Information NOW
Information for people in Newcastle upon Tyne

Healthy eating and drinking

Why do I need a healthy diet?

The food you eat has a huge impact on your health. A well-balanced, nutritious diet can help to prevent many illnesses and improve some existing health conditions, such as **diabetes** or **high blood pressure**. It can lower your chances of developing **heart disease**, **stroke** and some types of **cancer**.

A good diet alongside **keeping physically active** is important to help you to maintain a healthy body weight. This helps to prevent or improve conditions such as **osteoporosis** and **arthritis.**

What is a healthy diet?

You need to drink plenty of water and eat a variety of foods to make sure you're getting the vitamins and nutrients your body needs. This includes:

- fruit and vegetables
- fibre and starch foods
- protein
- dairy products
- drink alcohol in moderation

What should I be eating and drinking?

Fruit and Vegetables

Try to eat 5 portions of fruit and vegetables every day. A portion is:

- An apple, banana, pear, orange or other similar size fruit
- 2 plums or similar size fruit
- A grapefruit or avocado
- A slice of large fruit, such as melon or pineapple
- 3 heaped tablespoons of vegetables (raw, cooked, frozen or tinned)
- 3 heaped tablespoons of fruit salad (fresh or tinned in fruit juice) or stewed fruit
- A heaped tablespoon of dried fruit, such as raisins or apricots
- A dessert bowl of salad
- A cupful of grapes, berries or cherries

Try adding a sliced banana to your cereal, fruit to yoghurt, having a side salad with your lunch, or having a piece of fruit as an afternoon snack. Remember that potatoes don't count towards your fruit and vegetable intake.

Fibre and Starch

Adults should eat 30g of fibre a day. Food containing starch and fibre should make up about one third of the food that you eat. These foods also contain calcium, iron and B vitamins, so are very important for your health. Starch and fibre are found in many foods, including the ones listed below. Choose wholegrain and seeded varieties wherever possible (or fermented bread to maintain a healthy gut), as they contain more nutrients and help bowel movements:

- Bread (wholegrain, seeded and fermented)
- Cereals (oats and barley are particularly good)
- Rice (brown)
- Potatoes (with skins are best)
- Pasta (wholemeal)

Research now shows us that we need to keep "good bacteria" in our gut. Fibre helps protect the gut.

Resistant starch is a form of starch that cannot be digested in the small bowel so it's a type of fibre. It's found naturally in some foods such as bananas, potatoes, grains, and legumes. It's also added into some food products. It can help to control blood glucose levels.

Protein

Protein is found in the foods listed below and should make up around 10% to 15% of your diet:

- Meat
- Fish
- Eggs
- Pulses (peas, beans and lentils)
- Tofu or bean curd
- Plant or soya based meat substitutes such as Quorn

You should eat protein every day as it helps to build and repair your body. For example, healing sore muscles, or growing fingernails. Many of these foods also contain zinc, omega 3 fatty acid and iron, which is important to prevent anaemia. Plant based protein (beans and pulses) are inexpensive and a rich source of protein, as well as fibre, vitamins and minerals.

Red meat and processed meats should be kept to a maximum of 70g a day. This is equivalent to a piece of steak about the size of a pack of cards, 3 average-sized rashers of bacon or slices of ham, or a quarter-pounder beef burger.

It is recommended to eat two portions (140g cooked weight) of white, oily and shellfish a week. One portion of oily fish is essential.

Oily fish such as sardines, herring, mackerel, trout and salmon are all rich sources of omega 3 fatty acids which help prevent heart disease. Oily fish is also a good source of vitamins A and D. Fresh tuna is an oily fish and is high in omega 3 fatty acids. But when it's canned, these fatty acids are reduced to levels similar to white fish. So, although canned tuna is a healthy choice for most people, it doesn't count as oily fish.

Pulses

Pulses are the dry, edible seeds of plants in the legume family; beans, dry peas, lentils and chickpeas are the most common pulses produced in the world. However, the range of canned and dried pulses includes: Adzuki, kidney, lima and black eyed beans.

Pulses are an excellent source of protein, fibre, vitamins and other key nutrients, easy to cook and very versatile. A great way to help contribute towards a healthier way of living. Increasing your fibre is great for your gut health and there is research that links your happiness and wellbeing to gut health.

A healthy gut ensures that the food you eat is broken down efficiently so that your body can absorb and use the nutrients derived from your meal. An inefficient digestive process will result in the food lingering for too long in the gut, allowing it to fester and give off gases that lead to uncomfortable IBS symptoms like bloating, stomach cramps and reflux.

Top tip: as you add more beans and pulses to your meals, also increase the amount of water you drink, to help your gut handle the increase in fibre. Exercise also helps improve your gut function.

