

Top Tips for Eating Healthily



TOP TIPS FOR HEALTHY EATING DURING SOCIAL DISTANCING



In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, eating healthy food remains an important part of maintaining your health. While there are no specific foods that can help protect you from the virus, a nutritious diet can boost your immune system or help you fight off symptoms. You may not be able to share meals with friends and loved ones, but there are lots of other ways to eat well and support your health at this difficult time.

Here's a few of our top tips for healthy eating, not just during COVID but beyond.



1 Plan what you are going to eat

Whether you are cooking for just yourself, one to two people, or a larger group, planning meals is a good place to start improving your food choices. Taking the time to plan a healthy evening meal can help you avoid fast food and ready meals. To start, grab a pencil and paper and list your favorite meals. Try and think of the meals that you will all enjoy. As you do, try and build in variety so you're not eating the same thing everyday.

When you have your meal lists, try and plan a meal for each day of the week. Save the quick prep meals for the days when you have less time.

Make a list of all the things you need for each meal, this list becomes your shopping list and this will help you avoid buying the things you don't need and will help make sure you have everything you need for each meal. As you make your list, have a think of any simple changes you can make. Here's a few simple ones to start you off:

Breakfast

- Swap whole milk for semi-skimmed, 1% fat or even skimmed milk
- Swap a sugar-coated breakfast cereal for a wholegrain breakfast cereal such as porridge or shredded wholegrain wheat cereal with no added sugar – read about [how to choose a healthy breakfast cereal](#)
- Swap a sprinkle of sugar on your breakfast cereal for a topping of fresh or dried fruit, which counts towards one of your 5 A DAY
- Swap full-fat greek yoghurt for lower-fat or fat-free greek yoghurt, or natural low-fat yoghurt.

Get more ideas for [healthy breakfasts](#).

Lunch

- Swap white breads, bagels and muffins for wholegrain varieties
- Swap butter and cheese in your baked potato for reduced-fat spread and reduced salt and sugar baked beans
- Swap a tuna melt panini for a tuna salad sandwich on wholemeal bread without mayo
- Swap a cheddar cheese filling in your sandwich for reduced-fat hard cheese.

Dinner

- Swap creamy or cheesy sauces for tomato or vegetable based sauces on your pasta, meat or fish dishes
- Swap mashed potato made with butter and whole milk for mash with low-fat spread and a lower-fat milk, such as semi-skimmed, 1% fat or skimmed milk
- Choose leaner cuts of meat – for example, swap streaky bacon for back bacon
- Swap the frying pan for the grill when cooking meat.

Drinks

- Swap a coffee made with whole milk to a "skinny" coffee made with semi-skimmed or skimmed milk
- Swap a cordial for a cordial with no added sugar
- Swap a few of your sugary drinks for a glass of water
- Swap a cola or fizzy drink with some 100% fruit juice (with no added sugar) mixed with soda water
- Swap hot chocolate made with whole milk and served with whipped cream for a hot chocolate made with skimmed milk and no cream.

Snacks

Try and limit snacks to no more than one a day and keep them as healthy as you can.

Choose from these [10 surprising 100kcal snacks](#)

- Swap a blueberry muffin for a currant bun on its own or with some reduced-fat spread
- Swap yoghurt-coated raisins for plain raisins
- Swap salted nuts for unsalted nuts
- Swap cheese straws for rice cakes with lower-fat cream cheese.

When you do your shopping, don't be tempted to stray away from your list and always try and eat before you go shopping. Shopping on an empty stomach will often see you reach for foods that are higher in sugars and fats.



2 Eat the Rainbow

Colourful plates of food are appealing, but are they healthy too? According to the British Heart Foundation, there are lots of health benefits which can come from fruits and vegetables.



Red Properties: Contain antioxidants including lycopene (in tomatoes), anthocyanins (red berries, including strawberries), ellagic acid (strawberries, raspberries and pomegranate) and astaxanthin (crab, salmon and prawns).

Health benefits: Lycopene gives red fruits their colour. It is thought to have antioxidant properties that may help protect against CVD and has been reported to help reduce [blood pressure](#) and [cholesterol](#).

