Your guide to the eatwell plate

helping you eat a healthier diet



Get started now

See inside!

Department of Health in association with the Welsh Government, the Scottish Government and the Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland

Eating well and having a healthy lifestyle can help us feel our best – and make a big difference to our long-term health.

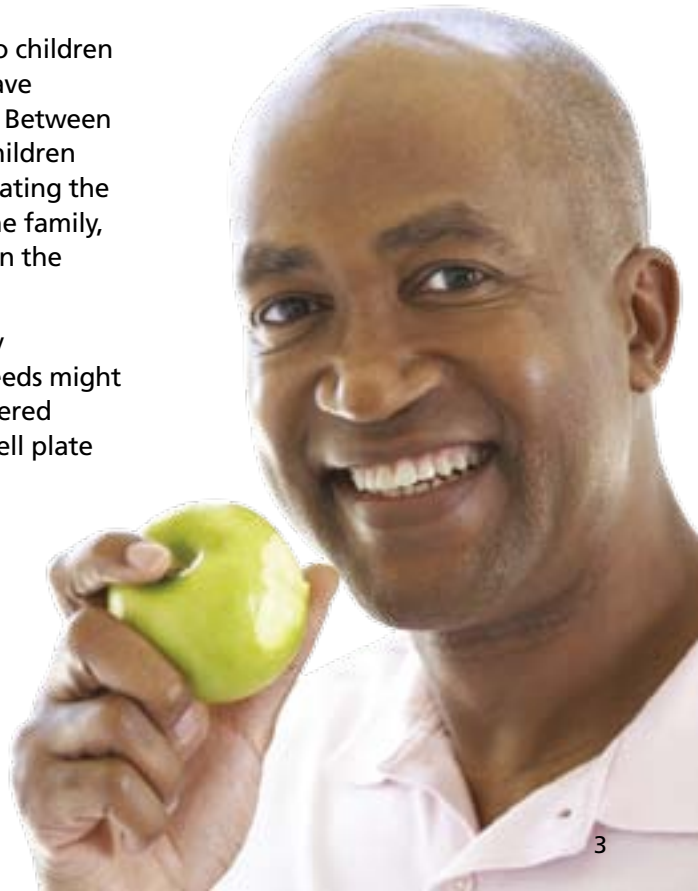
So why not get started today?

Is the eatwell plate for me?

The eatwell plate applies to most people, whether they're a healthy weight or overweight, whether they eat meat or are vegetarian, and it applies to people of all ethnic origins.

