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HEALTH NUT I'm such a pain in the a**e mum my kids can only have pizza once a week and I've even banned cereal, says Julia Bradbury

Sarah Morton
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SINCE being diagnosed with breast cancer two years ago, TV presenter Julia Bradbury has dramatically overhauled her lifestyle to keep the disease at bay.

The 53-year-old former **Countryfile** host used to munch on doughnuts at 11am, but now sticks to a strict regime of veggies for breakfast and a minimum 10,000 steps a day.

She says: "Before my illness, I used to love dunking biscuits in my tea, or having a cheeky mid-morning doughnut.

"I was naturally slim and my sugar-laden **diet** didn't seem to have any outward effect on me.

"But I now know it was changing me drastically on the inside.

"In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if I was **pre-diabetic** given the amount of sugar I consumed.

"I've now been eating healthily for two years, but I know that won't undo 20 years of non-stop sugar consumption.

"Stopping snacking was really hard, I had to really train my taste buds away from sweetness.

"Now, I have a **savoury breakfast** every morning — steamed vegetables, salmon, egg, avocado are my favourites."

Before her diagnosis in September 2021, Julia — who **lives with long-term partner Gerard Cunningham**, who works in property, and their son Zephyrus, 12, and eight-year-old twin girls Xanthe and Zena — frequently travelled across time zones due to her presenting job, getting minimal sleep and snacking whenever she could.

But now it's a very different story.

She explains: "I fast until 11am, then I'll have a big breakfast, mostly steamed vegetables along with some lean protein.

"Then shortly after I'll have a big bowl of seeds and berries with coconut milk and non-dairy yoghurt.

"I also allow myself one coffee with a splash of coconut milk a day.

"I've reduced my **dairy intake** drastically because I feel it's better for me personally.

"Everyone's different, but that works for me.

"I have to be very disciplined. When I'm filming, my rider is, 'Please can I start at ten and can I eat my steamed vegetables at 11?'"

Julia is so passionate about clean eating that she's banned cereal and plastic bottles from the house so the children have as few toxins in their diets as possible.

She says: "My kids raise their eyebrows at me when I go on about toxins in plastic and sugar in foods.

"We drink water from glass bottles, not plastic, because they're full of **hormone-mimicking chemicals**. And cereals are out.

"When it comes to pizza, we only have **sourdough**. And if they've had pizza once that week, they can't have it again.

"It shouldn't be a go-to, everyday food. You're eating wheat that's mass produced and the emulsifiers, they're bad.

"We've all become so addicted to pizza, bread, pasta, sugary sauces.

"I'm lucky that my kids love veggies like broccoli, sauerkraut and cauliflower, and will snack on cucumbers and carrots."

"If they get really hungry, shove that under their noses and they'll get full and get used to it."

Julia admits she's seen raised eyebrows as a result of her children's **super-healthy diets**.

She says: "People say, 'God, I feel sorry for your kids', but really? Don't.

"My kids understand why I feel this way. And, of course, they don't think sweets equal **cancer**. They know it's coming from a good place.

"And more importantly, they understand about food. They know what proteins and carbs are.

"Even though I am a pain-in-the-arse mummy, these things will stick with them.

"I hope they won't chow down on **McDonald's** when they go to uni, or slurp **Coca-Cola** all the time, but they might.

"At some stage they'll come back and they'll know."

Along with her diet, Julia has radically overhauled her sleep routine, leaving her busy social life a distant memory.

"It's a rarity for me to go out and see my friends in the evening, or stay up past 10pm," she says.

"I have a sleep hygiene routine. When I've not been sleeping properly for a couple of nights, my blood glucose goes up and it makes me feel really tired.

"When I know my body is tired, my responses aren't going to be as good and I won't digest my **food** properly.

"My golden rule is to eat while it's light, stop when it's dark. It's harder to digest food in the evening."

But Julia is realistic that she can't always run her life like clockwork.

"I did actually stay up until 1am the other night," she says.

"I didn't **drink**, but I was dancing and chatting with my friends and there's value to that, too.

"Fun, enjoyment, pleasure — it's important for your health once in a while.

"But in today's society, we are conditioned to think fun equals eating cake and drinking **alcohol** — and it doesn't have to."

Julia, whose passion has always been the great outdoors, has detailed her lifestyle changes in her new book, *Walk Yourself Happy*, in which she encourages readers to look to the healing power of nature.

She credits getting outside, taking in oxygen from the trees and walking at least 10,000 steps a day with helping her survive cancer.

She also had a single **mastectomy** in October 2021.

It's something the star feels strongly about because, like many cancer survivors, there is always the fear it could return.

"I've discovered from **DNA** testing that I have a higher chance of recurrence than other women in my position," she explains.

"If there was another Julia next to me and she didn't have the genetic make-up I have, she would have a ten per cent chance of recurrence, but I have a 13 per cent chance.

"I hope I've found a way of dealing with that.

"It's very important to understand the trauma you go through with something like a cancer diagnosis.

"I've shed tears and I've felt very frightened pre-mastectomy. But I think I've learnt to comfortably live with it.

"Sometimes, I let it back into my life and I'll have a teary meditation. And I practise gratitude, I'm doing well."

As for the current state of play, Julia is pragmatic.

She says: "I've done an ultrasound and **blood tests** quite recently and although my white blood count was a bit low, that could have been down to a variety of factors on the day, like tiredness.

"I'm in good health right now and I'm certainly doing all I can to stay that way."

She also understands that some people may find her lifestyle overhaul a little extreme and she is conscious not to preach.

She says: "I get a lot of pushback from people on **social media** when I talk about what I've changed.

"Some people say, 'You're blaming me for my illness. You're saying it's my fault'.

"I'm not saying that. You don't know what all the things in our environment are doing to you.

