

# Your guide to healthy eating

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Most of us realise we should be eating a healthy balanced diet. Eating healthily doesn't just make us look and feel better, it can also help reduce our risk of a range of medical problems. Despite this, experts believe many people don't eat as healthily as they should.

"Poor diets are all too common in this country and, along with obesity, are now one of the leading causes of disease such as cancer, heart disease and type 2 diabetes," says Dr Alison Tedstone, chief nutritionist at Public Health England.

According to Dr Tedstone, a healthy balanced diet is the foundation of good health. But what is a healthy balanced diet exactly?

These days there's so much information available on diet and nutrition, it can be easy to feel overwhelmed or confused about what you should – or shouldn't – be eating. However, following a healthy diet doesn't have to be difficult. Here's what you should know about the types of foods that make up a healthy diet, and how much and how often you should eat them.

## Did you know?

According to the most recent figures, only 31 per cent of adults and eight per cent of teenagers manage to eat the recommended five portions of fruit and vegetables every day. (*Source: National Diet and Nutrition Survey 2014 – 2016*).

## The Eatwell Guide

Developed by Public Health England in association with the Welsh Government, Food Standards Scotland and the Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland, the Eatwell Guide is the official guide that aims to help people in the UK eat a balance of healthier foods.

The guide applies to most people regardless of weight, dietary preferences, dietary restrictions or ethnic origin. However, it doesn't apply to children younger than two years old (for more information on children's diets, read our helpsheet [How to feed your children healthily](#)).

The guide recommends that adult women should aim to have 2,000 calories a day

# Your guide to healthy eating

and adult men 2,500 calories a day, including all foods and all drinks. This is the approximate number of calories you need to maintain your weight. So if you want to lose weight, you should eat fewer calories than the guide recommends – the NHS says that if you're a man you should try reducing your daily calories to 1,900 or 1,400 calories a day if you're a woman to lose weight at a safe rate.

You may also need fewer calories if you're not very active. Or if you do a lot of exercise or you have a physically strenuous job, you may even need more.

The following outlines what you should know about the different food types in the Eatwell Guide, including how much you should aim to eat of each of them (though according to the NHS you don't have to achieve the recommended balance with every meal, just try to get the balance right over a day or even a week):

## Fruit and veg

According to the Eatwell Guide, a third of the food you eat every day should be made up of fruit and vegetables. This means eating at least five portions of fruit and veg a day, which will help you get a good variety of the vitamins and minerals your body needs to stay healthy, as well as plenty of fibre.

Try to eat a variety of different coloured fruit and veg every day. For instance, try having brightly coloured peppers, tomatoes, beetroot, spinach, broccoli, carrots and sweet potato, as well as fruit such as apples, blueberries,

blackberries, strawberries, oranges and pears. Your 5 A Day doesn't have to all be fresh, as frozen, canned, dried or juiced varieties count too.

## How big is a portion?

A portion in most cases is 80g, or roughly the amount you can fit into one hand (a single piece of fruit, three heaped tablespoons of vegetables, a small bowl of salad etc). In the case of dried fruit, however, a portion is just 30g, thanks to the fact that dried fruit contains a particularly concentrated amount of sugar. If you're having fruit juice or a smoothie, a portion is one 150ml glassful (only one portion of your daily five can come from fruit juice or a smoothie).

## Starchy foods

Another third of everything you eat should be made up of starchy foods such as bread, potatoes, rice, oats, pasta, couscous and other grains. Starchy foods are an important part of a healthy diet because they contain lots of nutrients, including calcium, iron and B vitamins. And while many fashionable weight-loss diets advise against eating starchy foods, according to the NHS they contain fewer than half the calories of fat, gram for gram.

Experts also recommend eating higher-fibre, wholegrain varieties whenever you can, as these types of starchy foods contain more fibre than white or refined varieties, and often more of other nutrients too. This means choosing wholewheat pasta, brown rice, whole oats and other

# Your guide to healthy eating

wholegrain breakfast cereals plus wholemeal or wholegrain bread rather than white processed foods, as well as having potatoes with their skins left on. You can also buy high-fibre white versions of bread and pasta if you prefer them to wholegrain foods.

(Note: although potatoes are vegetables, they don't count towards your 5 A Day because they are part of the starchy food portion of your meals.)

