actually quite like freezing them as well, because first thing they hold together if they're frozen, but also just because then it becomes a fast food. It's as easy to make six as it is to make one.

Jack McNulty (00:35:10):

That's right. And you can use that same mixture because everything's already cooked, so you can use it. And instead of creating a burger, you can create little meatballs and throw it into your favorite pasta dish or something of that nature. So you're right, freezing is a great way to go.

Geoff Allix (00:35:30):

I think a lot of whole food cooking is more labor intensive, and so I think freezing is a good way rather than making every single meal from scratch, it is more labor intensive than buying ready prepared meals. But if we can make them and then freeze 50%, then suddenly we've got an easy-to-cook meal for next week that we don't have to cook everything from scratch and freezing for a couple of weeks, if not a month or more, it does retain a lot of the nutrition, doesn't it? You said actually things like tofu can actually be improved in some ways from freezing?

Jack McNulty (00:36:14):

Yeah, that's exactly right.

Geoff Allix (00:36:15):

And I think obviously things that sometimes are chili or something like that can actually taste better reheated. I don't know why.

Jack McNulty (00:36:21):

Oh yeah, definitely.

Geoff Allix (00:36:22):

I don't know what's happening there.

Jack McNulty (00:36:23):

I totally agree. Totally agree on that.

Geoff Allix (00:36:25):

So to move on to some of the specific questions from members of the global OMS community, there's two questions and I'm going to ask both of them because they're related. So Linda from Germany has taken to using soy crumbles, which have to be rehydrated, to sub for chicken or meat. And so she wants to know if they're okay or are they too processed?

Geoff Allix (00:36:49):

But also Vicky from the US, has another soy question. She's curious about your take on soy curls. She's not sure if you can access them everywhere. I've certainly not come across them, but her understanding that they're extruded and dehydrated soybeans. So she was asking, could you explain the difference between soy curls and TVP or texture vegetable protein. So both these things sound quite similar, so soy crumbles, soy curls, are they similar things and are they-

Jack McNulty (00:37:19):

Similar in the sense that they generally use soya and that's about where-

Geoff Allix (00:37:23):

Okay. They are quite different. Okay.

Jack McNulty (00:37:25):

So soya curls. Did you say you came across those already?

Geoff Allix (00:37:29):

No, I haven't come across soy curls, but-

Jack McNulty (00:37:31):

I think it's more of an American thing at this point. It's a company in America, that's developed it and it's basically using the whole soya bean. And so the soya bean is cooked, it's dried and then it gets cut up and extruded into these little pieces. And so it needs to be rehydrated to use it. You'd have to soak it in water usually about 10, 15 minutes or so. And then you can start adding all your flavors and then cook it as if you were cooking some meat or something in a frying pan or whatever. You can use it in various products, lasagna, tacos, that sort of stuff. So because it's soya, it's going to be very high in protein. It's going to taste very bland unless you put a lot of flavoring into it, and this is where the ingredients that we talked about earlier, the umami ingredients really come into play.

Jack McNulty (00:38:31):

Now TVP, textured vegetable protein, I think is what that stands for, is generally made from soya. So it's a byproduct of the vegetable oil industry. And so the oil, once it's extracted from whatever bean it is, let's talk about soya. So it's extracted from soya and basically then you're just left with really soya flour at that point. And soya, so that's the fat that's been denatured or taken out of the soya flour, most of the fat.

Jack McNulty (00:39:12):

So then that fat by the way, gets mostly removed using solvents and high temperatures. Just to be aware of that, that's how that gets extruded. But you're left with the soya flour, in that soya flour is very little impact from the solvents that were used. So there are lots of tests that have gone on about that. And there's no real risk there from the human health perspective. But basically, you're left with this processed bit of soya, which then gets formulated in heat into chunks. And then it gets extruded into pieces.

