

Anti-obesity chief urges Scots to cut the fat with meat-free days

Mary O'Connor

A LEADING anti-obesity adviser has called on Scots to follow the advice of Sir Paul McCartney, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Joanna Lumley and have meat-free days at least once a week in the latest drive to trim the nation's waistline.

Tam Fry, spokesman for the National Obesity Forum, voiced his support for the growing trend of "flexitarianism" where people refrain from eating meat on a part-time basis, and he urged the Scottish government to encourage it as part of its upcoming obesity strategy.

Stressing the health benefits of the dietary move, he said: "Saturated fats are inherent in red meat and that can contribute greatly to obesity. We could well do without these fats in our

diets, which is why we should reduce our meat intake. Nations across the western world are not recognising the value of eating lots of fruit and vegetables; 60% of our diet should be fruit and vegetables but few Scots eat that amount."

He also pointed to the environmental benefits of reducing meat consumption as livestock-rearing is a significant cause of greenhouse gases, in part because of the methane produced by the animals.

In Scotland, almost two thirds (65%) of adults aged 16 and over were classed as overweight in 2015, including 29% who were obese. More than a quarter (28%) of children were at risk of becoming overweight, with 15% at risk of obesity. There has been an increase in the proportion who are overweight or obese among

both sexes aged 16-64 since 1995, from 52% to 62%.

More than a third of evening meals eaten by Britons are now meat-free, according to a study by market research company Kantar Worldpanel, while the number of people eating meat less than the average of 5.4 times per week has risen by 2.2m in the past two years.

A number of shops are encouraging people to reduce their meat intake by selling "lean and bean" mincemeat, containing roughly 60% beef and 40% haricot beans, and other products such as sausages with similar meat and vegetable combinations.

The Meat-Free Monday campaign was spearheaded by McCartney, who is a vegetarian, and quickly supported by other celebrities including Lumley, who stresses its environmental benefits.

Fry went on to condemn "the criminal delay" in the publication of the Scottish government's diet strategy, which is due to be released in the winter.

He added: "[Waiting for the strategy] is not going to make Scottish health any better. The government needs to produce a game-changing document on tackling the obesity crisis and cannot afford to provide a cheap-skate strategy on this."

Fry's comments follow criticism of the Westminster government's diet plan in a report by medical journal BMJ published last week. The report castigated the UK government's "watered down" strategy, released last August, which failed to outline stronger controls on junk food advertisers and better education on food and nutrition. It also warned that overweight

children "are likely to remain so as adults, when they will be at greater risk of non-communicable diseases such as type two diabetes, cardiovascular disease, some cancers and asthma".

The minister for public health, Aileen Campbell, said: "We are committed to tackling Scotland's obesity problems and will consult on our new diet and obesity strategy this year, building on our wide range of activity to make it easier for people to be more active, eat less, and eat better."

"We're investing £12m over five years on programmes to specifically tackle the nation's poor diet, including engaging with the food and drink industry on action to offer healthier choices, rebalance promotions, and reformulate products, with a focus on reducing calories, salt, fat and added sugar."



Lumley, Schwarzenegger and McCartney have campaigned for a cut in meat eating



Play it again: old films used to spark memories

Julia Horton

YOU must remember this: piano-playing Sam's rendition of As Time Goes By, as Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman gazed at each other intently in Casablanca, is one of the most iconic moments of cinematic history.

Now, thanks to an innovative cinema project focused on the golden era of Hollywood, the words of the song are also helping bring people across Scotland with dementia back to reality.

Dozens of pensioners in care homes and day centres nationwide have shown "incredible" responses to dementia-friendly screenings including clips of classics shown along with film stills, old advertisements and "star" cards of their teen idols.

The charity also expects to reach hundreds more people with dementia after a successful trial at Lochcarron earlier this month using the Screen Machine, a mobile cinema that operates in rural communities throughout Scotland, instead of relying on ad-hoc projectors set up in rooms at care centres.

Screen Machine is taking the dementia-friendly screening



Dementia sufferers have shown 'incredible' responses to films featuring stars such as Clark Gable, Doris Day, Bogart and Bergman

cards showing actors such as Clark Gable and Doris Day to spark recollections and conversation.

Michael White, project manager at Alzheimer Scotland, said: "Sitting down in groups with still images and posters as a stimulus really helps to bring [people with dementia] into the real world. It's no good asking them who their favourite star was because they will just look blank, but show them a card and that acts like a trigger [to unlock memories]."

