

# Nutrition

## Factsheet



# Nutrition

## Why eat a healthy diet?

From getting all the essential nutrients to keep your mind and body strong and healthy, there are many reasons to enjoy a well-balanced diet.

There's no one type of food that can provide all the nutrients a human body needs, so it's important to eat a wide range of foods. Eating well can help you to feel your best.

- Easier to maintain a healthy weight
- Increased energy levels
- A lower risk of health conditions like stroke, diabetes, and some types of cancer
- Keeps bones and joints strong
- Enhances mood
- Encourages good mental health
- Supports a healthy immune system
- Aids memory and learning
- Helps to improve sleep



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## Eating for brain power

From helping to ward off diseases like Alzheimer's and dementia to improving our mental health, there's growing evidence that certain foods can boost brain health.



### Antioxidants

Eating plenty of fruit and vegetables will nourish your body with antioxidants. A substance that combats damaging free radicals helping to protect against poor mental health. Try adding some pumpkin seeds, blueberries, oranges and broccoli to your diet.



### B vitamins

The brain needs B vitamins (including folate) for brain development, and a deficiency can cause depressive symptoms. Eat plenty of green and leafy veg such as broccoli and kale to add these important nutrients to your diet.



### Omega-3s

Eating oily fish may lower the risk of depression due to the anti-inflammatory properties of the omega 3 fatty acids. Add some salmon or sardines to your weekly shopping list or try chia and flax seeds if you don't eat fish.



### Carbohydrates

Cutting out carbs from your diet can leave you feeling irritable and tired. Include some brown bread or wholegrain pasta to your dishes to avoid brain fog, boost energy and enhance your mood.



### Fermented food and live cultures

Your gut and brain are connected through neurotransmitters, chemicals that control feelings and emotions. Nourish your gut microbiome with friendly bacteria found in foods like kefir, miso and kimchi, sourdough bread and some yoghurts.



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## Smart Snacking

Although eating between meals can lead to weight gain if your choices aren't healthy, planning ahead and choosing healthy options can boost your energy levels and help you to avoid overeating.

### **Are you really hungry?**

Sometimes we reach for a snack for other reasons like boredom, thirst, habit or stress. Drink some water or do something else for a while to see if you're still peckish.

### **Simple swaps**

Find a better balance and change unhealthy snacks to nutritious alternatives. Swap out crisps for unsalted popcorn or have veg sticks and hummus instead of salted nuts.

### **Mindful eating**

It's harder to gauge how much you're eating when there are distractions like the TV or you're driving. Choose food wisely and enjoy every mouthful.

### **Control snack size**

Snacks are meant to be small, they're not proper meals. Have a handful of grapes or unsalted nuts. A rice cake with cottage cheese, or an apple with nut butter.

### **Avoid empty calories**

Processed food like sweets and crisps aren't nutrient-dense which means you'll quickly feel hungry again. Choose foods with protein and carbs to keep you full for longer.



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## Easier choices with food labels

Reading the labels on food can help you to make informed decisions about what and how much you're eating. But it can seem tricky to understand what the various coloured labels and healthy claims mean.

Figure out food labelling and be confident with your choices with these handy tips.

### The ingredients list

They'll be listed in weight order from biggest to smallest, so if the first three to five ingredients contain saturated fat such as cream, cheese or fatty meat – or sugars, like syrups and juices, these will probably make up the majority of that food.

### Nutrition big four

Look at the 100g column when comparing the nutrition in different foods. The British Heart Foundation say to check the 'big four' – total fat, saturated fat, sugar and salt. These can affect your weight and blood pressure which can put you at higher risk of heart disease.

### Fat facts

Take a look at whether the fat is saturated or unsaturated. Unsaturated fats found in foods such as nuts, avocado, oily fish and vegetable oils are better for your heart than saturated fats, found in butter, fatty meat, cakes and biscuits.

### Health claims

Low-fat or low-sugar written on the labels doesn't always mean it's the healthiest choice. Quite often manufacturers will replace fat with sugar or sugar with salt. Compare nutrition information on the original food to see what the difference is.

### Be sugar savvy

If sugar doesn't appear on a label, it doesn't necessarily mean the food doesn't contain it. Other names for sugar include honey, syrup, nectar, molasses, fruit juice concentrate, fructose, glucose, dextrose and maltose.

### Colour coding

Some nutrition labels on the front of packets use a red, amber and green system so you can check the big four at a glance. The more green on the label, the healthier it is. The more red, the unhealthier it is.