Jack McNulty (00:40:00):

So the pieces themselves are going to be very light and spongy inside once they go through their extruder, which heats them and then they're immediately exposed to colder air, which creates this puffing up, but usually around three times the size and that's what creates that sort of sponginess inside. So they function almost identical to a soya curl in that you have to rehydrate them and then cook them. And if you don't add any flavoring to them, you're going to be really disappointed in the flavor because there won't be much flavor. It'll be very bland and you'll wonder why did I do this? But if you do add a lot of umami to it, they certainly aren't bad in certain isolated situations.

Jack McNulty (00:40:52):

I would say overall, I have used them. I'm not hugely impressed with TVP, I think there's other things that you can use that are better. For instance, okara comes to mind. Okara is what's left over from soya milk pressing. So the soya beans that are pressed to create soya milk, what's left behind, that meaty substance left behind is called okara. It's very common, you can buy it in almost any Japanese store and you can just cook that the same way that you would cook these TVP products and you would have a lot more protein in that particular product than you would using something that's TVP.

Geoff Allix (00:41:41):

Would you say this goes the same for soya crumbles as well?

Jack McNulty (00:41:45):
Yeah. Soy crumbles are in essence TVP.

Geoff Allix (00:41:48):
Right. Okay.

Jack McNulty (00:41:49):
So basically, it's just different names for them depending on where you are in the world. So I forget what they're even called here in the German side, but it's very easy to find them in any sort of health food store. And I use that term health food rather liberally.

Geoff Allix (00:42:14):
So you wouldn't say it's whole food, certainly these things aren't on that, they're not making us healthier, but they're not necessarily-

Jack McNulty (00:42:26):
I try to stay away from that term whole food-

Geoff Allix (00:42:29):
Okay.

Jack McNulty (00:42:29):
Because really, the only thing that's whole food is an apple. There's nothing that's going to get done to it. And so I like to look at these products and say, okay, which one is going to be better? So soya curls have nothing added to them and nothing taken away from them. So in essence, that's going to be closer to the concept of whole food than TVP, which has gone through a process where the fat has been removed from the soya. And then it's processed into flour before it's extruded. So that's going to have something added to it in the sense of solvents and something taken out in the sense of fats. And so, there the alarm bells would go off and I'd want to look into that product a little bit more before saying whether I would use it or not.

Geoff Allix (00:43:24):
Okay.

Jack McNulty (00:43:24):
But people talk about whole food, non-processed whole foods all the time in terms of diets, but it's very rare. The minute you cut into an onion, you've already processed the onion to some degree. So it's very rare to come across anything that hasn't had some degree of processing, but it's also very difficult to find something that's really a 100% whole food, unless of course you're eating something raw in its natural state.

Geoff Allix (00:44:01):
But these things aren't necessarily bad for you, but just keep an eye on the ingredients, some of them may be over processed, but in general?

Jack McNulty (00:44:09):
Yeah. I would say the soya curls are better than the other products, but it's the thing that everybody's got to decide for themselves. But from my perspective, I would say minimal amounts is probably better than a mainstay of your diet, I wouldn't use them every day.

Geoff Allix (00:44:30):
Okay. And we've got another question from Lisa asking, "There are so many different types of vegan meat alternatives, and it's often easy to use these alternatives when cooking for a mixed crowd or for a family when you're

tired and need a quick meal. So could you recommend specific options for a quick and easy OMS-friendly meat alternative meal?"

Jack McNulty (00:44:52):

Are we talking about stuff that you buy that's convenient?

Geoff Allix (00:44:55):

I think it's the convenience. I think she's saying if she's tired, needs a quick meal, feeding the family, what would be a good meat alternative to put in?

Jack McNulty (00:45:08):

Yeah. And I really sympathize with someone that finds themselves in this position. That's not me, but I certainly understand that's not a simple situation to be in. You're working all day, you're tired. Maybe you have a little bit of an MS flare, you have kids to feed and you come home and you have to make something, what do you do? It is tempting to go to the supermarket and to buy something off the shelf and put it on the stove and heat it up or put it in the oven and heat it up and there you go, that is terribly convenient. And that's exactly what the food industry wants us to do.

