HEALTHY EATING

The food that we eat plays a big part in our health. By choosing the right foods, you can help to reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke. Eating a balanced diet can help prevent and fight infections (e.g. chest infections) and will provide you with energy to help you keep active.

This factsheet will provide you with information about healthy eating recommendations and will help you to decide what positive changes you can make to your diet.

Tips for healthy eating:

- Eat a range of foods to make sure you have a balanced diet (page 2).
- Eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables each day (page 2).
- Eat more beans and pulses, and less red and processed meat (page 3).
- Fill up on fibre – choose wholegrain or higher fibre foods (page 4).
- Reduce your fat intake, especially saturated fats (this is important if you have high cholesterol) (page 5).
- Eat less sugar (page 7).
- Limit your salt intake (this is especially important if you have high blood pressure) (page 8).
- Drink sensibly - drink plenty of water and limit your alcohol intake (page 10).
- Check food labels (page 11).
- Choose healthy snacks (page 12).
- Choose healthy cooking methods (page 13).
- Lastly, enjoy what you eat!

For information on goal setting and useful smart phone apps, see pages 14 and 15.

For more information see the CHSS booklets ‘Reducing your risk of heart disease’ and ‘Reducing your risk of stroke’. The ‘Just move’ and ‘Losing weight’ factsheets also have further information on activity and reducing weight.
What is a balanced diet?
A balanced diet is choosing a variety of foods daily to give you all the essential nutrients and energy that your body needs to stay well.

The Eatwell Guide is an easy way of showing the types of foods that we should be eating daily and in the right amounts.

The Eatwell Guide is broken down into the food groups below:

- **Fruit and vegetables**
  Fruit and vegetables are good sources of essential vitamins and minerals. They contain special nutrients called antioxidants which help protect your body cells from damage and illness. Eating more fruit and vegetables can increase your protection against some illnesses such as stroke.

  Aim for at least 5 portions a day - at least 2 portions of fruit and 3 portions of vegetables. A ‘portion’ is 80g or about the size that you can hold in your palm. For example: one banana, two plums or three heaped tablespoons of vegetables.

  Increase the amount you eat by including fresh, frozen, canned and dried options. Potatoes do not count, as they are starchy foods.
• **Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other carbohydrates**

Starchy foods (or carbohydrates) should make up about a third of your daily food intake, so try to include some at each meal. They provide us with energy and essential vitamins and minerals. Try to choose wholegrain or higher fibre options, for example, brown bread and brown rice.

Other examples may include: cereals, crackers, oats, noodles, quinoa, roti, naan bread, sweet potato, chapatti and dumplings.

• **Dairy and alternatives**

Try to include 2-3 portions of milk and dairy products each day (e.g. milk, cheese and yoghurt).

One portion is 200ml of milk, a small yoghurt or a matchbox-size piece of cheese. These calcium-rich foods give us strong bones. Choose lower fat and lower sugar options such as semi-skimmed milk, low fat yoghurt and cottage cheese.

Other examples include: rice, almond or soya varieties, such as soy milk. Choosing a calcium-fortified option is important if these are your main source of dairy.

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

These protein rich foods help to build and repair body cells and help us to feel full for longer. Try to include 2-3 portions per day, each about the size of your palm.

Include 2 portions of fish per week, one of which should be an oily fish such as salmon, mackerel, herring, sardines, trout and pilchards (tinned or fresh fish). Oily fish provide healthy omega-3 fats. If you do not eat oily fish try to include vegetable sources of omega-3 fats such as broccoli, spinach, walnuts and soya oil.

Eat less red meat and processed meat (such as bacon, ham etc.). Choose lean cuts of meat, and remove the skin from chicken. Try not to add extra fat when cooking, instead try baking, grilling or poaching.

There are many non-meat options. Try to eat more beans, pulses, quorn, tofu and nuts. Tinned beans are OK as long as you choose ones that are low in salt and sugar.

• **Oils and spreads**

Some fat is essential in a healthy balanced diet. Use unsaturated oils and lower fat spreads, such as olive or rice bran oil or spread, and use them in small amounts.

• **Food and drinks high in fat and sugar**

Healthy eating doesn’t mean you can’t enjoy your favourite foods - it is about getting the balance right and an occasional treat is okay. Too much of these foods can lead to weight gain, high cholesterol and increased risk of heart disease and stroke.
• **Keep well hydrated**

Try to drink at least 6-8 glasses of non-alcoholic fluid a day. The best drinks to choose are water, low fat milk and sugar-free drinks including tea and coffee. Although fruit juice counts towards one of your 5-a-day, you should limit fruit juice and / or smoothies to a total of 150ml a day because they have a high sugar content.

