

Enjoy healthy eating





What we eat every day has a big impact on our health – from the amount of energy we have when we get up in the morning to our risk of developing conditions like heart disease and cancer in the future. A healthy diet doesn't have to be boring or restrictive – we can still eat a wide range of delicious foods, while keeping an eye on our intake of sugar, fat and salt.

Kids' stuff

This leaflet is aimed at adults and children over two years of age. A healthy diet for babies and children under two years is different from a healthy adult diet – more information is available in the leaflets *Weaning made easy: moving from milk to family meals* and *Getting a good start: healthy eating from one to five*.

Eat well, keep well

No single food provides all the nutrients we need, so it's important to eat a wide variety of foods. The Eatwell Guide below shows the different types of food we eat and the proportions we need to eat them in to achieve a healthy, balanced diet. View this at www.food.gov.uk/northern-ireland/nutritionni/eatwell-guide



Source: Public Health England in association with the Welsh government, Food Standards Scotland and the Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland

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The guide is split into five food groups:

- Fruit and vegetables (pages 4-5)
- Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates (page 6)
- Dairy and alternatives (page 7)
- Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins (pages 8-9)
- Oil and spreads (page 10)

Fruit and vegetables

Fruit and veg are the cornerstone of a healthy diet. Research shows that eating five or more portions of fruit and vegetables every day can help prevent heart disease and reduce the risk of some types of cancer.

Fruit and vegetables are a good source of fibre (see page 6) and contain vitamins and minerals.

They make a great low-fat snack and add colour, flavour and texture to main dishes. Fresh fruit and veg are great, but tinned and frozen varieties are also convenient and healthy – just choose fruit tinned in juice rather than syrup and vegetables in water rather than brine.



Rainbows rule!

Eating lots of different colours of fruit and veg will help make sure you get the full range of vitamins and minerals.

What's in a portion?

Potatoes are not included in the fruit and vegetables group, but lots of other things are. A portion could be:

- 1 medium sized piece of fruit, eg apple, orange, banana, pear
- 2 small fruits, eg kiwi, satsumas, plums
- 1 large slice of pineapple or melon
- 1 tablespoon of dried fruit, eg raisins, or 3 apricots
- 1 cereal bowl of salad
- 3 heaped tablespoons of cooked veg or pulses, eg beans or lentils, peas, mashed carrot and parsnip or turnip
- 1 glass (approximately 150ml) of fresh fruit or vegetable juice or a smoothie

The current advice is to limit fruit and vegetable juice and smoothies to a combined total of 150ml per day and this can be counted as 1 portion each day.

This advice includes all smoothies, regardless of how they are made. This is because sugars are released when fruit is juiced or blended and this can cause damage to teeth.

If taken, juices and smoothies are best taken at a mealtime when they are less damaging to teeth. Whole fruits are less likely to cause tooth decay because the sugars are contained within the structure of the fruit.

If eaten, dried fruit should be taken as part of a main meal – the high sugar content means it can be damaging to teeth if nibbled between meals.

Practical tips to achieve your five a day

- Start the day with a glass of fruit juice or a fruit smoothie (max. 150ml)
- Add some chopped fruit or dried fruit to wholegrain cereal
- Snack on whole pieces of fresh fruit/vegetable sticks throughout the day
- Make a fruit salad or fruit kebabs for dessert
- Add extra fresh or frozen vegetables to soups, stews and casseroles
- Replace some or all of the meat or chicken with pulses, eg chickpeas, cannellini beans, lentils

Ready, steady, cook!

- Wash fruit and vegetables thoroughly
- To keep as many vitamins as possible, prepare vegetables just before you cook them, use a small amount of boiling water and don't overcook them
- Keep the lid on the saucepan to speed up cooking or use a microwave or steamer instead
- Reuse the water you cooked the vegetables in to make soup or vegetable stock



Trying for a baby?

Dark green leafy veg (eg cabbage, spinach, Brussels sprouts) are rich in folate, one of the B vitamins. Getting plenty of this B vitamin helps prevent neural tube defects such as spina bifida in unborn babies. Women who may become pregnant are advised to eat lots of folate-rich vegetables and also to take a 400µg (microgram) supplement (folic acid) every day .

For more advice, refer to the leaflet *Folic acid - one of life's essentials* www.pha.site/folic-acid or speak to your pharmacist.

Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates



Foods from this group are a good source of energy and B vitamins – make them the basis of your meals. They all contain some fibre but the wholegrain varieties contain more.

Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates like cereals are low in fat in themselves – it's what we add to them that makes the difference! Resist the temptation to load them with butter, oil and creamy sauces, and you can use them to create meals that are both delicious and healthy. For more tips on reducing fat, check out page 12.