Jack McNulty (00:45:49):

So I think rather than taking that approach, I think it's much better to invest a little bit more time earlier in the week and make a plan, to sort of plan out a little bit, what am I going to do about food this next week? Get some help in the kitchen. If you have kids, get them to start chopping vegetables, get them involved, to help put things together on the weekend or towards the end of the week that you can freeze or that will keep in the refrigerator for a little bit of time. And so those are the things that I would tend to go with.

Jack McNulty (00:46:21):

You can certainly make vegetable curries that are delicious and incorporate things like tofu or some of the other things that we had talked about today that go in and create this sort of meatiness in a curry. Something served with rice or something, that's going to please anybody, whether you're vegan or not, you're going to be happy with that kind of dish.

Jack McNulty (00:46:44):

I think making something like a big bowl of beans, like a chili or something like this, you can make it in large portions. And like you said earlier, it doesn't cost anything to make 12 portions and it doesn't cost more than making four portions or something. So you might as well make enough that you can either freeze a portion for later or just eat during the week, maybe change it up a little bit and just add some different vegetables in it.

Jack McNulty (00:47:16):

Lasagna is another thing, it's so easy to make a lasagna. And really all you need is a good tomato sauce, you need some good vegetables, prepare those ahead of time. You just go buy the pasta sheets, dried pasta sheets that don't have an egg in them are very easy to buy. You don't need to pre-cook the pasta, which is great. And you just build a large lasagna adding some of the things that we talked about earlier in terms of building those flavors, using vegetables that are going to be median in nature, like eggplant or mushrooms or something of this nature, putting something together and boy that lasagna well, I guarantee you it'll be hard to keep it around much more than a couple of days, because it's going to taste really good.

Jack McNulty (00:48:03):

You do need to know how to make a very good bechamel, that's key because a lasagna is very creamy, but that's very simple to learn. I think things like a shepherd's pie is very simple to do using mashed potatoes and a whole host of different vegetables. You can, if you want to incorporate some of these easier meat replacement things like soya curls or okara like we talked about earlier into those vegetables, but don't make it the main star, just have it in addition to a lot of the other vegetables that are there.

Jack McNulty (00:48:40):

You can make a Bolognese, very simple to make a big portion. You can make it very easily so you always have it on hand. Really doesn't take a lot of effort to come home and unscrew a jar of pre-made tomato or Bolognese sauce and make a round of pasta for everybody. That's always going to be a pleaser.

Geoff Allix (00:49:03):

And you mentioned first curry. So if we are looking quick and easy, one thing we mentioned frozen, but I like to have things frozen out, they are sort of for emergency. We just need to eat quickly, low effort meal, but actually curry's really quick that way, so literally we look at onion. So the base is really just starting off with onion. It's going to have curry spices, which are premixed in a tub, but I don't bother. Yes, you could go and say, "Okay, I'm going to grind my own spices and mix them up." Absolutely, you could do. I'm sure you do that. But I buy it pre-made and say, "This is a [inaudible 00:49:51] flavored one, it has the mix already." And it's going to have chickpeas, it's going to have spinach and it's going to have tomato, like soup tomato. I don't think much else goes in there really.

Jack McNulty (00:50:11):

And maybe you can do some roasted eggplant or something. I mean, you can always add different things.

Geoff Allix (00:50:17):

Yeah. You can add different things, but the stuff I've put in there, that's taken me five, 10 minutes maximum. It doesn't take as long as the rice takes to cook. To cook the sauce and the chickpeas, give it a bit of chew to it and some protein. And I mean, I'm talking tin chickpeas here. I mean, obviously, otherwise you have to soak them, but that's a quick meal.

Geoff Allix (00:50:39):

And another one that I like is pasta you mentioned, and [inaudible 00:50:43] type sauce where literally we put in onion, garlic, again tomato, chili. So some fresh chili goes in there and then some vegetables. So we tend to do it with some fresh broccoli and then just with spaghetti. And again, it really doesn't take much longer to cook than the spaghetti takes.

Jack McNulty (00:51:10):

That's right.

Geoff Allix (00:51:10):

And that's a quick and easy meal. So a third point, I personally find the effort from an OMS standpoint is the chopping. So because of cooking more with fresh ingredients, there's more chopping involved. And a lot of chopping, I start to find my hands get really tired.

