# A red heart with text on a black background

# Healthy eating

**What's on this page?**

* A balanced diet
* Foods to eat less often and in small amounts

Eating a healthy diet can help reduce your risk of developing coronary heart disease and stop you from gaining too much weight, reducing your risk of diabetes and high blood pressure.

It can also help lower your cholesterol levels and reduce your risk of some cancers.

Even if you already have a heart condition, a healthy diet can benefit your heart.

**A balanced diet**

Everyone should aim for a well-balanced diet. Strict diets are hard to follow long term and may not provide the balance of nutrients you need.

Healthy eating is not about cutting out or focusing on individual foods or nutrients. It’s thinking about your whole diet and eating a variety of foods in the right amounts to give your body what it needs.

There are foods we need to eat more of, like fruit and vegetables, and others we need to eat less of, which are foods high in saturated fat, sugar and salt. It's all about getting the right balance. Eating healthily can be tasty, simple and fun. It’s about making small, long-term changes and enjoying the food you eat.

**Fruit and vegetables**

Fruit and vegetables are an important part of a healthy diet. Eating at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day has been shown to help lower your risk of developing heart and circulatory diseases. This section should make up just over a third of the food you eat each day.

There are 5 ways to get your 5 a day:

* fresh
* frozen
* dried
* juiced
* tinned (in juice or water).

Try to have a variety.

For fresh, frozen or canned fruit and vegetables, a portion is 80g. This is equal to about one apple, one banana, a handful of grapes, three tablespoons of corn, or half an avocado.

A portion of dried fruit is 30g and only counts for one of your recommended five portions. This means that even if you have three portions of dried fruit in a day, it counts as one portion of fruit and vegetables. 30g of dried fruit is about one heaped tablespoon of raisins or three dried apricots.

Limit fruit juice and smoothies to 150ml a day because of the free sugars in them. Free sugar is what we call any sugar added to a food or drink. Or the sugar that is already in honey, syrup and fruit juice.

Try to avoid adding rich sauces or butter to your vegetables and sugar or syrups to fruit. A good idea is to choose tinned fruit and vegetables with no added salt or sugar.

**Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates**

This group includes potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates such as breakfast cereals, porridge, yams and plantains. Some root vegetables such as sweet potato, parsnips and turnips are part of the vegetable group.

These foods should make up just over a third of the food we eat. Choose wholegrain or wholemeal varieties as they contain more fibre, vitamins and minerals.

Eating more fibre helps to keep your digestive system healthy, can prevent constipation and can lower your risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers.

**Dairy and alternatives**

Milk, cheese, yogurt, fromage frais, quark and non-dairy alternatives are included in this group. Non-dairy alternatives include soya, rice, oat, and nut-based drinks and yogurt. Choose those that are unsweetened and fortified with calcium where possible.

Butter, cream and ice cream are not included in this group as they are high in saturated fat. They are in the foods high in fat, salt and sugar group.

Dairy foods are a good source of protein and calcium which is important for strong bones and teeth. However, the amount of fat in them varies and they're often high in saturated fat. To make healthier choices, choose lower-fat and lower-sugar options where possible.

Swap whole milk for semi skimmed milk or 1 per cent fat milk and choose low or reduced fat versions of cheese and yogurts.

If using whole milk products, have them in smaller amounts and eat them less often.

**Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins**

These foods are sources of protein, vitamins and minerals.

Beans and pulses are low in fat and high in protein, fibre, vitamins and minerals. They are also considered a more sustainable source of protein than meat.

Aim to have two portions of sustainably sourced fish per week, one of which is oily. Some of the fish you can add to your diet include tuna, cod, haddock, and tilapia. Oily fish includes salmon, sardines, trout, mackerel, herring, and sprats.

Red and processed meat such as sausages, bacon and cured meats have been shown to increase the risk of illnesses such as cancer and heart disease. If you eat more than 90g a day which is about six thin slices of bacon or two medium sized sausages, try to cut down to no more than 70g per day.

When possible, remove skin and visible fat from meat and poultry.

**Oils and spreads**

The body needs fats, but we need to think about the type of fat we eat. Generally, we are eating too much saturated fat in the UK.

Unsaturated oils such as rapeseed, olive or sunflower oils are healthier choices than saturated fats like butter and lard, ghee, coconut and palm oil.

Because of the saturated fat content, butter is not included in this section. It's in the ‘foods to eat less often and in small amounts’ section as it’s not needed for a healthy diet.

All types of fat are high in energy (calories), and so cutting down on these foods could help to control your weight.

**Foods to eat less often and in small amounts**

Most people in the UK need to reduce the amount of saturated fat, salt and sugar they eat. If these foods are included in your diet, try to eat them less often and in small amounts.

**Saturated fat**

Too much saturated fat can increase blood cholesterol levels and increase the risk of heart attack and stroke. Replacing animal fats such as butter with plant-based oils like olive oil and vegetable oil can help you reduce how much saturated fat you eat.

**Salt**

Eating too much salt can increase the risk of developing high blood pressure. Having high blood pressure increases the risk of developing coronary heart disease. If you prefer salty foods, try squeezing some fresh lemon juice onto your food instead of adding raw salt.

**Sugar**

Too much sugar can increase the risk of weight gain and tooth decay. To reduce how much sugar you have, try doing it slowly over time instead of making a big sudden change. You can, for example, use half a teaspoon less sugar in your tea everyday instead of immediately switching to unsweetened tea.

**Drinking water**

Aim to have the equivalent of 6 to 8 glasses of fluid a day. Water, lower-fat milk and sugar-free drinks including tea and coffee all count. Limit fruit juice and/or smoothies to a total of 150ml a day.

**Alcohol**

If you drink alcohol, it's important to keep within the recommended guidelines. It is recommended that you drink no more than 14 units of alcohol per week and have several alcohol-free days in a week. Choosing smaller drinks such as single shots and smaller wine glasses can help you control how much you drink.

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