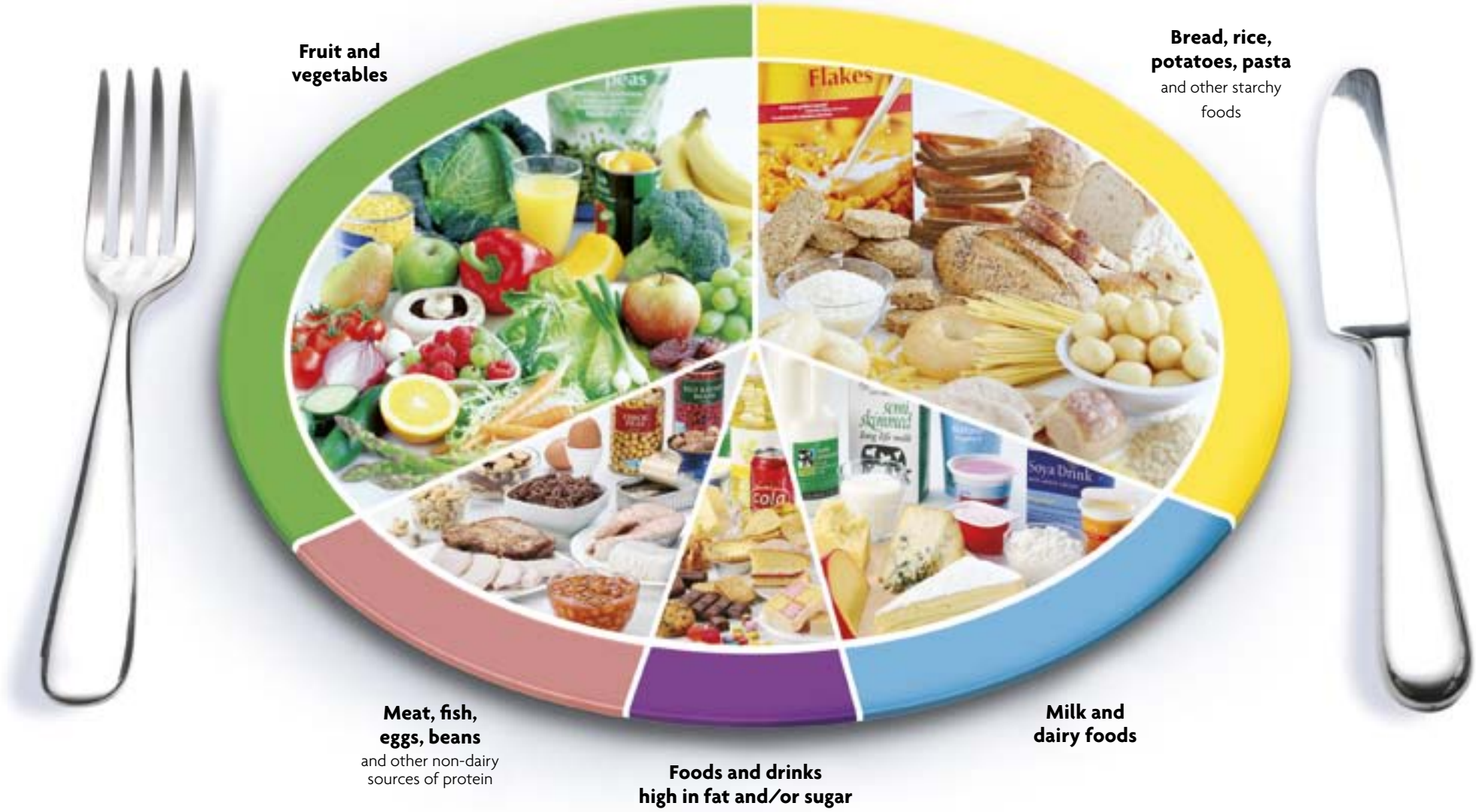
However, it doesn't apply to children under two, because they have different nutritional needs. Between the ages of two and five, children should gradually move to eating the same foods as the rest of the family, in the proportions shown on the eatwell plate.

Anyone with special dietary requirements or medical needs might want to check with a registered dietitian whether the eatwell plate applies to them.



The eatwell plate

Use the eatwell plate to help you get the balance right. It shows how much of what you eat should come from each food group.



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How can the eatwell plate help?

The eatwell plate shows the different types of food we need to eat – and in what proportions – to have a well balanced and healthy diet.

So take a look at what you eat during the day (including any snacks) and try to eat:

- **plenty of fruit and vegetables**
- **plenty of bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods – choose wholegrain varieties when you can**
- **some milk and dairy foods**
- **some meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein**
- **just a small amount of foods and drinks high in fat and/or sugar**

It's a good idea to try to get this balance right every day, but you don't need to do it at every meal.

And you might find it easier to get the balance right over a longer period, say a week.

When should I use the eatwell plate?

You can use the eatwell plate to help you make healthier choices whenever you're:

- **at home deciding what to eat, what to cook or what to shop for**
- **out shopping – aim to fill your trolley with a healthy balance of different types of food**
- **eating out in a restaurant, café or work canteen, or when you're choosing food 'on the run' – follow the eatwell plate to help you choose a healthy balance**

How does it work?



As you can see on the eatwell plate, the food we eat has been divided up into five food groups.

Try to choose a variety of different food from each of the food groups, apart from the 'Foods and drinks high in fat and/or sugar' group. This will help you get the wide range of nutrients your body needs to stay healthy and work properly.

It's important to have some fat in your diet, but you don't need to eat any of the food in the 'foods and drinks high in fat and/or sugar' group as part of a healthy diet.

Many of the things we eat, such as pizzas, casseroles, pasta dishes and sandwiches, are a combination of the food groups. For these sorts of food, you just need to work out the main ingredients and think about how these fit with the sections on the plate.

For example, if you're having a chicken stir-fry with rice, this is made up of:

- **chicken – this fits in the section for meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein**
- **vegetables – this fits in the section for fruit and vegetables**
- **rice – this fits in the section for bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods**

Let's take a closer look at each of the food groups...

A closer look at:

Bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods





Starchy food is a really important part of a healthy diet and should make up about a third of the food we eat. Try to choose wholegrain varieties when you can.