The project's expansion follows increasing requests from care homes where the charity is now training staff to use the

package to Fort Augustus this week with plans to tour it further around the Highlands and Islands later this year.

"The humour and amount of detail people go into when they see the stills is incredible. They inspire fascinating discussions about [which star] they wanted to look like and how they covered their hair in chemicals and dried it in front of the fire with sparks flying. They can remember who they went to see a film with, old boyfriends and girlfriends."

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icon cards for more highly-focused reminiscence, rather than showing old films in full, which can be too long for many people with dementia to cope with.

Sally Ross, manager of the Howard Doris Centre in Lochcarron, said: "We run a monthly film club, so [using] film was not new, but going to the Screen Machine definitely was and so were the stills."

"Two of our clients who are quite advanced in [the stage of their] dementia were abso-

lutely riveted. It was amazing to watch. Even those who probably did not remember they had been [afterwards] felt better - you could tell that they had been out and busy and part of the community, which is what we try to do here."

Robert Livingston, director of Regional Screen Scotland, which runs the Screen Machine, said: "We're going beyond what is normally considered dementia-friendly, where you might have the lights up a bit, the sound down a bit and a break during the film. We're looking forward to doing more screenings."

The film project was launched in 2015 following the success of similar football-themed schemes. Its expansion coincides with rising concern about a dementia "timebomb" in Scotland as the proportion of elderly people rises. Around 90,000 people in Scotland are thought to have diseases such as Alzheimer's, the most common form of dementia.

Other films shown through the project include It's A Wonderful Life, The Wizard of Oz, Brief Encounter, and Ben Hur.

Alzheimer's research chief orders shake-up

Jonathan Leake
SCIENCE EDITOR

RESEARCH into Alzheimer's, the killer disease afflicting hundreds of thousands of Britons, faces a shake-up after the scientist appointed to lead Britain's research efforts said two decades of work had produced no effective therapies.

Bart De Strooper, director of the UK's new £250m Dementia Research Institute, said he wants new treatments undergoing trials within five years - but that will happen only if researchers changed the way they thought about the disease.

"In the past we researchers have had too simplistic an approach to dementia," said De Strooper. "But what is emerging is that these brain diseases are highly complex with many processes. We need to make our research more nuanced."

"In five years' time I would like to see half a dozen drugs in development and one or two being tested on patients."

De Strooper is a former head of the laboratory for the research of neurodegenerative diseases at Leuven University, Belgium. He was headhunted to run the new institute after publishing a research paper last year challenging the "amyloid hypothesis" that has dominated dementia research since the 1980s.

This is the idea that Alzheimer's and many other dementias are triggered by the accumulation of two

deformed proteins, amyloid and tau, which poison the brain cells or neurons.

The dominance of this theory means that researchers have spent 20 years seeking drugs to remove the rogue proteins. Recently, however, several trials of these therapies were declared a spectacular failure. This month a drug called verubecestat became the latest such flop when Merck, its maker, halted trials after finding no benefit. The drug joined Eli Lilly's solanezumab, whose failure was announced last November, and Roche's gantenerumab.

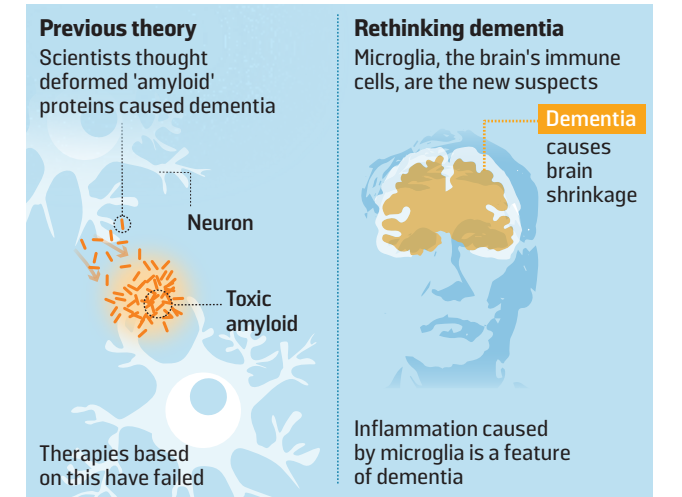
The need for a therapy is growing increasingly urgent. Dementia costs the economy £24bn a year.