Suggestions: Cherries, cranberries, radishes, red apples, red grapes, red peppers, tomatoes and watermelon.



Orange Properties: High in carotenoids, such as alpha-carotene and beta-carotene.

Health benefits: Beta-carotene gives yellow and orange fruits and vegetables their colour and is converted to vitamin A in the body, where it helps us make hormones and keeps our eyes healthy.

Suggestions: Cantaloupe melon, mangoes, nectarines, orange peppers, pumpkin and sweet potatoes.



Yellow Properties: Contain carotenoids including beta-carotene and beta-cryptoxanthin.

Health benefits: As with orange fruit and vegetables, beta-carotene gives yellow varieties their colour. Foods like sweetcorn, peach, papaya and egg yolk are also rich in the antioxidant beta-cryptoxanthin.

Suggestions: Butternut squash, honeydew melon, lemons, papaya, peaches, persimmons, swede and yellow peppers.



Green Properties: The pigment chlorophyll gives green fruits and vegetables their colour, but many green vegetables are rich in other nutrients too. Broccoli, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, kale and pak choi are all sources of sulforaphane and glucosinolate.

These vegetables also contain lutein and zeaxanthin, as do peas, sweetcorn, yellow peppers and eggs.

Health benefits: Studies suggest that sulforaphane may help protect against blood-vessel damage and certain cancers. However, most of these studies are based on mice, or human cells in the lab, rather than people.

There is evidence to suggest lutein and zeaxanthin-rich vegetables, like kale, spinach, broccoli and peas, may help prevent and slow the progression of an eye disease, age-related macular degeneration. Rather than focusing on a particular fruit or vegetable, aim to increase the total amount of both in your diet, and don't forget leafy green vegetables.

Suggestions: Apples, asparagus, avocados, celery, courgettes, cucumbers, green grapes, leeks, lettuce, limes, mange tout, sugar snap peas and don't forget leafy green vegetables.



Blue / Purple Properties: Anthocyanins give blue and purple foods their rich colours.

Health benefits: Anthocyanins are powerful antioxidants, which may have a role in protecting cells from damage. However, the positive effects seen in lab studies have not been seen in human studies.

As well as beetroot, purple lettuce, carrots, green beans, spinach, cabbage and radishes are high in nitrates. Overall, there are many ways that fruit and veg can help reduce your risk of CVD, so it's best to focus on eating more and a wide variety.

Suggestions: Aubergines, blackberries, blackcurrants, purple grapes and red cabbage.



White/Beige Properties: Anthoxanthins are the pigments that create white or cream colours.

Health benefits: Some studies have suggested that anthoxanthins may reduce the risk of CVD and inflammatory conditions such as arthritis, but there is not enough evidence for us to recommend white fruits and vegetables over those of other colours.

Suggestions: Bananas, celeriac, garlic, Jerusalem artichokes, mushrooms, onions, turnips, white peaches.

3 Eat a balanced diet

The Eatwell Guide shows how much of what we eat overall 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.

Most of us still are not eating enough fruit and vegetables. They should make up over a third of the food we eat each day.

Aim to eat at least 5 portions of a variety of fruit and veg each day. Choose from fresh, frozen, tinned, dried or juiced.



Remember that fruit juice and smoothies should be limited to no more than a combined total of 150ml a day. Fruit and vegetables are a good source of vitamins, minerals and fibre.



Starchy food should make up just over a third of the food we eat. Choose higher fibre wholegrain varieties, such as wholewheat pasta and brown rice, or simply leave skin on potatoes. There are also higher fibre versions of white bread and pasta. Starchy foods are a good source of energy and the main source of a range of nutrients in our diet.



Milk, cheese, yoghurt and fromage frais are good sources of protein and some vitamins, and they're also an important source of calcium, which helps keep our bones strong. Try to go for lower fat and lower sugar products where possible, like 1% fat milk, reduced-fat cheese or plain low-fat yoghurt.



These foods are good sources of protein, vitamins and minerals. Pulses, such as beans, peas and lentils, are good alternatives to meat because they're lower in fat and higher in fibre and protein, too. Choose lean cuts of meat and mince, and eat less red and processed meat like bacon, ham and sausages. Aim for at least 2 portions of fish every week, 1 of which should be oily, such as salmon or mackerel.