Most of us should eat more starchy food – try to include at least one starchy food with each of your main meals. So, you could:

- **start the day with a wholegrain breakfast cereal – choose one lower in salt and sugars**
- **have a sandwich for lunch**
- **round off the day with potatoes, pasta or rice as a base for your evening meal**

Some people think starchy food is fattening, but gram for gram it contains less than half the calories of fat. You just need to watch the fats you add when you're cooking and serving this sort of food, because that's what increases the calorie content.

Why choose wholegrain?

Wholegrain food contains more fibre than white or refined starchy food, and often more of other nutrients. We also digest wholegrain food more slowly so it can help us feel full for longer.

Wholegrain food includes:

- **wholemeal and wholegrain bread, pitta and chapatti**
- **wholewheat pasta**
- **brown rice**
- **wholegrain breakfast cereals and whole oats**



A closer look at:

Fruit and vegetables



Lots of people know we should be eating more fruit and veg, but most of us still aren't eating enough. Fruit and veg should make up about a third of the food we eat each day.







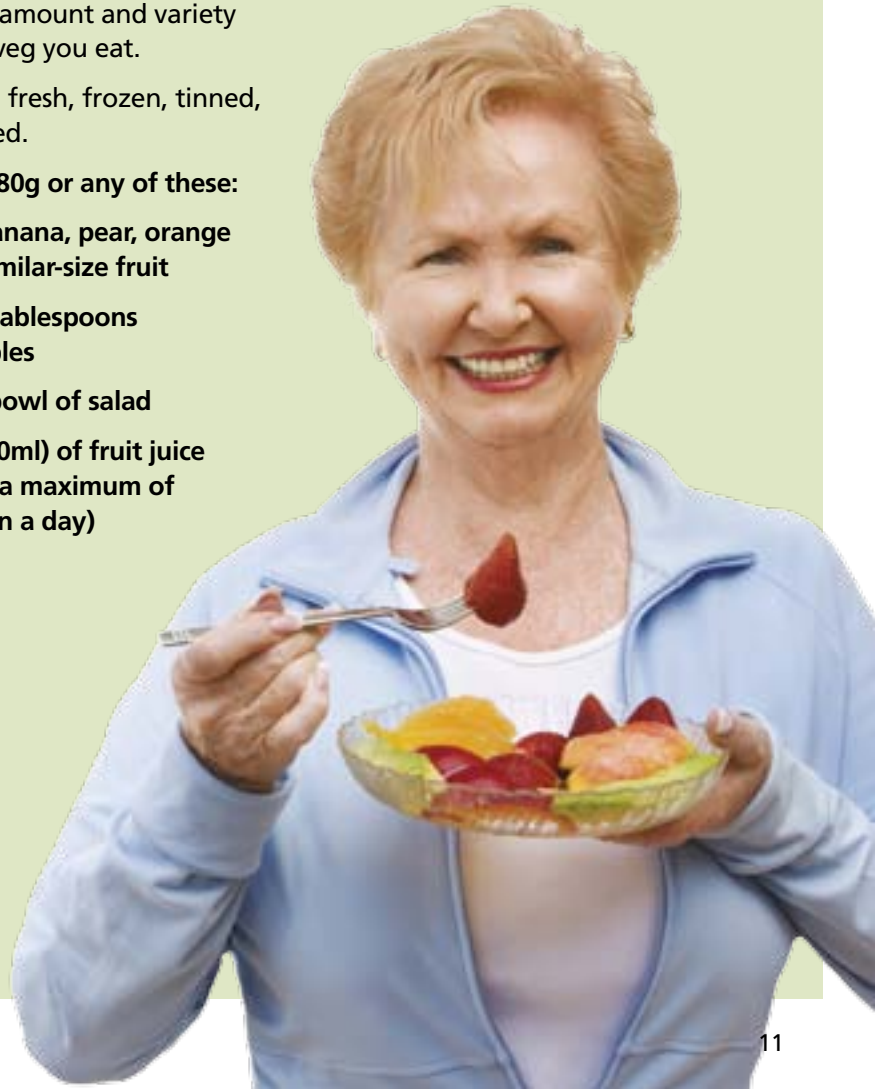
Aim to eat at least five portions of a variety of fruit and veg each day.

If you count how many portions you're having, it might help you increase the amount and variety of fruit and veg you eat.