Try to have starchy foods with every meal – for instance, have some wholegrain cereal or porridge for breakfast, a baked potato or a sandwich made with wholemeal bread for lunch, and an evening meal with potatoes, pasta or rice.

## Protein

Protein foods such as meat, fish, eggs, pulses (beans, peas and lentils) and some other plant-based foods are also an important part of a healthy balanced diet as protein is essential for the body to grow and repair itself. As well as providing protein, these foods contain vitamins and minerals, so try to have some with every meal – three slices of lean meat, for example, a couple of eggs or four tablespoons of cooked beans or lentils.

Try to choose lean cuts of meat or cut the fat off meat or take the skin off chicken to reduce the amount of saturated fat you eat (see **Fats**, below). Meanwhile processed meat – such as bacon and sausages – has been linked with an increased risk of

bowel cancer, so try to limit these as much as possible.

Plant-based protein is a good alternative to meat because it's naturally very low in fat and high in fibre, vitamins and minerals. That's why it's a good idea to try to have some foods such as lentils, chickpeas, beans, tofu or mycoprotein (Quorn) on a regular basis as the protein part of your meals.

As far as fish is concerned, the Eatwell Guide recommends having two 140g portions a week, which should include one portion of oily fish. Oily fish are rich in a type of polyunsaturated fat called omega-3 fatty acids, which have been linked to a number of health benefits. Fish and seafood also contain vitamin D, which many people are thought to be lacking in, especially during the autumn and winter.

## Dairy foods

Like protein foods you should also aim to have some dairy foods – or dairy alternatives – every day. These include things like milk, cheese, yoghurt, fromage frais and calcium-fortified dairy alternatives (soya or nut milks, for instance).

As well as being good sources of protein these foods also provide calcium, which your body needs to stay strong and healthy, as well as vitamins such as vitamin A and B12. However, try to choose lower-fat versions (such as skimmed or semi-skimmed milk instead of whole milk), as they contain just as much protein and calcium but less saturated fat and fewer calories. In the case of

# Your guide to healthy eating

foods that aren't available in low-fat varieties – butter and cream, for example – try to use as sparingly as possible.

## Fats

Foods high in fat contain lots of calories. According to Public Health England most people in the UK eat too much saturated fat, which can raise your cholesterol and your risk of heart disease. Foods high in saturated fat include fatty cuts of meat, sausages, butter, cream, cheese, chocolate, pastries, cakes and biscuits. You don't have to cut out these foods altogether, but it is advisable to have them less often and in smaller amounts.

Meanwhile try to use unsaturated fats instead of saturated varieties whenever you can. Unsaturated fats are healthier fats that usually come from plant sources and are in liquid form as oil (olive oil, rapeseed oil, sunflower oil etc). However, while these may be healthier than saturated fats they are also very high in calories, so keep the amount you eat to a minimum.

## Sugar

Most people know that eating lots of sugary foods and having lots of sugary drinks can increase the risk of gaining weight as well as getting tooth decay. But currently children and adults across the UK are thought to eat two to three times more sugar than the amount advised (according to Public Health England, no more than five per cent of the energy – or calories – you eat/drink should come from free sugars, which are sugars added to foods or drinks as well as honey, syrups and unsweetened fruit juices as opposed to the

sugars that are naturally found in fruits and vegetables).

The Eatwell Guide recommends having limited amounts of sweet foods and drinks, so it's a good idea to cut back on things like biscuits, chocolate, cakes and sweetened fizzy drinks if you have a lot of them. Remember, five per cent of the total calorie intake for a woman is the equivalent of just five or six teaspoons of sugar, and seven to eight teaspoons of sugar for a man.

Sugar is also often found in processed foods, even foods that aren't sweet such as pasta sauces, ready-made soups, ketchup and salad dressings. One way to find out if what you're eating has lots of added sugars is to check food labels when you're shopping. Look out for the following ingredients, all of which are names for types of sugars:

- Sucrose
- Glucose
- Fructose
- Maltose
- Dextrose
- Corn syrup (and other syrups such as agave syrup, date syrup, rice syrup etc.)
- Hydrolysed starch
- Barley malt
- Invert sugar
- Molasses

Also watch out for low-fat foods as these often contain high amounts of added sugars. For instance, some lower-fat yoghurts can be sweetened with refined sugar, fruit juice concentrate, glucose or fructose syrup.

