

# HEALTHY EATING

There are some key changes you can make to your eating habits which have been proven to be of benefit in reducing the risk of heart disease and strokes.

The general healthy eating message is to:

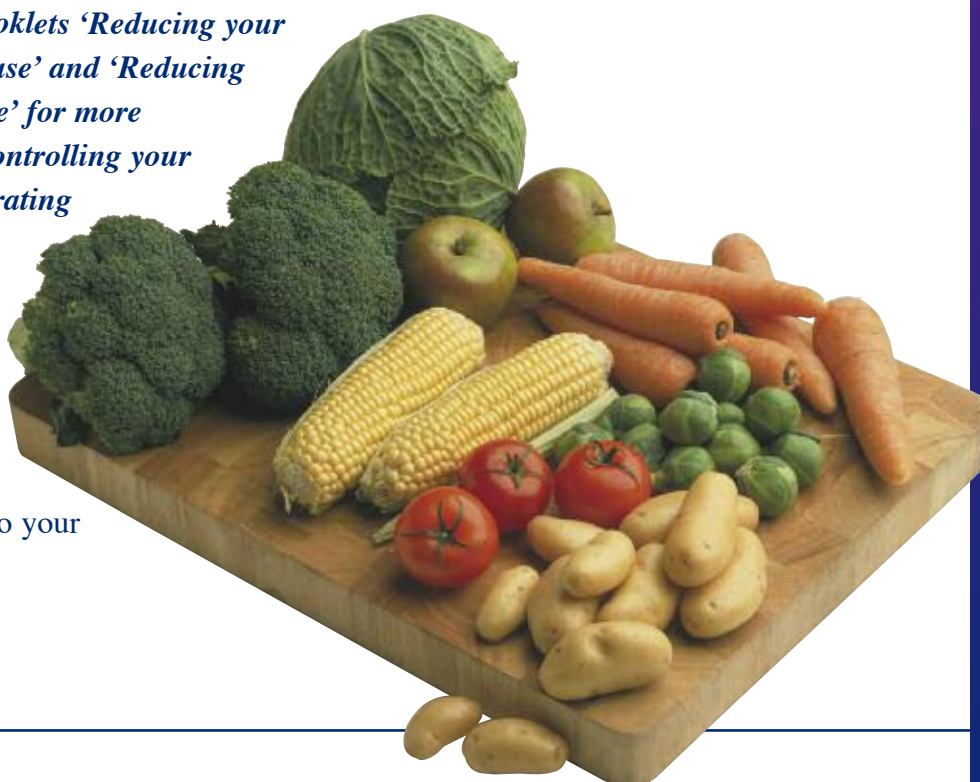
- Eat a varied diet.
- Eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables each day.
- Increase the intake of fibre in your diet.
- Reduce the fat in your diet, replacing saturated fats with unsaturated fats / oils. (This is particularly important if you have high cholesterol levels.)
- Eat less sugar.
- Watch how much salt you eat. (If you have high blood pressure then you may be advised to lower your salt intake.)
- Check the food labels. This gets you used to knowing what is in the food you are eating.
- Drink plenty of water and moderate your alcohol intake.

Eating a more healthy diet usually only means making small changes to the meals you already eat; eating a little more of some things and less of others.

As well as helping to reduce your risk of heart disease and strokes, eating healthily can also help you control your weight.

*See the CHSS booklets 'Reducing your risk of heart disease' and 'Reducing your risk of stroke' for more information on controlling your weight and moderating your alcohol intake.*

This factsheet will provide you with information to help you make positive changes to your diet.



## Variety is the spice of life

Variety is the key to a healthier diet. Food comes in all shapes, sizes, flavours, textures and colours. The best way to make sure you get a bit of everything you need is to eat a variety of different foods.

Eating the right amount of the right foods means you get the right amount of energy and nutrients you need to keep your body healthy. Many habits developed in your younger years are the cause of long-term health problems in later life, for example, fried breakfasts or regular takeaway meals. But remember, habits can be broken.

A varied diet should include a proportion of food from all the foods groups:

- plenty of carbohydrates (such as pasta, rice, potatoes and bread)
- plenty of fruit and vegetables
- some milk and dairy products
- some proteins (such as meat, eggs, fish, poultry)
- a small amount of fatty foods

Eating healthily doesn't mean you can't enjoy your favourite foods; it is all about getting the balance right.



This is 'The eatwell plate' showing how much of what you eat should come from each food group. This includes everything you eat during the day, including snacks.

Source: Food Standards Agency.

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## Fruit and vegetables: what does '5 a day' really mean?

Fruit and vegetables are a good source of essential vitamins and minerals. They contain lots of special nutrients called antioxidants that help protect the cells in your body from damage and illness.

It is recommended that you should be eating at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day. As a rough guide, fruit and vegetables should make up about a third of everything you eat each day.