Unsaturated fats are healthier fats and include vegetable, rapeseed, olive and sunflower oils. Remember all types of fat are high in energy and should be eaten sparingly.



These foods include chocolate, cakes, biscuits, sugary soft drinks, butter, ghee and ice cream. They're not needed in our diet, so should be eaten less often and in smaller amounts.



Water, lower fat milks and lower sugar or sugar-free drinks, including tea and coffee, all count. Fruit juice and smoothies also count towards your fluid consumption, but they contain free sugars that can damage teeth, so limit these drinks to a combined total of 150ml a day.



The Eatwell Guide divides the foods we eat and drink into 5 main food groups.

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

It's important to get some fat in your diet, but foods that are high in fat, salt and sugar have been placed outside of the circular image as they're not necessary as part of a healthy, balanced diet and most of us need to cut down on these.

Unsaturated fats from plant sources (for example, vegetable oil or olive oil) are healthier types of fat.

But all types of fat are high in energy (calories), so they should only be eaten in small amounts.

On average, women should have around 2,000 calories a day (8,400 kilojoules) and men should have around 2,500 calories a day (10,500 kilojoules). Most adults consume more calories than they need

The Eatwell Guide applies to most of us, whether we're a healthy weight or overweight, whether we eat meat or are vegetarian, and no matter what our ethnic origin.

Anyone with special dietary requirements or medical needs might want to check with a registered dietitian on how to adapt the Eatwell Guide to meet their individual needs.

For more information, including details of which foods are included in the food groups, download Public Health England's booklet about the Eatwell Guide from GOV.UK.

4 Make time to enjoy your food

Make sure you make time to enjoy your food. Whether you're eating on your own or eating as a family/group, make sure that you have the chance to actually enjoy what you're eating.

Try and not to eat as you are rushing about but make a conscious effort to sit and relax and just enjoy a short break while you recharge your energy levels and enjoy the food that you have made. With more time at home you may find that you have time to eat more of your meals together. Eating together at the table is not only a great way to increase family communication but also a great opportunity to encourage younger members of the family to try new foods.

5 Eat your 5 a day

It's recommended that you eat at least 5 portions of a variety of fruit and veg every day. It's good to get a good balance between fruit and vegetables and not just eat 5 pieces of the same fruit. Remember different fruits and veggies have different benefits and have different minerals, hence it's always good to get a balance.

Getting your 5 A Day is easier than it sounds. Your fruit and veg can be fresh, frozen, canned, dried or juiced.

Why not chop a banana over your breakfast cereal, or swap your usual mid-morning snack for a piece of fresh fruit?

As a guide:

- A portion of fresh, canned or frozen fruit and vegetables is 80g. A portion of dried fruit (which should be kept to meal times) is 30g.
- A 150ml glass of fruit juice, vegetable juice or smoothie also counts as 1 portion, but limit the amount you have to no more than 1 glass a day as these drinks are sugary and can damage your teeth.

6 Cut down on saturated Fats

We need some fat in our diet, but it's important to pay attention to the amount and type of fat we're eating.

There are 2 main types of fat: saturated and unsaturated. Too much saturated fat can increase the amount of cholesterol in the blood, which increases your risk of developing heart disease.

On average, men should have no more than 30g of saturated fat a day. On average, women should have no more than 20g of saturated fat a day. Children under the age of 11 should have less saturated fat than adults, but a low-fat diet is not suitable for children under 5.

Saturated fat is found in many foods, such as:

- fatty cuts of meat
- sausages
- butter
- hard cheese
- cream
- cakes
- biscuits
- lard
- pies

Try to cut down on your saturated fat intake and choose foods that contain unsaturated fats instead, such as vegetable oils and spreads, oily fish and avocados.

For a healthier choice, use a small amount of vegetable or olive oil, or reduced-fat spread instead of butter, lard or ghee.

When you're having meat, choose lean cuts and cut off any visible fat.

7 Cut down on sugar

Regularly consuming foods and drinks high in **sugar** increases your risk of **obesity** and **tooth decay**.