Fluids and Water

We should drink 6 to 8 glasses of fluids a day, (circa 1.2 litres). Water, lower fat milk and sugar-free drinks, including tea and coffee, all count.

Not drinking a sufficient amount of fluid can result in problems from headaches and tiredness to dehydration. There are many benefits to be gained from drinking the Recommended Daily Amount (RDA) of water. It is important to keep up fluids during **hot weather.** It can:

- Help to prevent pressure ulcers and heart disease
- Help to avoid constipation
- Maintain a healthy urinary tract and kidneys
- Stabilise blood pressure and prevent fainting
- Improve concentration and short-term memory
- Help to reduce the risk of falls by improving co-ordination
- Improve your dental health
- Keep skin healthy and young-looking
- Improve your general sense of well-being

If you don't enjoy plain water you could:

- Add a slice of lemon or lime

- Drink fizzy water
- Drink water with meals instead of alcohol
- Carry a small bottle of water with you when you go out
- Have a glass of water before breakfast

Keeping regularly hydrated may become more of an issue as you get older. This can become worse because of feeling less thirsty, ill health, chewing or swallowing problems, dehydrating medications or life changes like bereavement.

If you or someone you know struggle to keep hydrated you could:

- Eat foods with high water content. If you have trouble drinking fluids, try including water-rich foods with every meal. These include cucumbers, watermelon, lettuce, strawberries, tomatoes and celery. Try meals such as soups, broths, yoghurt and fruit bowls
- Eat specially created hydrating sweets and snacks such as Jelly drops
- Set a prompt or reminder to drink (this could be using phone apps, virtual assistants such as Amazon Alexa, a written note or diary)
- Have a range of readily available drinks and fluids (hot and cold) at home
- If you are supporting somebody you could prompt themn gently in conversations, visits or phone calls and have a drink with them.

Food labelling

Many of our foods are pre-packaged and we are buying more ready prepared meals. Understanding food labelling is important in maintaining a healthy diet. The following content is important to understand when buying food:

Total fat

High: more than 17.5g of fat per 100g
Low: 3g of fat or less per 100g

Saturated fat

High: more than 5g of saturated fat per 100g
Low: 1.5g of saturated fat or less per 100g

Sugars

High: more than 22.5g of total sugars per 100g
Low: 5g of total sugars or less per 100g

Salt

High: more than 1.5g of salt per 100g (or 0.6g sodium)
Low: 0.3g of salt or less per 100g (or 0.1g sodium)

Read more about how to read food labels from the NHS.

What should I be eating and drinking less of?

Most people in the UK eat and drink too many calories, too much fat, sugar and salt, and not enough fruit, vegetables, oily fish or fibre. Eating too many calories and too much fat and sugar lead to weight gain and tooth decay as well as contributing to other medical conditions including diabetes, high blood pressure and causing stroke, cancer and heart disease.

Fat

There are two main types of fat – saturated and unsaturated. Eating too much saturated fat increases the cholesterol in the blood which can cause serious health problems, such as heart disease or a stroke. These should be eaten infrequently and no more than 20g for a woman and 30g for a man.

Examples of foods which have a high fat content are:

- Cheese
- Cakes, biscuits and chocolate
- Butter and lard
- Pies and pastries
- Meat with visible white fat
- Sausages and bacon
- Cured meats such as chorizo
- Coconut milk
- Chocolate spread
- Processed foods
- Fried foods and rich sauces

Healthier choices include:

- Swap cooking with butter, ghee or coconut and palm oil, for rapeseed or olive oil
- Look at food labels – for example, if you're trying to cut down on saturated fat, eat fewer foods that have more than 5g of saturated fat per 100g.
- Grill, bake, poach or steam food rather than frying or roasting
- Eat oily fish (salmon, mackerel, trout, sardines etc), vegetable oils, soft margarine and nuts as they are good sources of unsaturated fats

High Cholesterol

High cholesterol is when you have too much of a fatty substance called cholesterol in your blood. It's mainly caused by eating fatty food, not exercising enough, being overweight, smoking and drinking alcohol. It can also run in families.

- Too much cholesterol can block your blood vessels. It makes you more likely to have heart problems or a stroke.

Sugar

We are consuming too much sugar in the UK. Sugar consumption leads to eating too many calories and weight gain as well as worsening conditions such as arthritis and osteoporosis. Consumption of sugar- sweetened drinks is particularly high in the UK and too much sugar causes tooth decay.

The Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition has announced that the public should be made aware of the term “free sugars” as these are the sugars we need to consume in smaller amounts. **Free sugars** includes all the monosaccharides and disaccharides added to foods by the manufacturer or cook, plus sugars naturally present in honey, syrups and unsweetened fruit juices.

The recommended allowance of **free sugars** for an adult is 30g, or 7.5 tsp or 7 cubes per day. Children under 11 years should eat less. For example, one 330ml can of cola contains 36g of free sugars and 200ml flavoured milk contains 16.2g free sugars.