"We know that these proteins are involved in dementias but they are only part of the picture," said De Strooper. "The evidence suggests that inflammation is another key factor in killing brain cells and we should be targeting that."

Other research suggests genetics are key. John Davis, chief scientist at Alzheimer's Research UK's Oxford drug discovery unit, said at least 20 genes were linked with an elevated dementia risk.

The Dementia Research Institute is being set up with £150m of government funding plus £50m each from the Alzheimer's Society and Alzheimer's Research UK. University College London will be its hub.

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Prefabs set to sprout up as solution to housing crisis

Michael Glackin

ONCE synonymous with poor-quality huts built to tackle Britain's post-war housing crisis, prefabs are poised to make a comeback in Scotland in a new improved form.

With first minister Nicola Sturgeon committed to building 50,000 new affordable homes, Legal & General (L&G), the financial services giant, which runs Europe's largest prefabricated modular homes factory in Yorkshire, is understood to have had entered talks with authorities in Scotland.

It comes after a similar plan involving China-based SinoFortone as part of a proposed £10bn infrastructure deal collapsed in what Chinese sources called "the Scottish shambles". Constructing prefabs, or off-the-peg homes, is said to be about 30% more cost-



Sturgeon has pledged that 50,000 affordable homes will be built

effective than on-site construction. The properties offer greater energy efficiency than traditionally built homes. Proponents also cite the reduced requirement for scarce skilled labour.

Politicians say Scotland is

in the grip of a housing crisis as a result of fewer houses being built, which is driving up prices. This makes it harder for renters and first-time buyers to find an affordable property and has led to tens of thousands of

people being on council waiting lists for a home.

L&G, which also has a 50% stake in Edinburgh house builder Cala Homes, has invested £55m in a state-of-the-art factory for prefabricated modular housing in Selby.

The company is in talks with a number of housing associations and local authorities to ease the current dearth of affordable homes.

The L&G factory is capable of turning out about 3,500 new homes a year, from 20-storey apartment blocks to rows of terraced, semi-detached and detached houses.

Once the foundations are laid on site, the houses can be installed by crane in a single working day. Once in place the exteriors of the homes can be finished in either brickwork or cladding.

The homes come complete with installed kitchens and bathrooms. Meanwhile, the

improved energy efficiency of modular homes could mean residents of a two-bedroom flat could pay as little as £25 a year on heating.

The collapsed SinoFortone deal was for 2,000 modular rental homes in Falkirk, 2,000 in Edinburgh, and 1,000 in Glasgow. It is understood any deal with L&G would be of a similar scale in the long term, but would initially be for a few hundred homes.

It would involve the Scottish government establishing an executive team to coordinate with L&G on a national basis and then liaise with the local authorities in whose areas the homes would be built.

An insider said: "It would be a national initiative under the aegis of the Scottish government. They would pull it all together."

Kevin Stewart, minister for local government and housing, said: "Several

registered social landlords and local authorities are already using modern construction methods to deliver new housing in Scotland. The Commonwealth Games village is a good example of housing built using these techniques."

He added that the Scottish government was "determined to increase and accelerate housing supply" while another government source said the administration is well disposed to modular housing.

L&G said it was "not currently in talks with the Scottish government" but declined to comment further. Prefab housing, widely used in the US and northern Europe, is becoming more common in the UK but has been largely restricted to the top end of the market, dominated by companies like the German group Huf Haus, whose homes cost from about £500,000.

City house prices up 3%

Buying a house in Scotland's cities has become less affordable, according to a new report.

The average house price in cities has risen by almost 3% from £181,061 in 2016 to £186,002 in 2017, compared with 1% across the whole of Scotland. As a result, average home affordability has worsened for the fourth year in a row, from 5.2 to 5.3 times gross average earnings.

The annual Bank of Scotland affordable cities review puts the affordability of homes in Scottish cities at its worst level since 2009. Stirling remains the most affordable city in Scotland.

At £173,848, the average property price there is 3.7 times average gross annual earnings compared with a UK cities average of 6.9.

Edinburgh is once again Scotland's least affordable city, with an average house price of £236,136 - six times annual gross average earnings.

Aberdeen, Perth, Dundee and Inverness make up the top five least affordable cities north of the border. Perth recorded the biggest price rise of any Scottish city over the past decade with a gain of 31% compared with the UK cities average of 21%.