Choose from fresh, frozen, tinned, dried or juiced.

A portion is 80g or any of these:

- **1 apple, banana, pear, orange or other similar-size fruit**
- **3 heaped tablespoons of vegetables**
- **a dessert bowl of salad**
- **a glass (150ml) of fruit juice (counts as a maximum of one portion a day)**



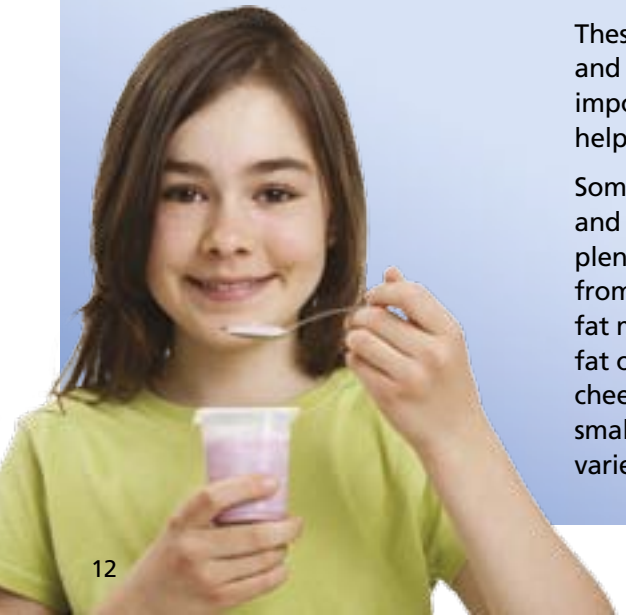
A closer look at:

Milk and dairy foods



Try to eat some milk and dairy food – such as cheese, yoghurt and fromage frais – every day.





These are good sources of protein and vitamins, and they're also an important source of calcium, which helps to keep our bones strong.

Some dairy food can be high in fat and saturated fat, but there are plenty of lower-fat options to choose from. For example, why not try 1% fat milk – it contains about half the fat of semi-skimmed – or reduced-fat cheese? Or you could have just a small amount of the high-fat varieties less often.

Checking the label

When you're food shopping, it's a good idea to look at the label to help you make a healthier choice. Try comparing similar products and choose the ones with less fat, saturated fat, sugars and salt. Sometimes there can be a big difference between similar products.

Many foods are now labelled with nutrition information. Front of pack nutrition labels contain information to help you make decisions, such as percentage of your Guideline Daily Amount and/or traffic light colour coding. Where traffic light colours are used, you can tell at a glance if they are **high** (red), **medium** (amber) or **low** (green) in fat, saturated fat, sugars and salt.

¼ pie (175g) typically contains (pack serves 4)

Calories	Fat	Saturates	Sugars	Salt
383 kcal	MEDIUM 18.5g	HIGH 8.9g	LOW 2.2g	MEDIUM 1.28g
	26%	45%	2%	21%

of your guideline daily amount

For a healthier choice, try to pick products with more greens and ambers and fewer reds.

To find out more, see **nhs.uk/foodlabels**



A closer look at:

Meat, fish, eggs, beans

and other non-dairy sources of protein



As well as being great sources of protein, these types of food are rich in vitamins and/or minerals, so try to eat some food from this group every day.





And aim for at least two portions of fish a week, including a portion of oily fish. Most people should be eating more fish, but there are recommended limits for oily fish, crab and some types of white fish. See nhs.uk/fish for more information about these limits and choosing fish from sustainable sources.

Some types of meat are high in fat, particularly saturated fat. So, when you're buying meat, remember that the type of cut or meat product you choose, and how you cook it, can make a big difference.

To cut down on fat:

- **choose lean cuts of meat and go for leaner mince**
- **cut the fat off meat and the skin off chicken**
- **try to grill meat and fish instead of frying**
- **try not to eat too many sausages, meat pies and salami, because these are often high in fat**
- **have a poached or boiled egg instead of a fried egg**

Beans, peas and lentils (which are all types of pulses) are good alternatives to meat because they're naturally very low in fat, and they're high in fibre, protein, and vitamins and minerals.



A closer look at:

Foods and drinks high in fat and/or sugar



Try to eat just a small amount of these foods and drinks.

Foods that are high in fat include cakes, biscuits, butter, cream and oil. Cakes and biscuits are often high in sugars too.

