

What is a healthy diet?

Eating a healthy and varied diet is important for maintaining your health and helping you feel well. In general, this means eating a balanced variety of foods in order to obtain all the nutrients you need for your body to function well. There is no one-size fits all when it comes to diet as everyone is unique. The Eatwell Guide shows how much of what we eat should come from each food group to achieve a healthy, balanced diet.

Dietary messages to help you eat well

The main dietary messages from the Eatwell Guide are:

- Eat at least 5 portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables each day.

- Base meals on starchy carbohydrates foods such as potatoes, bread, rice and pasta, choosing wholegrain versions where possible.
- Include some dairy or dairy alternatives (such as soya drinks), choosing lower fat and sugar options.
- Include some protein foods such as meat, eggs, beans, pulses and fish. Include 2 portions of fish every week, one of which should be an oily fish such as salmon, trout, mackerel or sardines.
- Choose unsaturated oils and spreads and eat sparingly.
- Drink 6-8 glasses of fluid a day.
- Foods that are high in fat, salt or sugars should be eaten less often and in small amounts.



How much food do I need?

The body needs energy to grow, keep warm and perform physical activity. Energy comes from the carbohydrates, fats and proteins in the food and drinks we consume. To maintain a healthy weight, you need to balance the amount of energy (or calories) from your diet with the amount of energy you use through physical activity.

The Eatwell guide suggests 2500 calories a day for an adult man and 2000 calories a day for an adult woman. Being aware of the food you consume and how it makes you feel can help you become more in-tune with your own individual dietary needs.

Mindful eating can be useful to practice when eating a meal or snack. This can be done by fully focussing on what you are eating for one minute. Thinking about the smell, appearance, texture, flavours of the food, and to chew your food thoroughly as you consider these things.

8 Practical tips for healthy eating

Here are few tips to help you put the healthy eating advice into practice.

1. **Increase your fibre:** Choose higher fibre or wholegrain cereals, breads and pasta. Try brown rice rather than white rice and leave the skins on vegetables like potatoes, carrots and parsnips to get more fibre from them.
2. **Eat a variety of plant foods:** Including 30 or more different plant foods a week results in a more diverse community of beneficial microbes in your gut. Fruits, vegetables, pulses, grains, nuts and seeds all count.
3. **Space out your protein:** Protein has many important functions in the body including maintaining your muscles, supporting your immune system, making hormones and satisfying hunger. Including some protein foods in each meal can help your body make the most of this nutrient. Protein foods include meat, fish, eggs, dairy, legumes, tofu, nuts and seeds.
4. **Limit saturated fats:** Using a small amount of vegetable oil, rapeseed, olive oil or reduced fat spread instead of butter, lard, ghee or coconut oil is a healthier choice. Pastries, cakes and biscuits can be high in saturated fats, so try to limit these foods in your diet.
5. **Limit sugary foods:** Some foods can contain a surprisingly high amount of sugars, for example sugary fizzy drinks, sugary breakfast cereals, cakes, biscuits, puddings, sweets and alcoholic drinks. Try to limit how often you consume sugary foods and drinks.
6. **Check food labels:** A quick glance at the front of pack label can help you identify foods lower in saturated fat, sugars and salt. Choose products with more green and amber labels.
7. **Reduce salt:** Adults should eat no more than 6g (1 teaspoon) per day of salt, and children even less. Try using extra herbs, spices, lemon or lime juice or vinegar to flavour foods so you can use less salt in your recipes.
8. **Don't get thirsty:** Feeling thirsty is a sign that you are dehydrated. Water is the best choice as it hydrates you without adding any extra calories. Other good options include unsweetened tea and coffee, low fat milk or sugar free drinks. Unsweetened fruit juice and smoothies are also hydrating, but limit these to 150ml a day.

References

1. EatWell Guide (2018). Available: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-eatwell-guide>
2. The American Gut Project (2018). Available: <https://www.mymicrobiome.info/news-reading/the-american-gut-project.html>