

How a good diet can help your health and wellbeing

Eating a nourishing diet is not only good for your overall health, but it can help your body to fight infection, as well as support skin health and healing. Here we list the foods that make up a balanced diet and what you should eat to help you stay well.



A balanced diet involves eating a good range of food types and making sure that you get enough of each of the essential components. This includes protein, fats, carbohydrates, milk and dairy products, and fruit and vegetables. It is important that you

have enough of these every day to help support your health.

Protein

Protein is important for growth and repair of your muscles, skin and bones. If you have a wound, it is



particularly important to get enough protein, as your wound can take longer to heal if you don't. Eating enough protein will help to strengthen your muscles and connective tissue, which will help with exercises and mobility. Eating a diet with plenty of protein in it can also help you to feel full for longer, which can help you cut down on snacks between meals.

What should I eat?

Foods that are high in protein include meat, fish, eggs, beans, pulses and nuts.

Carbohydrates

Carbohydrates, are a main source of energy. Where you can, try and eat the wholemeal or high fibre versions of these foods, as fibre is an important part of a healthy diet (see p.37).

Complex carbohydrates take your body longer to break down, so they provide a steady source of energy. Simple carbohydrates are high in sugar, so you shouldn't eat too much of them – they are also not good for your teeth.

What should I eat?

Potatoes (keep the skins on for extra fibre), bread and pasta (wholemeal if possible), rice and porridge oats are all good sources of complex carbohydrates.

Fruit and vegetables

Not many people eat enough fruit and vegetables – they should make up just over one third of the food we eat each day. You should try and eat five a day – this means five different types of fruit or vegetable every day. The NHS website has some good advice on how to include more fruit and vegetables into your diet.

What should I eat?

You can eat fresh, frozen, tinned, dried or juiced fruit and vegetables, though fruit juice and smoothies should be limited to no more than a total of 150ml each day.

Milk and dairy foods

Dairy foods and milk are a good source of protein and some vitamins, and they also contain a lot of calcium which is important for strong bones and teeth. Lower-fat versions are better for you where they are available. If you can't eat dairy, for example if you have allergies or if you eat a plant-based



diet, unsweetened calcium-fortified dairy alternatives also count as part of this food group. These can make good alternatives to dairy products.

What should I eat?

Milk, cheese, yogurt and fromage frais. Dairy-free alternatives include soya, coconut, nut or oat-based products.

Fats

It might seem confusing that fats make up part of a balanced diet, but there are different types of fats. Dairy products often have higher levels of 'bad' (saturated) fats. 'Good' (unsaturated) fats are important as a source of some essential fatty acids, and to help your body to absorb vitamins A, D and E.

What should I eat?

Unsaturated fats include olive oil and rapeseed oil, avocados, some nuts (including almonds, Brazil nuts, walnuts, cashews and peanuts), and oily fish (such as kippers, herring, trout, sardines, salmon or mackerel).

What shouldn't I eat?

Saturated fats are found in many foods, both sweet and savoury. They mainly come from animal sources, including meat and dairy products, as well as some plant foods. You should try to cut down on food that is high in saturated fats, because these can block your blood vessels and cause a heart attack or a stroke. Foods that are high in saturated fats include: fatty cuts of meat, butter, ghee, and lard, hard cheese like cheddar, cream, chocolate

confectionery, biscuits, cakes, and pastries, palm oil and coconut oil.

Other things to think about Drinking enough

Drinking plenty is good for your kidneys, your heart and your skin, as well as your brain function and concentration. Ideally you should drink 6-8 cups or glasses a day.

Water, lower-fat milks, lower-sugar or sugar-free drinks and tea and coffee all count towards your fluid intake. If you can switch to decaffeinated tea or coffee, that's even better.

Getting lots of fibre

Eating plenty of fibre is good for your digestive system and helps to prevent constipation by helping your food pass through your body efficiently. It also helps to lower your cholesterol and blood sugar levels, and reduces your risk of heart disease and of some cancers, such as bowel cancer. Leaving the skin on fruit and vegetables where possible and edible is a good extra source of fibre. ➡

Top tips

- Aim to improve one part of your diet at a time
- Check out supermarket offers on fruit and vegetables, especially 'wonky' ranges
- Frozen fruit and vegetables contain almost the same levels of nutrients as fresh, and can help to reduce waste as you just use as much as you need.