Here are some tips to help you work out what a 'portion' is:

- One portion could be a banana, two plums, a couple of broccoli florets, one carrot, a handful of strawberries or two tablespoons of peas.
- All dried, canned and frozen fruit and vegetables count towards your daily portions.
- Fruit juice counts as a serving once a day.
- Beans and pulses count as a serving once a day.
- Potatoes do not count as they are carbohydrates.

Eating at least five portions of fruit and vegetables every day may seem a lot at first. Try to get into the habit of eating some fruit and / or vegetables with each meal.

Here is an example of how you could spread your portions throughout the day:

Meal	Eating suggestion	No.
<i>Breakfast</i>	Breakfast cereal with a couple of spoonfuls of dried apricots or other dried fruit added and semi or skimmed milk.	1
	A glass of orange juice.	1
<i>Lunch</i>	A wholemeal sandwich of your choice with a grated carrot, a sliced tomato or a handful of salad.	1
	A smoothie drink made from fresh fruit and low-fat yoghurt or milk.	1
<i>Snack</i>	An apple or a banana.	1
<i>Main meal</i>	A couple of broccoli florets and a spoonful of carrots as part of your meal.	2
	A handful of strawberries with low-fat yoghurt or ice cream.	1
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>8</b>

Eating lots of fruit and vegetables doesn't have to be expensive, or boring! For more ideas about how to get your '5 a day' see the 'Take Life On, One Step At A Time' website (details in the 'Useful addresses and websites' section at the end of this factsheet).

## Go the whole way

When you have a choice of white or wholemeal pasta, bread, flour or cereals try to choose wholemeal (e.g. brown rice or brown bread). Wholemeal / grain foods have not been processed as much and contain more vitamins, minerals and fibre than white foods.

If you increase the amount of fibre in your diet you will find that you feel fuller for longer. This is because wholegrain foods take longer to digest. Drinking plenty of water helps to process fibre through your gut.

Oats are a very good source of dietary fibre. Research has shown that the inclusion of oats as part a diet low in saturated fat combined with a healthy lifestyle can help reduce blood cholesterol.

An easy way to eat more fibre is to start the day with wholegrain cereal, porridge / muesli or toast. Try adding a piece of fruit to this to make a start on your '5 a day'.

## Reducing fat

Most of us eat too much fatty food. There are two main types of fat in food: saturated and unsaturated.

Saturated fat is usually solid when cold e.g. butter, lard, fat on meat.

Unsaturated fat is liquid at room temperature and can be divided into:

- monounsaturated fats (e.g. olive oil, rapeseed oil, avocados, nuts)
- polyunsaturated fats (e.g. sunflower oil, soya oil, reduced fat spreads which are labelled as high in polyunsaturates)
- omega-3 fatty acids (e.g. oily fish, seafood such as clams and prawns, and flaxseed oil)

It is best to replace saturated fats with unsaturated fats i.e. replacing fat that comes from meat and dairy products with fish and other healthier oils.

Unfortunately fatty foods often taste lovely! You don't need to cut fat out completely from your diet. Try to aim for healthier foods most of the time; this way you can enjoy the occasional treat.

By making several small changes in your daily routine you can get good results. For example:

- Choose low-fat varieties of cheese such as cottage cheese; the harder the cheese, the higher the fat content.
- Switch from butter to reduced-fat spreads.
- Switch from full-fat milk to semi-skimmed or skimmed milk.
- Choose low-fat varieties of yoghurt.
- Choose unsaturated oils such as rapeseed, sunflower or olive oil; remember being 'oily' is not necessarily bad for you.

- Replace meat with fish and increase your omega-3 fats; it may help to eat at least two portions of fish a week, one of which should be oily fish (e.g. mackerel, herring, sardines, trout, salmon or pilchards). Tinned tuna does not contain the beneficial types of oil.
- Trim all visible fat from meat before cooking.
- Discard any fat that comes out of food during cooking.
- Grill food instead of frying.
- Avoid pastry as it is high in fat.
- Eat fewer meat products such as pies, pasties, sausage rolls, hamburgers and sausages.
- Replace snacks such as crisps, cakes and biscuits with fruit.
- Increase the amount of carbohydrates in your diet (e.g. pasta, cereals, rice or bread). This will give you the energy that you used to get from fat.
- Check food labels for hidden fats in processed foods and ready-made meals.

If you have a high cholesterol level you will have been advised to reduce the amount of saturated fat in your diet. Reducing saturated fat reduces the amount of LDL or ‘bad’ cholesterol in your blood stream. LDL cholesterol is what contributes to an increased risk of heart disease and stroke.

(Note: eggs, liver and shellfish, although rich in cholesterol, have only a small effect on blood cholesterol levels.)

*See the CHSS factsheet ‘Cholesterol’ for more information.*

### **Eat less sugar**

Sugar makes food taste good but it comes at a cost. Food and drinks containing lots of added sugars are often high in calories but low in other nutrients. As well as contributing to weight gain, sugary foods and drinks can also cause your teeth to rot, especially if eaten between meals.

