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GUIDANCE, DOCUMENT

Eatwell guide

Helping you eat a healthy, balanced diet.

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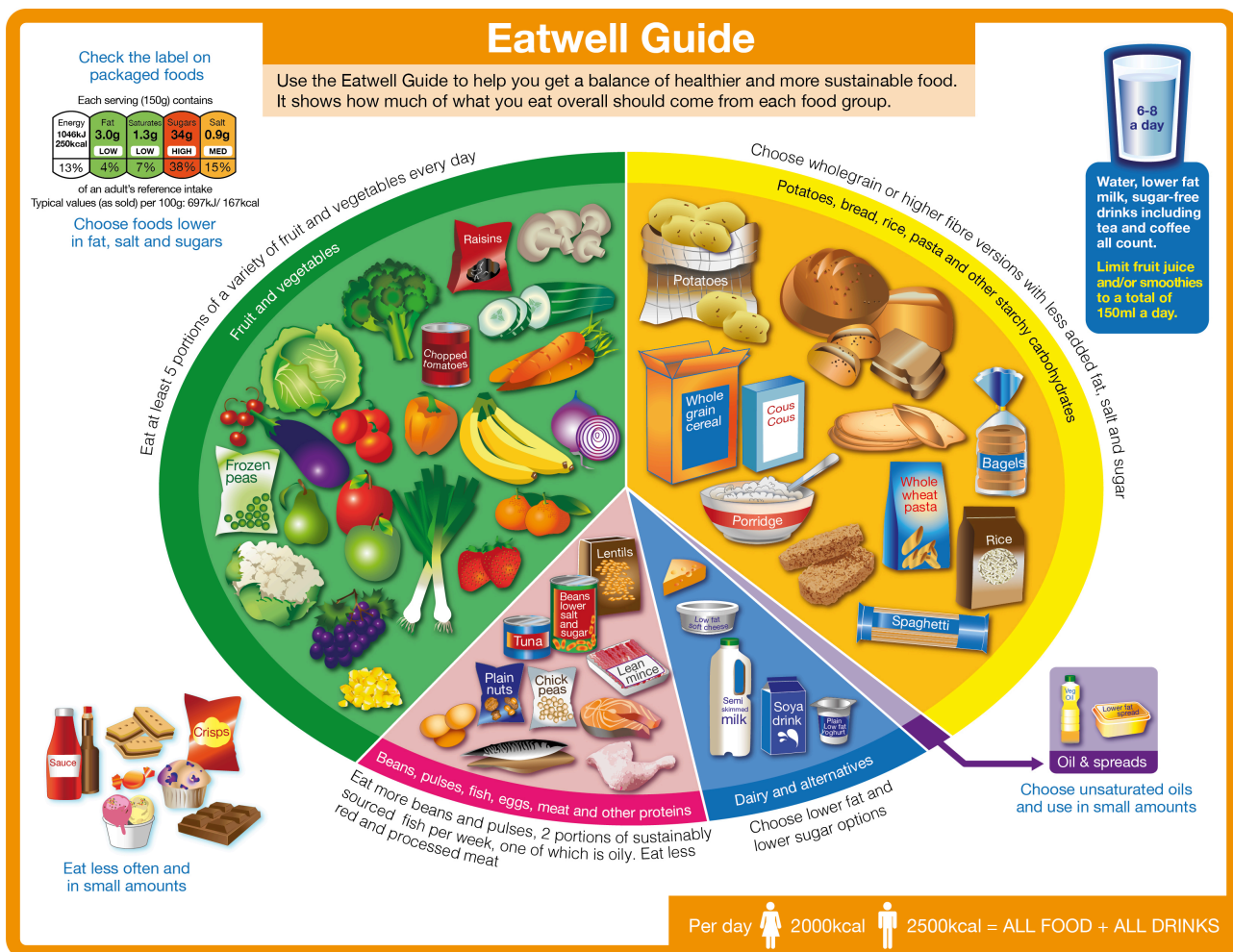
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Get started now

Eating well and having a healthy lifestyle can help us feel our best. It can also make a big difference to our long-term health. So why not make a change today?

The eatwell guide shows the proportions and different types of foods to achieve a well-balanced diet.

It shows how much of what we eat should come from each food group to achieve a healthy, balanced diet. You do not need to achieve this balance with every meal, but try to get the balance right over a day or even a week.