### Example:

Each burger contains:

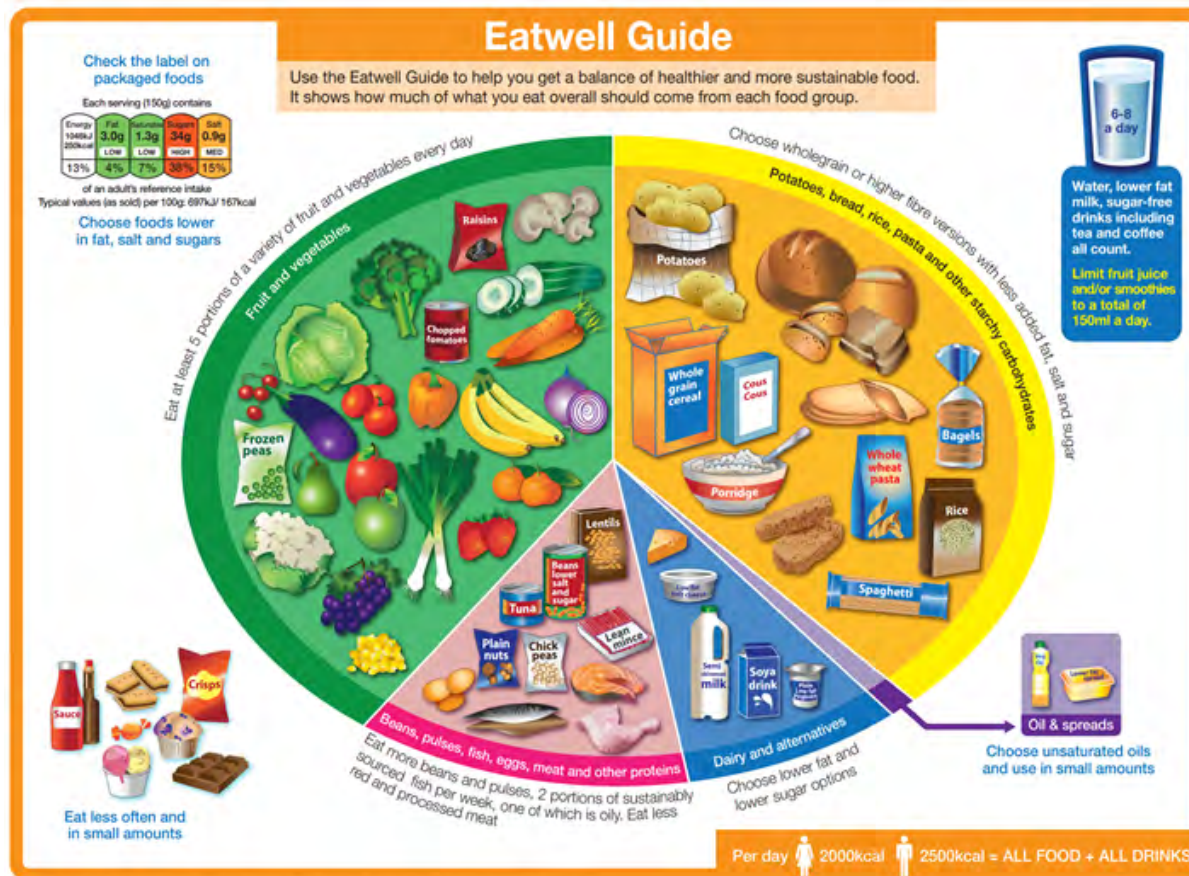
<b>ENERGY</b> 924KJ 220kcal 11%	<b>FAT</b> 13g MED 19%	<b>SATURATES</b> 5.9g HIGH 30%	<b>SUGARS</b> 0.8g LOW <1%	<b>SALT</b> 0.7g MED 12%
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% of an adults reference intake.  
Typical values per 100g: Energy 966kJ/ 230kcal

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## Eatwell Guide

This diagram represents the overall balance of a healthy diet. It shows how much of what you eat should come from each food group, including everything you eat and drink during the day.



### For a balanced diet try to:

- Eat at least five portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables every day
- Base meals on potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates, choosing wholegrain versions where possible
- Have some dairy or dairy alternatives (such as soy drinks), choosing lower fat and lower sugar options
- Eat some beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins (including two portions of fish every week, one of which should be oily)
- Choose unsaturated oils and spreads and eat in small amounts
- Drink six to eight cups or glasses of fluid a day

If you consume foods and drinks high in fat, salt or sugar have these less often and in small amounts.

Find out more about choosing a healthy diet on the **NHS Choices website**

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## Sources

### Eatwell Guide source:

Public Health England in association with the Welsh government, Food Standards Scotland and the Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland.

### Other sources:

- [www.bda.uk.com](http://www.bda.uk.com)
- [www.bhf.org.uk](http://www.bhf.org.uk)
- [www.nutrition.org.uk](http://www.nutrition.org.uk)
- [www.nhs.uk/changeforlife](http://www.nhs.uk/changeforlife)
- [www.worldwidecancerresearch.org](http://www.worldwidecancerresearch.org)



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