Lots of the sugars we have come from sugary fizzy drinks, chocolate and sweets, so it's a good idea to cut down on these.

If you get hungry between meals, try to go for healthier snacks such as fruit, wholemeal toast, a low-fat yoghurt or a few unsalted nuts.

Check the table at the back of this booklet for examples of food included in each of the food groups.



Cutting down on saturated fat

Cutting down on saturated fat can lower your blood cholesterol and reduce your risk of heart disease. Most people in the UK eat too much saturated fat – about 20% more than the recommended maximum amount.

- **The average man should have no more than 30g saturated fat a day.**
- **The average woman should have no more than 20g saturated fat a day.**

Children should have less saturated fat than adults. But remember that a low-fat diet isn't suitable for children under five.

One of the easiest ways to cut down on saturated fat is to compare the labels on similar products and choose the one lower in saturated fat.

And watch out for foods that are high in saturated fat, including fatty cuts of meat, sausages, meat pies, butter, cream, cheese, chocolate, pastries, cakes and biscuits.

You don't need to stop eating these foods altogether, but eating too much of these can make it easy to have more than the recommended maximum amount of saturated fat.

To find out more, see nhs.uk/satfat



Cutting down on salt



Eating too much salt can raise your blood pressure, which triples your risk of developing heart disease or stroke. And since many people in the UK eat too much salt, that means that lots of people would benefit from cutting down.

Adults should eat no more than 6g of salt a day. Children should have even less.

6g of salt is about a teaspoonful. But remember we're not just talking about the salt you add to your food because most of the salt we eat is already in everyday foods such as bread, breakfast cereal, pasta sauce and soup.

Checking the label and choosing foods that are lower in salt is one of the best ways to cut down.

To find out more, see nhs.uk/salt

How much food do I need?

We all need different amounts of energy (or calories) from food to be a healthy weight. How much you need depends on lots of things, including how active you are.

Whenever we eat more than our body needs, we put on weight. This is because we store the energy we don't use as fat. Even if we have just small amounts of extra energy each day, we can put on weight. And most people in the UK eat more than they need.

Try to:

- **eat only as much food as you need**
- **improve the balance of your diet by looking at the eatwell plate**
- **get more active**

If you're eating a good balance of the different food groups, and you're a healthy weight, you're probably eating about the right amount.

But if you're overweight, then you may need to eat less, improve the balance of your diet and/or get more active. Ask your GP, or other health professional, for advice about losing weight.

Do you know if you're a healthy weight? Find out at nhs.uk/bmi

Do I need vitamin and mineral supplements?

Most people can get all the nutrients their body needs by eating healthily. And supplements can't do the same job as a balanced diet.

However, some people do need certain supplements.

For example, if you're pregnant or planning to get pregnant, you should take a daily 400 microgram (mcg) folic acid supplement from the time you stop using contraception until the 12th week of pregnancy.

Women who have already had a pregnancy affected by neural tube defects, need to take 5mg of folic acid each day until the 12th week of pregnancy. In addition, women who have diabetes and those taking anti-epileptic medicines should consult their GP for advice.

People should also take a daily 10mcg vitamin D supplement if they:

- **Are pregnant or breastfeeding**
- **Are aged 65 or over**
- **Aren't exposed to much sun, for example, those who cover up their skin for cultural reasons, who are housebound or confined indoors for long periods**
- **Have darker skin, such as people of African-Caribbean and South Asian origin**

For more information, talk to your GP or another health professional, or see nhs.uk/vitamins