Is the eatwell guide for me?

The eatwell guide applies to most people. This is regardless of weight, dietary restrictions / preferences or ethnic origin. It doesn't apply to children under 2 because they have different nutritional needs. Children should gradually start eating the same foods as the rest of the family between the ages of 2 and 5. They should also aim to follow the proportions shown in the eatwell guide. A registered dietitian is able to adapt the eatwell guide to individual needs. This

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could be for those with special dietary requirements or medical needs.

How can the eatwell guide help?

The eatwell guide shows the different types of foods and drinks we eat. It outlines what proportions of each type of food you should eat to achieve a healthy, balanced diet. The eatwell guide recommends that you should:

- eat at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables every day
- base meals on potatoes, bread, rice, pasta or other starchy carbohydrates; try and choose wholegrain versions
- include some dairy or dairy alternatives (such as soya based drinks); choose lower fat and sugar options
- eat some beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins; try to include 2 portions of fish every week, one of which should be an oily variety
- choose unsaturated oils and spreads and eat in small amounts
- drink 6 to 8 cups or glasses of fluid a day

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

How should I use the eatwell guide?

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

- deciding what to eat
- at home cooking
- out shopping for groceries

- eating out in a restaurant, cafe or canteen
- choosing food on the run

Aim to fill your trolley with a healthy balance of different types of food.

How does it work?

The eatwell guide divides the foods and drinks we consume into five main groups.

Try to choose a variety of different foods from each of the groups. This will help you get the wide range of nutrients your body needs to stay healthy.

It is important to get some fat in the diet but foods high in fat, salt and sugar are not essential. For this reason, these foods are not included as part of the main eatwell guide image. Most of us need to cut down on these to achieve our healthy balance.

All types of fat are high in energy, so only eat in small amounts. Plant based, unsaturated fats such as vegetable or olive oil are healthier.

Much of what we eat, such as pizzas, casseroles, pasta dishes and sandwiches, is a mixture of food groups. For these sorts of foods, think about the main ingredients and how these fit with the sections of the guide.

For example, a cottage pie might have:

- mashed potato which would include potato from the yellow starchy carbohydrate segment
- mashed potato might also include milk from the blue dairy segment
- mashed potato might also include spread from the purple oil and spreads segment

- meat, meat substitute or beans would fit into the pink protein segment
- onion, carrots and peas would fit into the green fruit and vegetables segment

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

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 just over 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, canned, dried or juiced.

A portion is 80g or any of these:

- one apple, banana, pear, orange or other similar-size fruit
- three heaped tablespoons of vegetables
- a dessert bowl of salad
- 30g of dried fruit (counts as a maximum of one portion a day)
- 150ml glass of fruit juice or smoothie (counts as a maximum of one portion a day)

Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates

Starchy food is an important part of a healthy diet and should make up about a third of the food we eat. Choose higher-fibre, wholegrain varieties when you can. Buy wholewheat pasta, brown rice, or leaving the skins on potatoes.

Base your meals around starchy carbohydrate foods. So, you could:

- start the day with a wholegrain breakfast cereal (try to choose one lower in salt and sugars)
- have a sandwich for lunch
- have 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. Watch the fats you add during cooking and serving as this is what increases the calorie content.

Why choose wholegrain?

Wholegrain food:

- contains more fibre than white or refined starchy food
- digests slower in the body 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
- whole oats

Remember, you can also buy high fibre white versions of bread and pasta. This is a like-for-like way to increase fibre intake if you are not ready to switch to wholemeal.

Dairy and alternatives

Try to have some milk and dairy food (or dairy alternatives) such as cheese, yoghurt and fromage frais. These are good sources of protein and vitamins. 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. Go for lower fat and lower sugar products where possible. For example, 1% fat milk has about half the fat of semi-skimmed milk without a noticeable change in taste or texture. Or reduced fat cheese which is also widely available. Or you could have a smaller amount of the full-fat varieties less often. When buying dairy alternatives, go for unsweetened, calcium-fortified versions.

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

These foods are useful sources of protein, vitamins and minerals. It is important to eat some foods from this group.

Pulses such as beans, peas and lentils are good alternatives to meat. This is because they are low in fat but high in fibre and protein, as well as vitamins and minerals.

Other vegetable-based sources of protein include tofu, bean curd and mycoprotein.