Geoff Allix (00:51:30):

And so there's two things I like to do. One is to do that at lunchtime and put it in the fridge. So I've got my chopped stuff already to go. And the second thing is there's these things, I don't know what the proper term with it, we call it a [choppy-chop 00:51:45], but I know that's not his proper term. It's, it's a cylindrical sort of device with blades inside it, which has a pull cord, which causes the blades inside to spin very quickly. And it's very easy to use it to chop up things like onions. It's not something where you really want to get that precise, or I need these things to be an inch long, that's not going to do that. It's going to finely chop wherever you put in. It works very well with onions, works very well for mushrooms. So anything that takes a lot of chopping, you can reduce the effort with devices.

Jack McNulty (00:52:17):

That's right. I mean, in any soup or stew or even a pasta sauce or something, you're always going to be starting with something, I'll use the Italian term, like a soffrito, which is basically carrots, onion, celery, and needs to be chopped up. There's no rule that says you have to use a knife. I mean, you can chuck it all into a food processor and just pulse it a few times and chop it up a little bit, that's perfectly okay and that's going to work great. And it'll take literally seconds to make that as opposed to working on your knife skills.

Geoff Allix (00:53:02):
Although I would say from that-

Jack McNulty (00:53:03):
I've got nothing against that-

Geoff Allix (00:53:05):
No, my brother was a chef. And so I would say he bought us a set of proper chef's knives as a wedding present. And I would say a high-quality knife that's kept sharp is so much better and so much easier to use. Yes, you can cut yourself, but yeah.

Jack McNulty (00:53:24):
It's much safer. I have high-quality Japanese knives that are just razor sharp. The test that we always like to do is holding up a piece of paper in front of you and just actually slicing it without any effort.

Geoff Allix (00:53:37):
Yeah.

Jack McNulty (00:53:37):
And goes right through the paper, which is great because it requires no effort to cut anything.

Geoff Allix (00:53:43):
And another question you've mentioned Bolognese, so Nicola from Canterbury in the UK has a question about Bolognese. She wants your best advice for a good ragu. She uses red, green and brown lentils, but I suggest finely chopped mushrooms or crumble tofu. What are your thoughts on that?

Jack McNulty (00:54:02):
My thoughts are it sounds good, what time is dinner? It doesn't need to be much more than that. I think that sounds fantastic. So a real true Bolognese is basically going to be the classic Bolognese, is going to be carrots, onions, garlic, celery, all sweated a little bit, by sweating that means basically just in a pan over relatively low heat and just stewing in their own juices until they get soft. So the traditional one then will have chunks of meat, not ground beef or ground meat, it'll have chunks of meat. And then it's cooked in a meat broth. And it's basically at the end, sometimes it's finished with a little bit of butter or cream, but also that's an optional thing. What people find fascinating, a true Bolognese actually doesn't have tomato in it.

Geoff Allix (00:54:55):
I was going to say you didn't mention that.

Jack McNulty (00:54:56):
Yeah. A true one doesn't have tomato in it. If you go to Bologna and you're in Italy now I recognize most of the world doesn't know that. And most of the world thinks that a Bolognese or a ragu has tomato in it, which is fine you can do that. It's just a different kind of sauce, but that's fine. You can use the same sort of technique. So instead of meat, in this particular case, you do these vegetables, but then you can work in some of the things that we talked about, the jackfruit, lentils, mushrooms, okara, soya curls, if you want to, those sorts of things, what I would suggest is cooking that protein element separate and introducing a good amount of these umami type flavors we discussed earlier into those elements. Once they're cooked, then putting them into the sauce and just finishing it.

Jack McNulty (00:55:51):
I think that that gives you a better overall finish than if you tried to cook it all together and add soya sauce into the tomato-based sauce. It just doesn't come out the same. I think you can control the flavors much more if you cook that element separately and then work it into the sauce. And make a big portion because you can freeze it or can it later.