**Healthy eating and weight**

As well as helping to reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke, eating healthily can also help to control your weight. *For information about a healthy weight and body mass index (BMI) see the CHSS factsheet ‘Losing weight’.*

Calories are a measure of how much energy we take in. Its is recommended that women should have about 2000kcal per day and men should have about 2500kcal per day.

Remember, all food and drink that you have contributes to your total energy intake.

**Fill up on fibre**

Fibre helps to keep our digestive system healthy and may help to lower blood cholesterol. It is found in plant-based foods such as fruits, vegetables and grains. Fibre helps us to feel fuller for longer because it takes longer to digest.

Easy ways to increase your fibre intake:

- Choose wholemeal or wholegrain products, for example, brown rice or pasta, and wholegrain bread. These are less processed and contain more vitamins, minerals and fibre than white foods.

- Include oats. Use of oats along with a diet low in saturated fat and combined with a healthy lifestyle can help reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke. Use as porridge or as a crumble mix over fruit.

- Snack on fresh fruit, dried fruit, nuts or wholemeal crackers.

- Try having fruit at breakfast time – add fruit to your porridge or wholegrain cereal.

- Add an extra serving of vegetables at teatime (with the skin on if possible).

- Make meat dishes go further by adding peas, beans and pulses. For example, adding kidney beans to a mince dish.

If your fibre intake is low, introduce more fibre into your diet slowly. A sudden increase in fibre can cause abdominal pain and wind. Drinking plenty of water also helps to process fibre through your gut.
Reduce your fat intake
Eating less fat can have a beneficial effect on our health but it is important to also consider the types of fat we eat.

There are three main types of fat in food and they all have different effects on our health:

- **Saturated fat**: usually solid when cold and found mainly in animal sources e.g. butter, lard, fat on meat. Eating large amounts of saturated fat is linked to *increased cholesterol* so you should **reduce the amount of saturated fats** in your diet.

- **Unsaturated fat**: usually liquid at room temperature and found mainly in plant and fish sources e.g. olive oil, nuts, salmon. There are two types – monounsaturated and polyunsaturated. These fats can replace saturated fats and help reduce cholesterol levels.

- **Trans fats**: found mainly in processed foods and are associated with an increased risk of heart disease and stroke.

To understand fat, it’s important to know what effect it has on our blood cholesterol. There are two types of cholesterol:

1. **LDL** is the ‘bad’ cholesterol in your blood stream. **Saturated and trans fats** increase your LDL, which can **increase your risk** of heart disease and stroke.

2. **HDL** is the ‘good’ cholesterol in your blood stream. **Unsaturated fats** increase your HDL and help to reduce the LDL, which can **reduce your risk** of heart disease and stroke.

Note: Although some foods contain cholesterol (e.g. eggs, liver, shellfish), it is the saturated fat content (not cholesterol content) that will have more of an effect on your blood cholesterol.
**FACTSHEET**

**CHOOSE SMALL AMOUNTS OF:**
Foods high in unsaturated fats

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monounsaturated fats</th>
<th>Polyunsaturated fats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Oils: rapeseed, olive, avocado, rice bran</td>
<td>• Oils: sunflower, corn, soya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Nuts: almonds, hazelnut, peanuts, cashew, macadamia, pistachio</td>
<td>• Nuts and seeds: walnut, pinenut, brazil, linseed, pumpkin, sesame, sunflower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Avocados</td>
<td>• Oily fish (rich in omega-3s): pilchards, mackerel, salmon, sardines, herring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Margarine spreads</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**EAT LESS OF:**
Foods high in saturated fats and trans fats

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Saturated fats</th>
<th>Trans fats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Butter</td>
<td>• Commercially baked or fried goods e.g. biscuits, crackers, pastries, cakes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ghee / coconut / palm</td>
<td>• “Partially hydrogenated vegetable oil”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lard / tallow / cooking fat / suet</td>
<td>• Takeaways and processed foods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Visible meat fat: chicken skin, chops</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Meat pies / sausages / corned beef</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cream / sour cream / cream cheese</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

See the CHSS factsheet ‘Cholesterol’ for more information.
**Eat less sugar**

Some foods, such as fruit and milk, contain natural sugars and are part of a healthy diet. The types of foods that we should try to eat less of are foods with ‘added sugar’. For example, cakes, sweets and fizzy drinks.

Eating too many foods or drinks high in sugar can lead to weight gain, increasing your risk of heart disease and stroke. It can also cause tooth decay, another risk factor for heart disease.