Try to cut down your amount of food and drinks that contain added sugar. This may mean changing your eating habits as sugary foods are often very comforting.

Aim to:

- Eat fewer cakes, biscuits, chocolate and sweets. If you like sweet snacks try a piece of fruit or a small handful of dried fruit.
- Cut down on sugary drinks: you can replace these with water or unsweetened fruit juice. For a fizzy alternative try diluting fruit juice with sparkling water.
- Try to reduce the amount of sugar you take in coffee and tea. If you really want a sweet drink try using artificial sweeteners.
- Try wholegrain breakfast cereals instead of ones with added sugar.
- Check food labels and go for foods with less added sugar.

## Reduce your salt intake

Too much salt in your diet can increase the risk of high blood pressure which increases the risk of heart disease and strokes.

It is recommended that you should reduce your salt intake to 6g, or less, of salt a day.

Automatically putting salt on your food can become a habit that your taste buds have got used to. If you gradually reduce the amount of salt you eat your taste buds will soon adapt and eventually you will prefer less salty food.

The highest salt-containing foods are processed foods like ready meals, baked beans, soups, processed meat (e.g. ham and bacon), smoked foods, restaurant and takeaway foods, some cereals and even bread. It is difficult to avoid eating some of these foods but look for low-salt alternatives instead, or eat fresh food which has no added salt.

Tips to reduce salt in your diet:

- Don't add salt at the table or during cooking. Instead try adding herbs and spices for flavour. In time your taste buds will adjust to the changes.
- Be aware that processed foods such as bread, meat products, vegetables, soups and sauces may contain a lot of salt.
- Avoid processed foods, which contain more than three quarters of the salt hidden in your diet.
- Avoid salted crisps, nuts, crackers or other salty snacks, especially when socialising as they will also make you thirsty and encourage you to drink more alcohol.
- Read the labels on foods and look for low-salt varieties.
- Salt alternatives are not advisable: they don't help your taste buds to adapt to less salt and they can be high in other minerals e.g. potassium (which may be harmful for some people).

*See the CHSS factsheet 'Salt' for more information.*

## Check the labels!

If you get into the habit of checking the labels on the food that you buy you will become more aware of what it is that you are actually eating.

In the UK there is no legal obligation for manufacturers to display the nutritional content of foods e.g. calories, fat, sugar and salt contents. However, many of the larger retailers and supermarkets now display these details on their foods. Some have adopted the 'traffic light system' which allows you to quickly see if the food you're looking at has a high (red), medium (amber) or low (green) amount of fat, sugar, salt etc.

Using this system:

- **Red = High Content. Try to cut down / avoid these foods.**
- **Amber = Medium Content. These foods are OK in moderation.**
- **Green = Low Content. This is the healthy choice; the more green lights, the better!**

## Helpful hints on checking food labels

- Fat content: labels may list 'fat content' and / or 'of which saturates.'

Fat content per 100g	
Low fat content	3g fat or less
Low saturated fat	1g saturated fat or less
High fat content	20g fat or more
High saturated fat	5g saturated fat or more

- Sugar content: labels may say 'carbohydrates (of which sugars)'. Check the ingredients to see whether sugar has been added.

Sugar content per 100g	
Low sugar	5g of sugars or less
High sugar	15g of sugars or more

- Salt content: this can be listed as salt or as sodium. The amounts are not the same. You can multiply the amount of sodium by 2.5 to see how much salt is in the food: 1g of sodium (per 100g) is 2.5g of salt (per 100g).

Salt content per 100g		
Virtually salt free	0.005g sodium or less	0.0125g salt or less
Low salt	0.1g sodium or less	0.25g salt or less
Medium salt	0.2 – 0.4g sodium	0.5 – 1g salt
High salt	0.5g sodium or more	1.25g salt or more

Read the labels carefully; look for amounts 'per 100g' and 'per serving'. Remember that the amount you eat of a particular food (serving size) affects the total amount of fat, sugar, salt etc you will get from it. Your serving size may be different to what's recommended on the label!

Be wary of products such as 'low-fat', 'low-salt' etc. Take time to actually read the exact contents and compare with similar options.

## Useful addresses and websites

### **Eat Well, Be Well**

[www.eatwell.gov.uk](http://www.eatwell.gov.uk)

### **Food Standards Agency (Scotland)**

6th Floor

St Magnus House,

25 Guild Street,

Aberdeen

AB11 6NJ

Tel:01224 285100

E-mail: [scotland@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:scotland@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk)

Website: [www.food.gov.uk/scotland](http://www.food.gov.uk/scotland)

### **Take Life On, One Step At A Time**

[www.takelifeon.co.uk](http://www.takelifeon.co.uk)

FACTSHEET

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please call the Chest, Heart & Stroke Scotland Advice Line  
**Monday – Friday 9.30am - 12.30 and 1.30pm - 4.00pm**

**0845 077 6000**