Healthy Eating

Maintaining a healthy diet

Advice for older people

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This leaflet was written in association with the Nutritional Advisory Group for Elderly People (NAGE) of the British Dietetic Association (BDA). Web: www.bda.uk.com

The Eatwell Plate on pages 4–5 is based on information provided by the Food Standards Agency with permission of the Controller of HMSO.

If you would like this leaflet in another format, such as large print or audio tape, please contact the Information Resources Team on 020 7278 1114.
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Eating well means enjoying your food and having plenty of variety. Here is a guide to the foods you should try to eat each day.

Fruit and vegetables

Try to eat a variety of fruit, vegetables and salads. They are full of vitamins, antioxidants, minerals and fibre. Aim to eat five portions a day. Frozen, tinned, dried fruit and vegetables, and fruit juice count too. Use fruit and vegetables that are tinned in water or their natural juice instead of in syrup or oil. Try to include some fruit and vegetables at each meal and use fruit as a snack between meals.

Meat, poultry, fish, eggs, beans, lentils and nuts

Eat a portion of any of these foods at two of your meals each day. All these foods contain proteins which build and repair your body. You do not need to eat meat or fish every day – cheese, well-cooked eggs, beans, lentils or tofu can be eaten instead.

Foods containing fat and sugar

Sugary and fatty foods provide us with energy and can make meals taste better, but use them sparingly if you are watching your weight as they are high in calories. Don’t eat these foods at the expense of other more nutritious foods.
Bread, other cereals and potatoes

Try to have a serving of starchy food (such as bread, breakfast cereal, potatoes, rice, noodles or pasta) with every meal. These foods give energy. Wholegrain cereals have more B vitamins, minerals and fibre, which keep us well and helps prevent constipation.

Milk and dairy foods

These foods contain calcium which helps to keep bones strong. Try to have three servings a day. A serving can be:

- 1 cup of milk
- 1 yoghurt or fromage frais
- 25g (1oz) cheese
- a small pot of cottage cheese

Low-fat dairy products still have all the goodness in them, they just have less fat and less calories.

Drinks

Drink at least 6 to 8 glasses of liquid every day to keep you hydrated and help digestion. These could include water, tea, coffee, fruit juice, fruit squash, milk and milky drinks, or occasional fizzy drinks.

Enjoying and eating a good variety of food is important. If you eat well, you are likely to feel healthier, stay active for longer and protect yourself against illness.
Eating habits

Eating regular meals and snacks is a good habit. If you get used to missing meals, or eating unhealthily, you may start to feel tired, depressed and cold. Check your eating habits against the following questions and answers.

1. Do you always eat three meals a day?
   - breakfast
   - lunch (midday meal)
   - tea (evening meal).

   Good regular eating patterns are essential to keeping well. This means three meals or snack meals daily.

2. If you don’t manage three meals a day, what do you tend to replace meals with?
   - tea and biscuits
   - bread and jam
   - nothing.

   Instead of missing meals, you could try some of the simple snacks and meals suggested later in this leaflet.

3. Over the last year:
   - Have you lost over one stone in weight without trying?
   - Have you stayed around the same weight?
   - Have you put on more than one stone without trying?

   Check your weight regularly (for example, monthly). If you gain or lose weight without trying, see your doctor.
4. Are your bowels regular?
Eating a diet with plenty of fibre is important for good health and well-being. It also helps prevent constipation. Wholegrain breakfast cereals, wholemeal bread and pasta, brown rice and chapattis are all good sources of fibre. So are fruit, vegetables, beans and lentils. But avoid adding raw bran to your food as it can prevent you from absorbing some of the goodness in your food. Drinking plenty of liquid helps to keep your bowels healthy and prevent constipation. Aim for at least 6 to 8 glasses a day.

5. Do you eat the following foods which are rich in iron?
- red meat, including liver and kidney
- eggs (particularly the yolks)
- ‘fortified’ breakfast cereals containing added iron
- green vegetables such as spinach, broccoli and okra
- baked beans, lentils and other pulses such as kidney beans.
These foods are rich in iron and will help prevent anaemia, which causes tiredness and shortness of breath. Eat fresh fruit and drink fruit juices or vitamin C enriched drinks with meals to help your body absorb iron. Don’t drink tea with meals, because tannin in tea can reduce the amount of iron you absorb from your food.

6. Do you eat the following foods rich in vitamin D?
- oily fish such as salmon, sardines and pilchards
- eggs
- dried milk and evaporated milk with added vitamin D
- margarine and low-fat spreads.
Vitamin D, which helps to keep the bones healthy, is found in all these foods. Your body can also make vitamin D when your skin is
exposed to sunlight. If you can’t leave the house and are unable to sit outside, or are covered up all day, you may need to take a vitamin D supplement. Ask your doctor for advice. Our free advice leaflet Healthy Bones gives more information about looking after your bones.

**Meal ideas**

Try to eat regularly, at least three times a day. You may not always feel like cooking – if you don’t, there are a wide variety of tinned, chilled and frozen ‘ready meals’ available. Stews and soups are particularly easy to make and you only need one pot to cook them in.

Eating healthily doesn’t have to be expensive. Try to buy seasonal fruit and vegetables to keep costs down. Most fresh fruit and vegetables are sold loose, so you don’t need to buy large quantities of one item. All food, whether hot or cold, provides warmth and energy. A snack can be just as nourishing as a more traditional meal. Here are some suggestions:

**Breakfast foods**

- toasted currant teacake and a milky drink
- fruit – fresh, tinned, dried (or fruit juices)
- crumpets, muffins or toast with butter and jam or cheese
- peanut butter or banana sandwich and fruit juice
- hard boiled egg and toast
- cheese and tomato on toast
• yoghurt (try it with muesli, honey and fresh fruit)
• pancakes with grilled bacon and tomato
• wholegrain breakfast cereal, for example, porridge, muesli, Shredded Wheat, Bran Flakes.

Main meals
• spaghetti bolognaise with green salad
• corned beef hash with green vegetables
• roast chicken with potatoes and vegetables
• cauliflower or macaroni cheese with bread and salad
• boiled bacon with parsley sauce and broad beans
• steamed or baked fish with potatoes and vegetables
• spinach and potato curry with chapattis or boiled rice
• omelette with potato and vegetables
• meat or bean casserole with swede and cabbage
• liver and onions with mashed potatoes and carrots
• shepherd’s pie or fish pie with peas and green beans
• vegetable stir-fry with noodles.

Quick meals
• sandwiches – try tuna, cheese, corned beef, peanut butter, hummus, ham or egg and salad – and use different breads for variety
• toast – with pilchards, well-cooked scrambled egg, baked beans, creamed mushrooms or tinned spaghetti