Aim for at least two portions (2 x 140g) of fish a week, including a portion of oily fish.

Most people should be eating more fish, but we recommend you limit oily fish,

crab and some types of white fish. For more information on fish please see [the live well part of the NHS website](#). Also the [Marine Stewardship Council website](#) for more guidance on sustainably sourced fish.

Some types of meat are high in fat, particularly saturated fat. When 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
- go for leaner mince
- trim the fat off of meat and the skin off of chicken
- try to grill meat and fish instead of frying
- have a boiled or poached egg instead of fried

If you eat more than 90g of red or processed meat per day, try to cut down to no more than 70g per day. The term processed meat includes sausages, bacon, cured meats and reformed meat products.

Oils and spreads

Although some fat in the diet is essential, generally we are eating too much saturated fat. We need to reduce our consumption.

Unsaturated fats are healthier fats usually from plant sources and in liquid form. Examples include:

- vegetable oil
- rapeseed oil
- olive oil

Swapping to unsaturated fats will help to reduce cholesterol in the blood. It is important to get most of our fat from unsaturated oils.

Choosing lower fat spreads, as opposed to butter, is a good way to reduce your saturated fat intake.

Remember that all types of fat are high in energy and you should limit them in your diet.

Foods high in fat, salt and sugars

This includes products such as:

- chocolate
- cakes
- biscuits
- full-sugar soft drinks
- butter
- ice-cream

These foods are not needed in the diet. If you eat them, try to only have them on an occasional basis and in small amounts. Food and drinks high in fat and sugar contain lots of energy. Check the label and avoid foods which are high in fat, salt and sugar.

Hydration

Aim to drink 6 to 8 glasses of fluid every day. Water, lower fat milk and sugar-free drinks including tea and coffee all count.

Fruit juice and smoothies also count towards your fluid consumption. But, as they are a source of free sugars, you should limit consumption to about 150ml a day.

Sugary drinks are one of the main sources of sugar for children and adults in Wales. Swap sugary soft drinks for diet, sugar-free or no added sugar varieties for a simple way to reduce sugar.

Alcohol also contains lots of calories (kcal). The recommended limit is no more than 14 units per week for men and women.

The calories in an alcoholic drink depends on the type of alcohol, the volume served and the addition of mixers. As an example:

- 1 pint of standard strength lager contains approximately 136kcal
- 175ml medium glass of wine contains approximately 135kcal
- 25ml shot of spirit (40% vol) contains approximately 56kcal

Food labelling

Lots of pre-packaged foods have a food label on the front of the pack. This shows the nutrition information per serving. They also refer to reference intake. This tells you how much of each nutrient you need in the daily diet. The percentage shows how much the product contributes to each nutrient reference intake.

Food labels can help you to choose foods that are lower in calories, fat, sugar and salt. Some products use colour codes to show at a glance if they are high, medium or low in fat, saturated fat, sugars and salt. For a healthier choice, try to pick products with more greens and ambers and fewer reds.

Remember portion sizes used on the label are suggestions and may not be the same as you actually consume. For example, many foods are often eaten as one serving but the nutritional information is for half a pack.

To find out more about food labelling you can visit [the food labelling part of](#)

[the NHS live well website.](#)

Cutting down on saturated fat

If you reduce saturated fat in your diet, it can lower your cholesterol levels. Lower cholesterol levels can reduce your risk of heart disease.

Most people in the UK eat too much saturated fat. 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 way to cut down on saturated fat is to compare the food labels on similar products.

Be aware of foods that are high in saturated fat, including:

- fatty cuts of meat
- sausages
- butter
- cream
- cheese
- chocolate
- pastries
- cakes
- biscuits

You don't need to stop eating these foods but be aware of how much you consume. Eating too much of these foods can make it easy to have more than the recommended amount of saturated fat.

Cutting down on sugar

If you often have food or drink high in sugar, this increases your risk of obesity and tooth decay. Ideally, no more than 5% of the energy we consume should come from free sugars ^[footnote 1]. Currently, children and adults across the UK are consuming 2 to 3 times that amount.

Recommended maximum free sugar intake, 4 to 6 years:

No more than 19 grams per day, which is 5 sugar cubes.

Recommended maximum free sugar intake, 7 to 10 years:

No more than 24 grams per day, which is 6 sugar cubes.