Reduce your sugar intake by:

- Limiting sweet biscuits, ice-cream, chocolate, sugary cereals and white bread/rice/pasta. If you fancy a sweet snack, try a piece of fruit.
- Drinking water, low-fat milk or sugar-free drinks. Limit fruit juice and smoothies to 150ml per day.
- Watch out for added sugar in other forms e.g. honey, glucose, corn syrup, high-fructose corn syrup, sucrose or maltose.
- Add little or no sugar to hot drinks. Alternatively try a sweetener e.g. Splenda, Sweetex, Canderel.

Check food labels and choose foods and drinks with less added sugar. See the **food label** section on page 11 for more information.
Limit your salt intake
Salt contains sodium. Too much sodium in your diet can increase your blood pressure which increases your risk of heart disease and stroke.

You should reduce your salt intake to 6g or less per day. So, what does 6g of salt look like…? It is about 1 teaspoon worth.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Each of these contain ¼ teaspoon salt* =</th>
<th>Each of these contain ½ teaspoon salt* =</th>
<th>Each of these contain 1 teaspoon salt* =</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• 1 individual pork pie</td>
<td>• 2 noodle sachets</td>
<td>• 1 cup instant soup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 1 sausage roll</td>
<td>• 1 tin of cream of tomato soup</td>
<td>• 14 slices bread</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 60g cornflakes with milk</td>
<td>• 3 rashers bacon</td>
<td>• 3 tablespoons soy sauce</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*All figures are approximations

Most of the salt we eat is hidden in processed foods - ready meals, baked beans, tinned or packet soups, processed meats (e.g. ham and bacon), takeaways, some cereals and even bread. It is difficult to avoid eating some of these foods but look for lower-salt alternatives instead, or eat fresh food which has no added salt.
Tips to reduce your salt intake:

- Don’t add salt. Flavour with pepper, chilli, lemon juice, herbs and spices.
- Fresh is best – avoid processed foods where possible.
- Use salt alternatives (e.g. LoSalt) with caution: they don’t help your taste buds to adapt to less salt and they can be high in other minerals e.g. potassium (which may be harmful for some people).
- Sea salt is no better for you than table salt.
- When eating out, ask for “no added salt” and for sauces and gravies “on the side”.
- Check food labels for salt under other names: sodium benzoate, disodium or monosodium glutamate (MSG).

Did you know: it can take up to 6-8 weeks for your taste buds to adjust to a lower salt diet, so don’t give up and you will become used to the taste of reduced salt!

See the CHSS factsheet ‘Salt’ for more information.
Drink sensibly
Alcohol can be enjoyed in moderation, but people who regularly drink more than the recommended amount are three times more likely to have a stroke.

One unit is equal to 10ml of pure alcohol. The labels on cans and bottles will show ABV% (alcohol by volume) – the lower the percentage, the less alcohol it contains.

Often alcoholic drinks will state how many units they contain.

Example of ‘one unit of alcohol’:

- 25ml spirit (40% ABV)
- 76ml wine (13% ABV)
- 250ml beer (4% ABV)

Both men and women should drink no more than 14 units of alcohol per week. This is equal to about six pints of 4% beer or six small (175ml) glasses of 13% wine per week.

Spread alcohol consumption across the week. Everyone should have at least 2 alcohol free days per week and you should avoid alcohol for 48 hours if you have had a heavy drinking session. You should avoid binge drinking (more than four units at any one time).

To reduce the number of units you are drinking, try the following:

- Choose drinks with a lower ABV%.
- Mix wine with soda water; spirits with sugar-free drinks; or beer with sugar-free lemonade to make it go further.
- Choose non-alcoholic drinks between alcoholic drinks.
- Fill up your wine glass with ice first then add wine.
- Choose a smaller glass size.
- Sip slowly.
Reading food labels

Reading food labels can give you a lot of information about the food you’re eating and help you to make healthier choices.

The ‘traffic light system’ is a quick and easy guide to help interpret labels. It rates foods in regards to the amount of fat, saturated fat, sugar and salt they contain:

- **Red** = high amount. Limit your intake.
- **Amber** = moderate amount. If most lights are orange, this food can be eaten most of the time.
- **Green** = low amount. This is a healthier choice. The more green lights, the better.

A food label may look something like this:

**Per 40g of product:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Energy</th>
<th>Fat</th>
<th>Saturates</th>
<th>Sugar</th>
<th>Salt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>142kcal</td>
<td>0.9g</td>
<td>0.2g</td>
<td>13.5g</td>
<td>0.36g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>594kJ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This food is low in fat and saturates, high in sugar, and has a moderate amount of salt.