"But don't underestimate that there are things at play that will have an effect on your health.

"I can't change the past. I ate the sugar. I stayed up late, I drank the way I did.

"Maybe it would've happened to me anyway, but I don't blame myself or feel shame.

"I don't think there's one thing that contributes to **chronic illness**. I think it's a multitude of things.

"But one thing's for sure, it's never too late to make lifestyle changes that can have a positive impact on your health."

Walk Yourself Happy by Julia Bradbury, £20, is out now. She will be touring it from Monday. For dates, see theoutdoorguide.co.uk.

SCIENCE SECRETS BEHIND HER DIET

JULIA'S new diet is aimed at keeping cancer at bay, but what's the science behind it?

Dr Laura Freeman, GP and medical director of PB Health, explains . . .

DAIRY: There is evidence to show that consuming dairy is linked to hormone-dependent cancers, such as breast and **ovarian**.

This could be due to the growth hormones found in milk.

Studies have shown people who eat tofu and soya, rather than dairy, are 12 per cent less likely to develop breast cancer.

SUGAR: Sugar consumption is linked to the development of chronic conditions such as heart disease and type 2 diabetes.

In turn, chronic disease is a risk factor for **cancer**. But not all sugar is harmful.

Whole fruits contain natural sugars, but also fibre, vitamins and antioxidants, and are extremely good for you.

SOURDOUGH PIZZA: The emulsifiers Julia mentions are in many processed foods.

They disrupt the gut's microbiome, which plays a key role in fighting cancer.

If sourdough is made using wholegrain wheat – which along with other **wholegrains** can lower the risk of cancer – it could be beneficial.

PLASTIC: There's currently no strong evidence to prove that plastics can increase your risk of cancer, although some cancer **charities** encourage you to avoid it.

Plastic is currently on the Institute of Cancer Research's high-priority list to be reviewed, so everything could change over the next few years.

Related Images



Former Countryfile host Julia Bradbury explains how she's dramatically overhauled her life to keep breast cancer at bay

David Venni

Motherhood



Julia says her kids, including twin girls Xanthe and Zena, understand just how important it is to live healthily
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There is evidence to show that consuming dairy is linked to hormone-dependent cancers

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Sugar is linked to developing chronic conditions – but fruits, which contain natural sugars, are extremely good for you

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Breast cancer ...and me

TV presenter and author **JULIA BRADBURY**, 53, on life after a mastectomy and prioritising her health

The day after having a mastectomy sees a “new you” in every way - the way you think about life, and your health. For me, it meant a complete lifestyle change. I hadn’t had a straightforward cancer diagnosis. I first noticed a lump in my left breast in 2020. I was examined quickly and told I had benign microcysts - but nothing too sinister. The doctor suggested I have another screening in a year’s time, so in 2021, I had a second mammogram and again, nothing worrying showed up.

But now, the lump felt grittier and painful to touch. I’d also been told I had dense breast tissue, which makes it difficult to see a cancerous tumour on a mammogram, so I pushed to have an ultrasound - which picked up a tiny, dark pinprick. A week later, a biopsy confirmed it was a 6cm-long cancerous tumour.

At that point, I felt shock and fear, and my mind went into overdrive, thinking: “This can’t be happening to me.” I believe that’s a common reaction. My son Zephyr, 12, and twin girls Xanthe and Zena, eight, were on my mind, too. I remember thinking: “I want to be around to see my children grow up.”

Then began the onslaught of appointments, seeing all sorts of specialists. My sister, my partner [Gerard, a property developer], or friends came with me, and I always tell others in the same situation to go with somebody if you can, because there’s so much information coming your way.

I knew early on that I would have to have a mastectomy - because of the cancer’s location and size, I couldn’t have had a lumpectomy. I had to come to terms with losing my left breast in what is a big operation, physically and emotionally. Thankfully, the op was a success, and the tumour was removed cleanly. They also took out some of my lymph nodes to test to see if the cancer had spread and, fortunately, it hadn’t.

At the same time, I had reconstructive surgery. I was lucky to have had that option, because it’s dependent on factors such as whether or not you need chemotherapy - which I didn’t. I’m not thrilled to have a silicone bag inside my body, but I still feel very grateful. I call it my “mozzarella boob”, because there’s no fat around the implant, so it looks like a ball of mozzarella cheese when it’s been taken out of the packaging!



Once I got over that initial shock, my cancer wasn't actually a total surprise. While there is no history of breast cancer in my family, there are several things that could have been contributing factors. Because I'm naturally quite slim and very active, I used to feel like that gave me carte blanche to eat a lot of sugary cereal, chocolate bars and ice cream. What I have learned since is that, while sugar doesn't give you cancer, eating a massive amount can disrupt the body, so you're not at your optimum health. For my new book, I talked to food science experts such as Professor Tim Spector, who told me how sugar affects everything from your hormones to your immune system. Also, DNA tests have shown that my gut lining doesn't function well, so all that sugar could have a worse impact on me than on another person.

I've slowly weaned myself off it. I've changed my kids' diets, too: we've never been into processed foods, but now everything is cooked from scratch. I've also been told that alcohol will increase the chance of cancer recurring, so now I have a better time drinking my carbonated water with "ice and slice". Meditation and breathwork have become daily habits to calm my nervous system, and I spend as much time as possible in nature, plus I exercise regularly. I'm a work in progress, learning every day.

I don't want anybody to go through what I have. But, one in seven UK women will be diagnosed with breast cancer in their lifetime and one in two will get a cancer diagnosis. I'd urge people to learn as much as they can to take the best care of themselves. **F**
● [Walk Yourself Happy](#) by Julia Bradbury (£20, Piatkus) is out now.

'I want to be around to see my children grow up'