Recommended maximum free sugar intake, from 11 years, including adults:

No more than 30 grams per day, which is 7 sugar cubes.

Many packaged foods and drinks contain surprisingly high amounts of free sugars. These include some breakfast cereals, yoghurts and fruit juice drinks. Use the food label to help you choose foods lower in sugar. Swap sugary products for unsweetened and plain varieties. For example, plain porridge, wholegrain wheat cereals or no added sugar muesli. Cereal bars often contain high levels of free sugars ^[footnote 1] too, so remember to check the label. Swap flavoured or corner-style yoghurts for low fat, lower sugar yoghurts. You could add fresh fruit for variety.

Sugary drinks have no place in a child's daily diet. Despite this they make up a large proportion of daily sugar intake of both children and adults. Almost a third of the free sugars consumed by 11 to 18 year olds comes from soft drinks. Try to swap sugary drinks for water, lower fat milk or sugar-free drinks including tea and coffee. Be sure to check the label for added sugar.

For more information, visit [the NHS live well webpage on sugars](#).

Cutting down on salt

Eating too much salt can raise your blood pressure. This will increase 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 could do with 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 only talking about the salt you add to your food. Most of the salt we eat is already in everyday foods such as bread, breakfast cereal, pasta sauce and soup. Try replacing salt with pepper, herbs and spices to add flavour to your favourite dishes. Checking the label and choosing foods that are lower in salt is one of the best ways to cut down.

For more information, visit [the NHS live well page on 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 small

amounts of extra energy each day, we can put on weight. And most people in the UK eat more than they need.

Daily energy requirement, males

Age	Kilocalories (kCal)	Kilojoule (KJ)
1	765	3201
2	1004	4201
3	1171	4899
4	1386	5799
5	1482	6201
6	1577	6598
7	1649	6899
8	1745	7301
9	1840	7699
10	2032	8502
11+	2500	10,460

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Daily energy requirement, females

Age	Kilocalories (kCal)	Kilojoule (KJ)
1	717	3000
2	932	3899
3	1076	4502
4	1291	5402
5	1362	5699
6	1482	6201
7	1530	6402
8	1625	6799
9	1721	7201
10	1936	8100
11+	2000	8368

Try to:

- eat only as much food as you need; improve the balance of your diet by looking at the eatwell guide

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- get more active

You're probably eating about the right amount if:

- you're eating a good balance of the different food groups
- you're a healthy weight

If you're overweight, then you may need to eat less, improve the balance of your diet or get more active. Ask your GP, or another health professional, for advice about losing weight. Do you know if you're a healthy weight? Find out at [the NHS live well healthy weight page](#).

Do I need vitamin and mineral supplements?

Most people can get all the nutrients their body needs by eating a healthy diet. But, some people do need certain supplements. If you are planning a pregnancy, you should take a daily 400 microgram (μg) folic acid supplement. Take the supplement every day until the 12th week of pregnancy. If you have already had a pregnancy affected by neural tube defects, you need to take 5mg of folic acid. You should take this each day until the 12th week of pregnancy. Consult your GP if you are a woman with diabetes or are taking anti-epileptic medicine.

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

- pregnant or breastfeeding
- aged 65 or over
- aren't exposed to much sun

There are many reasons why people may not get enough sun. For example you may cover your skin for cultural reasons, be housebound or have darker skin. Talk to your GP or health professional for more information. Or visit [the NHS](#)

[webpage for vitamins and minerals.](#)

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. Eat less salt – no more than 6g a day for adults.
6. Get active and be a healthy weight.
7. Don't get thirsty (Remember fruit juice or smoothies should be limited to no more than 150ml per day in total).
8. Don't skip breakfast.

Leaner: choose leaner cuts of meat and poultry, remove any visible fat.

Lower: go for lower fat, salt and sugar products, such as dairy and starchy carbohydrate foods.

Less: use less oils and spreads. Choose foods high in fat, salt and sugar less often.

How can I find out more about healthy eating?

To find out more:

- get general advice from [the NHS live well webpages](#)
- 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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- for healthy eating ideas, handy tips and recipes visit [nutrition skills for life](#)

Footnotes

[1] These are any sugar added to food or drink products by the manufacturer, cook or consumer. This includes those naturally found in honey, syrups and unsweetened fruit juice.

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