



“I dealt with all sorts of things, the accounts, stock taking, budgeting and staffing, so I felt like I knew the business side of things when I came here,” Margaret recalled. “It was then just about doing a lot of courses on the health side of things to get my knowledge there.”

Choosing the right product offering is one of the most important elements of the business for Margaret, and she says: “You have to really work out what you are putting on your shelf, especially with food as there is a lower margin so it has to sell. It is just experience I think. You always have to freshen up what you’re offering.

“Customers travel to us from all around so they expect to find the products when they come in, so we make sure our shelves are well stocked all the time and they are always full.”

When choosing new products, Margaret says price is important, what the ingredients are and whether it is something customers are demanding. But, she says, supermarkets selling similar products does not seem to have a big impact.

“Nut butters are in all the supermarkets but we sell loads of them,” Margaret said. “I do think people enjoy shopping in independents.”

Margaret is also very set on not discounting products, except for the reduced basket of slow selling lines she is delisting.

“I think discounting devalues the shop,” she said. “The only discount we offer is to practitioners and that works because they send people to me, and I send customers to them.”

This has been a good move by Margaret as there is a large practitioner network in the area, as well as personal trainers.

“We have a leaflet corner and they can leave their cards there for customers to pick up,” Margaret added.



AT A GLANCE

Stores: One

Location: Wickham Bishop's, Essex

Retailer: Margaret Clark

Staff: Three, plus Margaret

Training: Staff have taken part in a range of industry courses

In stock: Biona, Meridian, Raw Health, Nature's Path, CherryActive, Jason, Viridan

Wickham Bishop's Health Foods is a member of the National Association of Health Stores (NAHS) and is something that is important to Margaret.

“I think having that sticker in the window is important because it is showing you are adhering to certain standards.”

Customer trends

Whereas many health food stores these days sell far more in the way of supplements and bodycare, Wickham Bishop's remains a foodie store, and offers huge variety.

“We are very much a food store and we have a lot of choice, especially in free from foods and people come here because they know they can get it all,” Margaret said. “We sell huge amounts of porridge, our jumbo oats fly out, so do our nuts and seeds and dried fruit.”

The team is also very switched on when it comes to moving out brands that are not selling.

“There are very few slow selling areas as we pull them out if they are not selling to find space for something else,” she explained. “We are always trying new things. And we are always rotating our stock and ensuring the shelves are full. We have been steadily increasing our raw

foods as this is an area that's selling well.”

Food wise, there is a vast choice of brands, including Biona, Meridian, Dr Oz, and Nature's Path.

One decision Margaret took recently was to stop selling sports nutrition, and she believes this has made a real difference.

“When VAT was added onto sports nutrition, I decided to stop stocking it as it took up a lot of room and it gave us so much more space to add in a lot more food.”

Although food can be found in abundance, there's also plenty of variety when it comes to other areas. Solgar, Viridian, Lamberts and BioCare are named as key brands, along with Lifeplan, while bodycare wise, Jason and Green People are the big sellers, supported by other brands such as Faith in Nature.

“Supplements have picked up since last year and certain brands we are increasing what we're selling; Solgar, for example, we are always getting in their new products as that's very strong here,” Margaret said.

Customer wise, Margaret says it is mixed.

“We have a lot of older people coming in, but we're also seeing younger people who are into raw foods,” she said. “We have customers who have been coming in for years and they are so reliant on getting their products here that we have to make sure it is in stock.”

Future wise, Margaret says she has always wanted to add a coffee shop to the store, but space simply wouldn't allow it. With a solid team at the store, Margaret says she spends a little more time at home looking at strategy.

“We all really enjoy it still, every day is different and it never gets boring,” Margaret said. “We love it.” **hfb**