# Your guide to healthy eating

## Fluids

What and how much you drink is also important for a healthy diet. The Eatwell Guide states you should aim to drink six to eight glasses of fluid every day, including water, lower-fat milk, sugar-free soft drinks, tea and coffee. Alcohol, however, contains lots of calories, and currently the government recommends that adult men and women should drink no more than 14 units of alcohol a week.

- Find out how many units of alcohol are in your favourite drinks at the [Drinkaware website](#).

## Salt

Salt isn't included in the Eatwell Guide, but it's useful to be aware of how much you should be eating as part of a healthy balanced diet, since eating too much salt can raise your blood pressure.

In the UK, the recommendation for salt intake is 6g of salt a day for adults and children older than 11 years – that's about the equivalent of a teaspoon. Younger children should have different amounts of salt depending on their age

- Less than 1g a day for babies less than a year old
- 2g a day for children between one and three years of age
- 3g a day for four-to-six year-olds

- 5g a day for children aged seven to 10

To cut down on the amount of salt you eat, try not to use much in cooking (don't use any at all if you can help it). However, since most of the salt in the average British diet comes in processed foods, try to get into the habit of checking your food labels.

However, note that some food labels state the amount of sodium in food, rather than salt (2.4g of sodium is the equivalent of 6g salt). It may be easier to remember this: if a label says a food has 0.3g or less of salt per 100g (or 0.1g sodium), it means it's low in salt and you can eat plenty of it; but try to avoid anything that contains 1.5g or more salt (0.6g sodium) per 100g.

## What about vitamin supplements?

If you eat healthily all or most of the time you probably don't need to take any vitamin or mineral tablets. On the other hand there may be a reason why you may need a supplement. Some people who are on restricted diets may need extra nutrients in the form of supplements, or your GP may recommend supplements if you have a particular medical condition (if you have iron deficiency anaemia, for example, your doctor may recommend you take iron tablets).

## Folic acid

If you're pregnant or trying to have a baby, you should take a folic acid supplement. When taken up to week 12 of pregnancy these can help prevent birth defects such as spina bifida.

# Your guide to healthy eating

Your GP or midwife can give you more information about folic acid supplementation.

## Vitamin D

Since sunlight is the main source of vitamin D (the body makes its own vitamin D when skin is exposed to ultraviolet rays), many people in the UK are thought to be at risk of not getting enough during the autumn and winter months. Currently, the Department of Health recommends everyone over the age of five should consider taking a daily vitamin D supplement from the end of September to late March/early April. And if you don't get much sun exposure during the summer – if you're housebound, for instance, or you usually wear clothes or sunscreen that covers most of your skin whenever you're outdoors – the government says you should consider taking a vitamin D supplement all year round.

## Vitamins A, C and D

It's also currently recommended that all children aged between six months and five years should take a supplement that contains vitamins A, C and D (ask your GP or health visitor for more details).

## Useful links:

If you are experiencing any of the issues covered in this guide, in the first instance call our free helpline on 0808 801 0550. Our Advisors will listen without judging and will work with you as best they can to achieve a positive outcome. If you prefer you can email: [support@ltcharity.org.uk](mailto:support@ltcharity.org.uk) Visit our website: [www.licensedtradecharity.org.uk](http://www.licensedtradecharity.org.uk) It's full of useful

information about the kind of issues we know people who work in the licensed trade face.

## Other sources of information:

British Nutrition Foundation  
[www.nutrition.org.uk](http://www.nutrition.org.uk)  
Information on healthy living and nutrition.

BDA Food Fact Sheets  
Healthy eating and lifestyle guides written by experts from the Association of UK Dieticians,

Change4Life  
<https://www.nhs.uk/change4life>  
For healthy eating advice, tips and recipes

NHS Choices Live Well  
<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/>  
Lots more information on eating a balanced diet, including recipes and tips on eating out

NOTE: This guide is not exhaustive. It has been produced by the Licensed Trade Charity to provide you with an overview of the issue in question. If you're experiencing problems with this issue, our Advisors are available to you.