Geoff Allix (00:56:15):

So finally, I know you've been a vegan for a long while. So meat has not been anywhere near your radar, when one makes a health-based or ethical choice to meat, do you think it's a good idea to even find substitutes that taste similar or just leave it behind and explore the world of other delicious options that are nowhere near the same flavor profiles? So do you actually think, ultimately, we shouldn't be looking to replace the meat, we should actually just be looking for a whole range of different delicious foods and not even think about a meat alternative?

Jack McNulty (00:56:54):

Yeah, it's an excellent question to ponder, Geoff. There are many approaches I've heard that people take when first starting out on a plant-based diet or within the OMS community, personally I think it could be a mistake to rely too much on the meat replacement options at the outset. I think it's important to understand the role that meat played in your life previously, review maybe some of your favorite recipes from that timeframe and figure out ways to replicate the flavor profile without relying on meat replacers. So that's putting the onus right back onto everybody out there, all our listeners. It's really up to everybody to just say, "I don't really need these meat replacers in my life." There are plenty of other ingredients that are out there that I can explore. And as long as I learn a few things, how to season something, how to put some additional flavor in, how to change textures, then I can really move a great deal further and I can get beyond some of the meat replacers.

Jack McNulty (00:58:14):

I just think and I've seen this so much. I think people tend to take the path of least resistance. And for example, in the vegan baking world, I just get so frustrated when I just look at these recipes that are developed and almost everybody is using just the easiest solution to figure out how to replace butter in a pastry dough, right? And so they turn to coconut fat or they turn to vegan butter, which is essentially just margarine and they just go from there and there are just other ways to do it. And it just requires a little bit more effort to figure that out. And I think the same thing applies in replacing meats. I think it's extremely simple to heat something up that is basically a convenience food, that's not a problem. It may even taste amazing with exactly the same texture as meat. And unfortunately it just doesn't do anything to benefit your health. And for us, I think that should be a primary consideration.

Jack McNulty (00:59:22):

But having said that, I also think there's some room for people to just work slowly into transition. I think there's some room out there to utilize some of these ingredients, especially if they're lower in sodium, lower in saturated fat, don't have a lot of binders or emulsifiers. And I think you can use them wisely at specific times, not necessarily even for convenience, but to please other people.

Jack McNulty (00:59:56):

Maybe you're having a dinner party, not everybody there is going to be following the same diet as you, but you want to serve something that's going to be generally familiar to most people. And I think that's a good place to begin to think about that, to do it every day, I would recommend staying away from that. I think I mentioned this earlier, it's not a meat replacement diet we're on, it's using strategically some meat replacers that are generally healthy or to use these meat replacers strategically to create meals that are familiar and comforting to other people, but also to ourselves sometimes. And I think that, that's okay as long as it's done minimally and as long as it's done with using ingredients that are not necessarily going to be unhealthy.

Geoff Allix (01:00:56):

Okay with that, thank you very much for another illuminating episode, Jack. And I look forward to having you back in the hot seat for more questions on the next episode of Ask Jack, which will premiere on July 6th.

Jack McNulty (01:01:08):

Thanks, Geoff. Just a sort in closing, I just encourage people to maybe think about breaking the reliance on commercially prepared and heavily processed foods, as much as possible. In other words, just encourage people to learn how to cook for themselves a little bit more and certainly how to purchase more ingredients. The world is very large and broad when it comes to the options that are available. And I think it just requires just a little bit of effort there.

Jack McNulty (01:01:41):

It's also, this whole meat replacement business is a very [fluid 01:01:47] environment right now, there's just billions of dollars being poured into creating new foods in essence. And I think it's worth keeping an eye on for sure, but a wary eye. And I think it's important to not necessarily just jump right back into the same sort of habits that maybe got us into a health situation in the first place, meaning too much reliance on things that are convenient and unhealthy for us.

Geoff Allix (01:02:25):

Thanks for listening to this episode of Ask Jack. Please check out this episode's show notes at www.overcomingms.org/podcast, where you'll find all sorts of useful links and bonus information.

Geoff Allix (01:02:36):

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Geoff Allix (01:02:52):

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Geoff Allix (01:03:38):

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