Food group	What's included?	What to do
Bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods	• Bread, including: soda bread, rye bread, pitta, flour tortilla, baguettes, chapatti, bagels • Rice • Potatoes • Breakfast cereals, oats • Pasta, noodles • Maize, cornmeal, polenta • Millet, spelt • Couscous, bulgur wheat, pearl barley • Yams and plantains	Eat plenty of bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods every day. Choose wholegrain varieties when you can.
Fruit and vegetables	• All fruit and veg, including: apples, pears, oranges, bananas, grapes, strawberries, mango, pineapple, raisins, broccoli, courgettes, cabbage, peas, sweetcorn, lettuce, tomatoes, carrots	Eat plenty of fruit and vegetables. Aim for at least five portions of a variety of fruit and veg each day. There is evidence to suggest that people who eat lots of fruit and veg are less likely to develop chronic diseases such as coronary heart disease and some types of cancer. *Remember not to include potatoes when you're adding up your portions of fruit and veg. because these count as a starchy food.*
Milk and dairy foods	• Milk • Cheese • Yoghurt • Fromage frais • Cottage cheese • Cream cheese • Quark	Eat some milk and dairy foods every day. Choose lower-fat options when you can or have just a small amount of the high-fat varieties less often. *Butter and cream aren't included in this group – they fit in 'Foods and drinks high in fat and/or sugar' because they are high in fat.*
Meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein	• Meat, poultry and game, including: lamb, beef, pork, chicken, bacon, sausages, burgers • White fish (fresh, frozen or canned), including: haddock, plaice, pollack, coley, cod • Oily fish (fresh, frozen or canned), including: mackerel, sardines, trout, salmon, whitebait • Shellfish (fresh, frozen or canned), including: prawns, mussels, crab, squid, oysters • Eggs • Nuts • Beans and other pulses, including: lentils, chickpeas, baked beans, kidney beans, butter beans	Eat some meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein every day. Eat at least two portions of fish a week, including a portion of oily fish. *Beans and other pulses fit in this group and they are also included in 'Fruit and vegetables'. But they can only count as a maximum of one portion of fruit and veg a day.*
Foods and drinks high in fat and/or sugar	• Cakes • Sugary drinks • Biscuits • Chocolate • Sweets • Puddings • Pastries • Ice cream • Jam • Honey • Crisps • Butter • Margarine and spreads • Oil • Cream • Mayonnaise	Eat just a small amount of foods and drinks high in fat and/or sugar. Cutting down on these types of food could help you control your weight because they often contain lots of calories. And don't forget that sugary foods and drinks can cause tooth decay, particularly if eaten between meals, so having fewer of these could also protect your teeth.

Tips

Check the labels on different types of bread and try to choose the one lower in salt.

Compare different breakfast cereals and choose the ones lower in salt and sugar.

If you're having chips, try oven chips instead of deep-fried.

When you're cooking or serving starchy food, try to avoid:

- adding too much fat (e.g. by spreading too much butter, margarine or spread on bread)
- adding rich sauces and dressings (e.g. cream or cheese sauce on pasta)

Try to eat as many different types of fruit and veg as you can.

Always keep some fruit with you to snack on when you're hungry.

Keep some frozen veg in the freezer, so you don't run out.

When you're cooking or serving fruit and veg, try to avoid:

- adding fat or rich sauces (e.g. carrots glazed with butter or parsnips roasted in a lot of fat)
- adding sugar or syrupy dressings (e.g. stewed apple with sugar or chocolate sauce on banana)

Try switching to lower-fat milk, such as 1% fat milk.

Compare labels on yoghurts and try to choose the ones lower in saturated fat and sugars.

Try to use low-fat yoghurt or fromage frais instead of cream, soured cream or crème fraîche.

Keep an eye on how much cheese you eat – most types of cheese are high in saturated fat and salt.

When you're cooking and serving these foods, try not to add extra fat or oil.

When you're buying meat, ask your butcher for a lean cut or compare the labels on different products and choose the one lower in saturated fat.

Watch out for meat and fish products in pastry, batter or breadcrumbs – these can be high in fat and/or salt.

Instead of sugary, fizzy drinks and juice drinks, go for water or unsweetened fruit juice (remember to dilute these for children).

Or try diluting fruit juice with sparkling water.

Instead of cakes or biscuits, try having a currant bun or some malt loaf with low-fat spread.

Use a reduced-fat spread instead of butter.

When you're cooking, use just a small bit of unsaturated oil such as sunflower, rapeseed or olive, rather than butter, lard or ghee.

If you take sugar in hot drinks, or add sugar to your breakfast cereal, gradually reduce the amount until you can cut it out altogether.

8 tips for eating well

1. Base your meals on starchy foods
2. Eat lots of fruit and veg
3. Eat more fish – including a portion of oily fish each week
4. Cut down on saturated fat and sugar
5. Try to eat less salt – no more than 6g a day for adults
6. Get active and try to be a healthy weight
7. Drink plenty of water
8. Don't skip breakfast



How can I find out more about healthy eating?

To find out more:

- get general advice from **nhs.uk/healthyeating**
- contact your local community dietitian – you can do this through your health centre or GP
- contact your local NHS health promotion unit if you have one

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