Food labels have to include the total amount of sugars but this doesn’t help you when purchasing or making food. Read the ingredients list carefully. Free sugars include:

- cane sugar
- honey
- brown sugar
- high fructose corn syrup
- fruit juice concentrate
- corn syrup
- fructose
- sucrose
- glucose
- crystalline sucrose
- nectars

There are simple ways of cutting down on the amount of sugar in your diet. You could:

- Have fresh or dried fruit as snacks, rather than biscuits and chocolate
- Fruit and vegetables contain natural sugars which are a healthier choice than refined or free sugars
- Drink water, semi skimmed milk, dairy alternatives or tea/coffee instead of fruit juices, smoothies or fizzy/energy drinks.

Salt

Most people know that too much salt is bad for your health. However, it may surprise you to know that 75% of the salt we eat doesn’t come from adding it to your food, but is already contained in the food itself. Processed foods such as soups, sauces, bread, biscuits and ready meals often contain a large amount of salt.

A diet high in salt can cause raised blood pressure which can increase your risk of heart disease and stroke. High blood pressure often has no symptoms, and many people who have high blood pressure don’t know it.

The maximum amount of salt that we should be eating is 6g per day, which is about a teaspoonful or 2.4g sodium. Always check the labels of the food that you buy to see how much salt it contains. To convert sodium to salt, you need to multiply the sodium amount by 2.5. For example, 1g of sodium per 100g is 2.5 grams of salt per 100g.

The following foods are almost always high in salt. To cut down on salt, eat them less often and have smaller amounts:

- anchovies
- bacon
- cheese
- gravy granules
- ham
- olives
- pickles
- prawns
- salami
- salted and dry-roasted nuts
- salt fish, smoked meat and fish
- soy sauce and stock cubes
- yeast extract

Alcohol

Although alcohol is thought to have some health benefits in small quantities there are also many risks when alcohol consumption is too high.

How much alcohol can I drink?

The more you drink the more likely it is that alcohol will harm your health. To keep health risks from alcohol to a low level it is safest to drink fewer than 14 unites a week. We all need several days a week without alcohol. Doctors agree that drinking more than the sensible limit damages health in the short and long term. As we get older, we become more sensitive to the effects of alcohol. See the **alcohol** page for more information.

Managing your weight

Managing your weight is essential throughout your life. You can check if you are in the healthy weight range by **calculating your Body Mass Index (BMI).**

It can be harder to keep a healthy weight if you have a medical condition and exercise less. Being overweight can take 9 years off your life expectancy. It can reduce your quality of life because your are hips, knees, feet and internal organs are under greater strain. It increases your risk of cancer, heart disease and stroke. The Health survey for England 2016, shows an increase in men and women who are overweight or obese, between the ages of 45 and 74 years of age.

Thinking about what you eat, when you eat it and cutting out sugar and fatty snacks can help to manage your weight. For most men, this means sticking to a calorie limit of no more than

1,900kcal a day, and 1,400kcal for most women. As you get older it may be sensible to consume less but you should talk to **your GP.** It is safe to lose weight at a rate of 0.5kg to 1kg (1lb to 2lb) each week by sticking to a daily calorie allowance.

Managing your weight isn't easy and you should give yourself **non-food rewards** if you are on a weight loss programme to maintain your motivation.

There are local groups that can support you and help you to stay motivated such as:

- **Healthworks**
- **Fitness**
- **Events and Activities**
- **Swimming Pools**
- Fitness apps such as walking/running trackers
- diet clubs
- **local gyms (search our organisation directory)**
- NHS and diet programmes

Underweight

Your appetite may decline as you get older. This can become worse because of ill health, chewing or swallowing problems or life changes like bereavement. Becoming underweight can have be harmful to your health. Poor diet can lead to excessive weight loss, weakness, tiredness, confusion, a weakened immune system, **fragile bones** or **osteoporosis** and you are **more at risk of falls.**

You still need to eat a balanced diet. If your appetite has reduced you can try to:

- add unsalted nuts or fruit to cereal
- eat eggs yoghurts and milky puddings
- try peanut butter or baked beans on toast
- baked potato and cheese intake
- switch to smaller meals and frequent snacks, so you're not struggling to eat 3 large meals a day
- avoid filling up on foods that are high in saturated fat or sugars, such as sugary fizzy drinks, cakes and biscuits

If you are losing weight and over 60 years old, then **contact your GP.**

Vegetarian and Vegan diets

- **Vegetarian for Life** are an advocacy and educational charity for older vegetarians and vegans and people who cater for them. Vegetarians don't eat products or by-products of slaughter including fish, meat and poultry.
- **The Vegan Society** believe in a plant-based diet avoiding all animal foods such as meat (including fish, shellfish and insects), dairy, eggs and honey – as well as avoiding animal-derived materials, products tested on animals and places that use animals for entertainment.