This table explains how the nutrients in foods are coded for red, amber or green. It shows the amount per 100g of food. If a food label doesn’t display the ‘traffic lights’, you can still compare the nutrients in a food to these guidelines:

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Tips for food label reading:

- When comparing two similar products (e.g. breakfast cereal) look at the ‘per 100g’ column (not per serve). This way you are comparing like for like. The manufacturer decides what a ‘serving’ is and this can vary between products.

- Ingredients are listed in weight order - the one with the highest quantity first. So, if sugar, fat or salt (or one of their other names), appears in the first few ingredients, this may not be the healthiest choice.

- ‘Lite’ or ‘light’: means this food contains 30% less of one nutrient. For example, it could contain 30% less fat or sugar than a standard product.

- Low fat: means that there is 3g (or less) fat per 100g of food (or a ‘green light’). Also check the sugar content of the food, as it may be high.

- No added sugar: means that the manufacturer hasn’t added sugar to the food. However, this food could still be naturally high in sugar (e.g. fruit).

Healthy snack ideas

It is not usually necessary to snack, but if you get hungry between meals choose a healthy snack like the ones below:

- Fresh, dried or canned fruit
- One slice of brown toast or one crumpet with tomato, hummus, avocado, jam or honey
- Vegetable sticks – carrots, celery or peppers
- Small pot of low fat, light or diet yoghurt
- Two wholegrain crackers or rice wafers with low fat spread
- Small handful of unsalted nuts
- Small wholegrain sandwich with salad and lean meat
- Bowl of high fibre cereal with low fat milk
- One handful of unsalted popcorn

Potato crisps → Plain water crackers
Muffin or scone → Fresh fruit
**Healthy cooking tips**

The way that food is prepared and what is added to it can make a big difference.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Healthier cooking methods:</th>
<th>Avoid these cooking methods:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Grill, bake, boil or steam</td>
<td>• Frying or deep frying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use a non-stick pan</td>
<td>• Use of high fat gravies, sauces, and condiments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Remove the skin from chicken; cut the visible fat off meat e.g. chops</td>
<td>• Use of butter, lard, duck fat, dripping or ghee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Discard any fat that comes out of food during cooking e.g. pour fat off mince</td>
<td>• Consuming fat on meat / skin on chicken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Using small amounts of oils or margarine (no more than 1 tablespoon per meal)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Example:**

Grilled or fresh tomato, poached egg and toast with a thin spread of margarine

**Example:**

Fried tomato, fried or scrambled egg (with cream) and toast with a thick spread of butter
Goal setting - small steps to success

Setting goals or having an idea of what you would like to achieve will increase your chance of successfully achieving a healthier lifestyle.

Talk to your health practitioner (for example, dietitian or doctor) about setting achievable goals for you. You might like to break down a larger goal into smaller steps. For example:

**Ultimate goal:** to eat five portions of fruit and vegetables per day.

**Smaller steps to achieve this:**
1. Add an extra portion of vegetables at teatime
2. Snack on one piece of fruit daily

Tips for setting sustainable goals:

• Choose just one thing to change at a time.
• Make sure it is realistic and achievable for you, everyone is different.
• Think about why this goal is important to you and to write it down.
• Tell a friend or family member about your goal, so that they can support you.
• Reflect on your progress and see how far you have come.
Get savvy with smart phones
There are a number of smart phone apps available, many of which are free, and can help you to achieve your healthy lifestyle goals. Note this is not an extensive list and simply a guide to some popular options, in no particular order:

- **Change4Life Smart Recipes**: free, easy to prepare healthy recipes
- **My Fitness Pal**: monitor your daily food intake and exercise
- **NHS Drink Tracker**: monitor your alcohol intake and units
- **NHS BMI tracker**: calculate and track your BMI (body mass index)
- **Weight Watchers**: track your intake and activity
- **FoodSwitch UK**: scan barcodes to find out what’s in the food you’re eating, and find out healthier options
If you would like to speak to one of our nurses in confidence, please call the Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland Advice Line Nurses

0808 801 0899
Free from landlines and mobiles.

More information:
Here is a list of addresses that you might find useful:

**Food Standards Agency (Scotland)**
www.food.gov.uk/scotland
Email: scotland@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk
Tel: 01224 285100

**Eatwell Scotland**
www.eatwellscotland.org

**NHS Live Well**
www.nhs.uk/LiveWell

**Drink Aware**
www.drinkaware.co.uk
Email: contact@drinkaware.co.uk
Tel: 020 7766 9900
For advice about alcohol and how to calculate how many units you are drinking

**British Dietetic Association**
www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts
Free food fact sheets and information on where to find a dietitian