Find out about fibre

Fibre is helpful in controlling our weight because it fills us up quickly, but it has other health benefits too.

- It helps prevent and cure constipation.
- It helps protect against some cancers, eg bowel cancer.
- It reduces the risk of developing heart disease.

Most of us don't get enough fibre, but it's easy to eat more:

- fruit and vegetables are high in fibre – make sure you get your five a day;
- start the day with a high fibre cereal such as Weetabix, Ready Brek or Shredded Wheat;
- choose wholegrain, wholemeal or granary-based bread, wraps or bagels;
- try baking a potato (eat the skin too) or using brown rice or pasta.

Fibre is like a sponge and soaks up water, so it's important to drink plenty of fluid to allow it to pass through the body easily. Aim for 6-8 cups/glasses of fluid a day.

Dairy and alternatives

Milk and dairy foods (yogurt and cheese) are a good source of protein, calcium, vitamins A and D and vitamin B₁₂. (For more information on vitamin D please see *Vitamin D and you* on <https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/vitamin-d-and-you-0>) Choose lower fat varieties of milk and cheese such as semi-skimmed milk, Edam, cottage cheese and half fat cheddar. Calcium is important for healthy bones – don't forget that the milk in milk puddings and sauces can help you get enough. Semi-skimmed and skimmed milk contain just as much calcium as whole milk but less fat, so they are a great choice.

Not included!

Margarine belongs in the 'oil and spreads' food group (see page 10). Butter and cream fall into the 'foods high in fat, salt and sugars' category (see page 11). Eggs are also not included here as they fall into the food group 'beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins' (see page 8).





Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins

Foods from this group are good sources of protein, vitamins and minerals. Protein helps the body build and repair cells, and we need to eat a small amount every day.

Good vegetable sources of protein include nuts and pulses such as lentils, chickpeas, peas and beans – they also provide fibre, B vitamins and iron. Pulses are cheap so make your food budget go further by using them to replace some of the meat in casseroles or stews. You could also try substituting Quorn, soya or tofu for meat in all sorts of dishes.

Fish is a good source of protein – try to eat it at least twice a week and make sure one portion a week is an oily fish.

- White fish such as cod, haddock and pollock are low in fat.
- Oily fish such as sardines, mackerel, salmon or trout are rich in omega 3 fats, which protect us against heart disease and stroke.





Eggs are a tasty alternative to meat or fish and are easy and quick to prepare. They are a good source of protein and vitamins A and D. Previous advice put a restriction on the number of eggs you could eat during the week, however research now indicates that dietary cholesterol has less of an impact on blood cholesterol than saturated fat.



Meat, particularly red meat, is an excellent source of iron which can help prevent iron deficiency anaemia. Chicken is a good source too. Cut the visible fat off meat before cooking it. The fat contained in chicken is found in the skin so it is best to remove this. Choose the leaner cuts of meat - it's not really more expensive, because there's less waste so you won't need to buy as much.



Processed meat and chicken products tend to be high in fat and salt, so limit them to once a week or less. Grill or bake them rather than frying, placing them on a rack to allow the excess fat to drain off and don't add any fat or salt while cooking.



Oils and spreads

The type of fat we eat is important. Although all fat is high in calories and can make us put on weight, some fats have other health risks.

Good fats (unsaturated fats including both monounsaturated or polyunsaturated) are better for our health, so when buying spreads and oils look for the ones labelled high in mono or polyunsaturates such as olive oil, rapeseed oil, corn oil or sunflower oil.

Hidden fats

It's particularly important to cut down on bad fats (saturated or trans fats) as they encourage fat to become deposited in our arteries, raising the risk of heart attacks or stroke. These bad fats are also more likely to raise cholesterol levels. Saturated fats can be found in bought cakes, processed meat and meat products such as burgers, sausage rolls, pasties, savoury snacks such as crisps, butter, cheese and cream. Trans fats are also found in many of the processed foods listed above and have similar health risks to saturated fats.



Cholesterol

Cholesterol is a fat found in the blood. Too much cholesterol is damaging to our heart health.

A diet high in bad fats (saturated and trans fats) will raise your cholesterol level.

Foods high in fat, salt and sugars

In Northern Ireland more than half the population is living with overweight or obesity, so most of us need to cut down on fat and sugar. We need a small amount of fat to stay healthy, but it's probably a lot less than you think (the small amounts from the 'oil and spreads' food group will be enough). Too much fat can make us put on weight and increases the risk of heart disease and other major health problems.

