

Interview with Jennifer: The effects of stress on healthy eating

Key: Interviewer in bold ; Interviewee (Jennifer) in plain font			
	1	Do you have any questions before we begin?	
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	3	Nope not at the moment.	
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	5	Great. I'd also like to just reiterate that anything that you mention today that	
	6	could be traced back to identify you will be replaced with some	
	7	unidentifiable context - so if you do say the names of any members of your	
	8	family or friends I will just replace those with different names when writing	
	9	up this interview. Is that ok?	
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	11	Yep that's fine.	
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	13	So first of all, can you please describe to me what eating healthily means to	
	14	you?	
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	16	Umm – the first thing that comes to my mind when I think of health eating is veg	
	17	[laughs]. And fruit. I mean... that's not all is it – it's about eating a balanced diet	
	18	and getting the correct amount of nutrients and stuff, isn't it? And minerals that	
	19	your body needs to function properly... I think that's what eating healthy mainly	

	20 means. To me, though, eating healthy means eating the things that I like to eat – 21 but, like, in moderation [laughs]. Not having takeaways every night. Home cooked 22 food I think is healthy, and you can be more aware of what is healthy and what 23 you're eating when you're making it yourself, can't you? And cooking a good 24 home cooked meal is always fun! 25 26 That's great, thank you. What would motivate you, or already does motivate 27 you, to eat healthily? 28 29 Umm.. I think you have to have a reason to want to eat healthy food all the time, 30 don't you? Like if I wanted to lose weight... I'd eat healthy. Or at least more 31 healthy than I do now. I think there has to be a reason – does anyone really just 32 eat healthy all the time for no reason other than they like healthy food? [laughs]. I 33 was diagnosed with high cholesterol a while back and I think that gave me a boot 34 up the bum to sort my eating out. I didn't really think about the stuff I was eating 35 until I HAD to think about it – if that makes sense... 36 37 Of course, and thank you for sharing that. Please remember to only share 38 information you are comfortable sharing. 39 40 Oh it's fine. 41 42 Ok, so what about factors that you feel may affect your ability to eat	
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43	healthily?	
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45	Oh god, where do I start? I think time is a big thing – not just for me, but for people	
46	to eat healthily in general. I like cooking, but it takes time and effort. Sometimes	
47	people just don't have that time, do they? Not just to cook, but the shopping for	
48	ingredients and stuff to put in a healthy meal. You work all day and then have to	
49	go to, say, Asda for shopping to make yourself some food – it's a pain really! I	
50	think healthy food can be quite expensive, too. Like, if I buy a bag of salad – I	
51	don't want to eat a whole bag of salad on a Tuesday evening [laughs] but then it	
52	tends to go to waste because I won't want it the day after either – the lettuce goes	
53	a bit limp and lifeless! If you've got the stuff readily available then fab! But if you're	
54	constantly buying stuff to make 'healthy' meals then the cost adds up, I think.	
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56	So, can you describe to me a specific time in your life that you have felt	
57	unable to maintain eating healthily?	
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59	When I was working full-time I definitely found it a bit more difficult. I'm only	
60	working part-time now and am here in the evenings so I can sort of plan what to	
61	eat and that – but when I was working full-time I would just grab what I could when	
62	I could, or when I fancied it. I worked in a restaurant for a while, too, so I'd be	
63	stuffing myself with chips in my break or at the end of a shift – not exactly a model	
64	healthy eater here [laughs] – no wonder my cholesterol crept up. Yeah, that sort of	
65	life circumstance of working full-time definitely took its toll on me in terms of, like,	

	66	eating well and eating a balanced diet, do you get what I mean?	
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	68	Of course, I can completely understand that feeling.	
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	70	I think as well that family situations can influence you to eat healthy. My son was a	
	71	bit of a nut when it came to healthy eating and that, and when he lived here he'd	
	72	be cooking his chicken and rice [laughs] and I'd think actually that smells nice, or it	
	73	looks nice and I'd be quite happy eating that. But I'd never sit there in the	
	74	afternoon and think – well, tonight I'm going to rustle up a hearty meal of chicken	
	75	and rice! That just wasn't me [laughs]. Or if you have to make a meal for the whole	
	76	family, you're more inclined to make a good healthy meal than chips or something,	
	77	aren't you? Cooking healthy meals for a group of people is a lot easier than just	
	78	for yourself. Like my son has moved out now, and my husband tends to work late	
	79	at night – so I don't really feel like spending the time and effort on making a full	
	80	healthy meal just for me! So it tends to be 'if-its' for tea for me most nights – if it's	
	81	there I'll have it! If it's not I won't [laughs]. I'm better at having healthy stuff in the	
	82	house most of the time now, though, than I used to be. It's just difficult to maintain	
	83	that all the time, I think.	
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	85	That's really informative, thank you. What role do you think, then, that stress	
	86	would have on your ability to eat healthily?	
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	88	I'd say stress has such a big impact on most things in life! Like I said, I found it	