Allergens

A food allergy is when your body reacts to certain foods. For some people, it's mild. For others, it can be serious or even life-threatening.

You might get symptoms right after eating the food, or even a few days later. They can affect different parts of your body at the same time.

Symptoms include:

- Feeling dizzy or faint
- Itchy skin or a rash (hives)
- Swelling of the lips, face, or eyes
- Coughing, wheezing, or trouble breathing
- Sneezing or a blocked/runny nose
- Feeling or being sick
- Tummy pain
- Diarrhoea

If your doctor thinks you have a food allergy, they might refer you for:

- A **skin-prick test** (a small amount of the food is put on your skin to see if it reacts)
- **Blood tests**
- A **special diet**

If you have a food allergy its important to :

- **Always check food labels and menus**
- **Tell others** about your allergy (family, friends, restaurant staff, airline crew)
- If you have an **adrenaline injector** (like an EpiPen), carry it with you and use it straight away if you have a serious reaction.
  Instructions are printed on the side if someone else needs to help.

Natasha Allergy Research Foundation provide information, advice and research on food allergies in the UK.

Local support

Healthworks offer help, advice and support, including food skills and staying steady programmes.

Ways to Wellness service helps people in the West of Newcastle to manage their long-term health conditions through activities such as:

- Getting involved in local groups and activities
- Accessing specialist services and support
- Healthy eating and getting more active

Eating Distress North East helps people to increase their understanding of how their emotions influence how they use food. They support them through a range of sessions to make changes. NIWE offers a confidential telephone helpline, groupwork sessions, and occasional open support sessions.

Help with getting food in Newcastle

The NHS Healthy Start Scheme is for people who are more than 10 weeks pregnant, or have children under the age of 4, who receive certain benefits. You get a free prepaid card that's topped up every 4 weeks to buy: milk, fruit and vegetables. You can also collect free vitamins from locations listed here. You can use the card in shops that accept Mastercard payments and sell at least one of these Healthy Start foods.

Free meals and cheap food in Newcastle is available if you need it.

Food Banks and emergency food is available in Newcastle if you need it.

Watch Top Tips for Feeding Your Child on a Low Budget

Other Useful Information

- **Wellness Reboot Quiz**
- **NHS weight loss plan**
- Read Age UK's guide to **Healthy Living.**
- **Alcohol Concern**
- **Food Standards Agency**
- **NHS.UK** – Food and diet pages
- **Ramadan Health Guide** – a guide to healthy fasting. Communities in Action booklet
- **One You on alcohol**
- **Public Health England** has produced a booklet called **Active at Home** and the **Eat Well Guide.**

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Useful Organisations

Food Standards Agency

Email: helpline@food.gov.uk

Website: www.food.gov.uk

Telephone: 020 7276 8829

Address: Floors 6 and 7, SW1H 9EX

British Nutrition Foundation

Email: postbox@nutrition.org.uk

Website: www.nutrition.org.uk

Telephone: 020 7557 7930

Address: New Derwent House , WC1X 8TA

Eating Distress North East

Email: enquiries@edne.org.uk

Website: https://www.edne.org.uk/

Telephone: 0191 221 0233

Address: Units 4/5, NE1 5DW

Nourish Food School

Email: hello@nourishfoodschool.co.uk

Website: https://www.nourishfoodschool.co.uk/

Telephone: 07888280155

Address: Nourish Food School, NE6 5PA

Healthworks

Email: enquiries@hwn.org.uk

Website: https://www.healthworksne.org.uk/

Telephone: 0191 272 4244

Address: Health Resource Centre, NE4 8BE

NHS 111

Website: www.nhs.uk/111

Ways to Wellness

Email: info@waystowellness.org.uk

Website: http://waystowellness.org.uk

Telephone: 0191 816 3540

Address: Ways to Wellness, NE1 3RH

NHS

Website: www.nhs.uk

Vegetarian for Life

Email: info@vegetarianforlife.org.uk

Website: https://vegetarianforlife.org.uk/

Telephone: 0161 257 0887

Address: 83 Ducie Street, M1 2JQ

UK Health Security Agency

Website: https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england

Telephone: 0300 303 8395

Healthy Start Scheme

Email: healthy.start@nhsbsa.nhs.uk

Website: https://www.healthystart.nhs.uk

Address: Healthy Start, NE1 6SN

Geoffrey Rhodes Centre NHS Health visiting services

Website: https://www.nhs.uk/Services/clinics/Overview/DefaultView.aspx?id=96346

Telephone: 0191 282 3319

Address: Geoffrey Rhodes Centre, NE6 2UZ

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