Much of the fat we eat is hidden in foods such as processed meats like sausage rolls and pies, pastry, crisps, biscuits, cakes and chocolate. Many of these foods also contain lots of hidden sugar. Sugary foods contain empty calories - when you eat them you're taking in lots of calories but little nutrition. They should be eaten only occasionally - choose fruit or yogurt instead.





Easy ways to cut down on fat and sugar

- Mashed potato makes a good topping for pies and is lower in fat than pastry.
- Measure oil onto a spoon when cooking so you know how much you have added.
- You can use less cheese in sauces and toppings if you pick one with a strong flavour.
- Use low-fat natural yogurt in dishes to create a creamy texture instead of cream or crème fraiche. Mix a teaspoon of cornflour into a small carton of yogurt to stop it curdling when heated.
- Serve tomato based sauces rather than creamy ones with pasta and rice.
- Satisfy a sweet tooth with sweet juicy fruits like strawberries and grapes. If you want a more filling snack, have a slice of toast, a pancake or a plain or wheaten scone.
- Think before you drink! Choose sugar-free soft drinks, ask for your coffee “skinny”, and remember that alcohol contains a lot of calories – up to 100 for a 125ml glass of wine or 160 for a pint of lager – so cut down if you’re watching your weight.
- Instead of buying a frozen pizza, why not create your own? Buy the base and add your own vegetable toppings.

Salt

Our bodies need a small amount of salt to work properly, but most of us eat more than we need. Too much salt is linked with higher blood pressure, which increases the risk of stroke and heart disease.

Older children and adults should reduce the amount of salt they eat to no more than 6g per day. Babies and younger children should have very little salt as their kidneys are not mature. Don't add salt to their food and cook vegetables, pasta etc in unsalted water.

Age in years	Maximum salt intake per day
Children under 1	avoid salty foods and table salt
Children aged 1 to 3	2g
Children aged 4 to 6	3g
Children aged 7 to 10	5g
Children aged 11 and over	6g
Adults	6g

One teaspoon is approximately 5g of salt.

More importantly, check the labels on the foods you commonly buy. Up to 75% of the salt we eat is in packaged foods such as bread, breakfast cereals, baked beans, biscuits, ready made sauces, cheese and bacon. Choose lower or no salt varieties where possible and try to eat less of the really salty foods.



Some labels list sodium rather than salt – multiply by 2.5 to get the amount of salt. For more information on food labelling check out www.choosetolivebetter.com

Food	Typical salt content (approx values)
Tinned condensed tomato soup per average serving	1.34g
Back bacon grilled per slice	0.84g
Packet of crisps	0.27g
Special flake cereal per bowl	0.25g
2 slices of processed ham	0.60g
White bread per slice	0.34g

Breakfast

Breakfast is probably the most important meal of the day – it might be 12 hours or more since you last ate, so your body needs something to kick start your metabolism. Missing breakfast can mean missing out on important vitamins and minerals, and research shows that breakfast skippers perform less well at school or work.

Breakfast is an easy time to eat fibre-rich foods, which help prevent those mid morning hunger pangs that have us reaching for fatty, sugary snacks. Choose high fibre, low sugar cereals such as Weetabix, Ready Brek or Shredded Wheat. Toast, bagels, fruit bread, soda and scones are all good sources of energy too.

Clock up the first of your five a day, and start your day with a vitamin boost by having a piece of fruit, a glass of fruit juice or a fruit smoothie as part of your breakfast.



If you fancy a cooked breakfast as a weekend treat, grill sausages or bacon rather than frying them, add some tomato, mushrooms and beans, and poach or scramble the egg. Scrambled, poached or boiled egg with toast is a good option if you want something hot but don't want to max out on fat or calories.



Takeaways and eating out

Eating out or having a takeaway doesn't have to mean abandoning healthy eating - a few careful choices will ensure your tempting treat isn't a dietary disaster.

- Go for boiled rice rather than fried or pilau rice, and reduce the overall fat content of your meal.
- Fried starters like samosas, pakoras and bhajis, or spring rolls will be very high in fat, so go for lower fat options like chicken tikka or chicken and sweetcorn soup instead.
- Creamy curries like korma or massala are also high in fat so instead choose tandoori or madras dishes. Or why not try a lentil based dish such as dahl.
- Battered dishes like sweet and sour chicken are another high fat choice, so opt for a stir fried main course like chow mein with an extra portion of vegetables.
- Order a serving of mushy peas or baked beans with fish and chips, and share a portion of chips between two.
- When ordering pizza, ask for less cheese and more vegetable toppings like mushrooms, peppers, pineapple and sweetcorn.





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