89	difficult to maintain a healthy eating pattern when I was working full-time and most	
90	of that was probably down to stress, if I'm honest. People have got so much going	
91	on these days, haven't they? Kids and husbands and life things that they have to	
92	deal with – on top of work – the last thing I, in particular, wanna do is stress myself	
93	out about eating healthy foods or making sure I have my five-a-day as well! When	
94	I had that health scare a couple of years ago – cholesterol and what not – that	
95	scared me a bit into eating healthy foods. But it was more a wake-up call for me in	
96	terms of, like, I'm stressing myself out with the other rubbish in my life and I'm not	
97	making time for myself to be healthy. Do you get what I mean?	
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99	Of course, thank you so much for sharing that. Please only share things that	
100	you are comfortable with though.	
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102	No it's fine, it really did have an impact. That's why I decided to go part-time, you	
103	know? What's the point in stressing out over work – I can put my unused stress	
104	into my kids or something then! [laughs].	
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106	Can you explain how you feel in general when you can't eat healthily?	
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108	It makes you feel like crap really. Sluggish and that – if you're constantly guzzling	
109	sweets or eating chips then you just feel dumpy and down. And spotty! [laughs].	
110	But then you have, like, that added pressure of thinking oh great, now I look a	
111	mess as well as being a stressed out idiot so you have more stress about how to	

	112 change that then! I think it's a vicious circle, to be honest – you get caught up in 113 life and the stresses and woes of life, then let your eating habits slip, feel crap 114 about it, and get caught up in more stress! 115 116 So when you get stressed, what strategies, if any, do you attempt to put in 117 place to attempt to manage that stress? 118 119 I never really used to do anything, but I'm getting on a bit now and I realise that 120 stress just isn't good for me – never mind the bloody healthy eating! I like to walk 121 my dogs if I get stressed – just to get out in the fresh air and have some peace, 122 you know? Get away from the kids answering me back [laughs] – dogs don't do 123 that! There's something I find really relaxing about a good walk with the dogs, to 124 the park or to the beach or something. 125 126 Did you attempt any strategies when you had your health scare, 127 specifically? 128 129 Oh god, yeah, I mean the doctors were giving me all the lectures under the sun 130 about calming down and eating right [laughs]. Making the decision to stop working 131 full-time was a massive benefit to me personally. I just found it was too much, and 132 I'm much better off now than I was – I don't stress out as much if I haven't done 133 something or don't have the time to do stuff because I tend to just be able to do it! 134 I started, like, getting involved with support groups as well. Just online looking for	
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135	information, really, more than anything – I never went and actually sat in a support	
136	group setting thing but I found that being online really helped. All the causes of	
137	high cholesterol were things that, like, I never really considered. I used to smoke,	
138	and quite a fair amount of fags per day if I'm honest! But I was smoking when I	
139	was stressed, and then I found out that smoking can increase your risk then of	
140	high cholesterol. So I cut my hours in work, switched from fags to a vape pen and	
141	that. My stress levels started to go down and I found I didn't really need the vape	
142	pen anymore – so I just stopped that. I didn't feel like I needed it for any reason – I	
143	never really felt like that before, I always wanted a fag for some relief! I wasn't	
144	getting worked up about things I would have been annoyed about before, anyway.	
145	Then it was the diet thing – that came easier as well because I wasn't working	
146	such stupid hours and I found that the more I ate more healthy meals, the more I	
147	enjoyed it and the better I ended up feeling about everything! So that sort of, in a	
148	way I suppose, helped my stress levels too!	
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150	So would you say, then, that these strategies have allowed you to eat more	
151	healthily?	
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153	I think so, yeah. I can taste things better now I'm not smoking, too [laughs].	
154	Doesn't sound like much but it was a welcome change for me to taste good food	
155	and not just be eating for the sake of having a meal! If I went out with the dogs, as	
156	well, I'd find that I worked up an appetite and I didn't want crap food then. I wanted	
157	to spend some time cooking and making a nice healthy meal – whether that was a	

158	nice prawn cocktail or a salad or something. My eldest daughter, <i>Sarah</i> , comes	
159	with me sometimes as well. For a walk. And then she will stay and have tea with	
160	me and even that is a help because I'm not just cooking for me then – I have to	
161	cater to her standards as well! [laughs]. I don't necessarily think it's the things that	
162	I've put in place to reduce my stress and all that – I think what's helped me eat	
163	better overall is, like, the outcomes of those strategies. Does that make sense?	
164	Like being told I had high cholesterol didn't mean me eat more healthy – it was the	
165	searching for information and speaking to other people – real people – about their	
166	experiences that helped me more.	
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168	That's lovely, thank you. Now finally just one last question to wrap this all	
169	up - if I was to ask you to give one piece of advice to someone who wanted	
170	to try and eat more healthily, what would it be?	
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172	Well, the practical things – think about your own health! That's basically it, isn't it?	
173	I don't think people are generally awful at eating or maintaining a healthy diet, it's	
174	just other stuff gets in the way sometimes and either forces you to reconsider your	
175	eating or makes you think about the reasons why you do eat like that. It was	
176	certainly that way for me, anyway. I think it is hard to be healthy every single day –	
177	it takes time to shop, prep, cook, all that... but one takeaway in the week isn't	
178	going to be a massive deal! And try to manage everything else going on in your	
179	life so that you don't have to put so much effort into eating well. If you're stressing	
180	out about everything else then the thought of going home and cooking for	

	181	however long is only gonna add to that stress, really.	
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	183	Ok that's great - thank you so much for your time Jennifer... is there	
	184	anything else that you would like to ask me or tell me about before we end	
	185	the interview?	
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	187	No I don't think so...	
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	189	Ok, great. Thank you again.	