Sugary foods and drinks are often high in energy (measured in kilojoules or calories), and if consumed too often can contribute to weight gain. They can also cause tooth decay, especially if eaten between meals.

Free sugars are any sugars added to foods or drinks, or found naturally in honey, syrups and unsweetened fruit juices and smoothies.

This is the type of sugar you should be cutting down on, rather than the sugar found in fruit and milk.

Many packaged foods and drinks contain surprisingly high amounts of free sugars.

Free sugars are found in many foods, such as:

- Sugary fizzy drinks
- Sugary breakfast cereals
- Cakes
- Biscuits
- Pastries and puddings
- Sweets and chocolate
- Alcoholic drinks

Food labels can help. Use them to check how much sugar foods contain.

More than 22.5g of total sugars per 100g means the food is high in sugar, while 5g of total sugars or less per 100g means the food is low in sugar.

There is a great Sugar Food Scanner App, take a look at it here <https://www.nhs.uk/change4life/food-facts/sugar#be-food-smart-app>

8 Stay Hydrated

You need to drink plenty of fluids to stop you getting dehydrated. The government recommends drinking 6 to 8 glasses every day. This is in addition to the fluid you get from the food you eat.

All non-alcoholic drinks count, but water, lower fat milk and lower sugar drinks, including tea and coffee, are healthier choices.

Try to avoid sugary soft and fizzy drinks, as they're high in calories. They're also bad for your teeth. Even unsweetened fruit juice and smoothies are high in free sugar.

Your combined total of drinks from fruit juice, vegetable juice and smoothies should not be more than 150ml a day, which is a small glass.

Remember to drink more fluids during hot weather or while exercising.

Here's just a few of the benefits of drinking water

- It can help you feel fuller - because water is an appetite suppressant, drinking it before meals can make you feel fuller, therefore reducing the amount of food you eat.
- It may improve memory and mood - [Research](#) has shown that even mild dehydration can impair memory and [mood](#) in everyone from [children](#) to the elderly.
- It can help reduce sugar cravings and aid weight maintenance - The brain can't actually tell the difference between hunger and thirst, so often we can mistake thirst as a 'sugar craving'. The next time you feel the need for something sweet, try drinking a glass of water first.
- It may reduce [headaches](#) and [migraines](#). A lack of water may increase the risk of a headache or migraines in some individuals.
- It may help prevent constipation in children and digestive system, and so staying hydrated can help prevent constipation in [children](#), adults and [the elderly](#).
- It may help to manage anxiety. Hydration has an impact on the brain, as well as the body, and [research](#) has shown that even mild dehydration can have a negative impact on [energy levels and moods](#), which may heighten the symptoms of anxiety.

9 Don't skip meals

When your routine changes, such as being socially distanced, and being home more, there is always a risk that eating habits also change. If people are worried about their weight one of the things they will often do is to start cutting out or skipping meals. Whilst this may save you some calories initially, you may well find that you end up snacking more or you end up eating much bigger meals when you do eat.

Instead of skipping a meal, set a goal to eat three good meals a days – breakfast, lunch and dinner.

There are some great examples of healthy meals at

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/?tabname=recipes-and-tips>

10 Think about your portion sizes

Serving sizes have ballooned recently and we are eating way more than our bodies need. If we eat more, and don't burn off the extra food with activity, our bodies will end up storing those extra calories as fat and our weight will increase.



There are some simple things you can do to help limit your portion sizes:

- Choose to eat from a smaller plate that has less space for food. Your plate will look full at the start but your portions will be less than even if you were serving up onto a big plate.
- Start with a small amount on your plate. Eat that and see if you start to feel fuller. Remember it takes time for your food to reach your stomach and for your body to register that you have eaten enough.
- Eat slowly and enjoy the food you have. Having a smaller portion that you savour is much better than guzzling a big plate of food.
- If you're still hungry add more leafy greens or veggies to your meal, these will help to fill you up.
- Drink some water with your meal, this will naturally help you to feel fuller, and give your body time to register the food you have eaten.

Here's a few tips for portions sizes for an average adult:

- o 2 handfuls of dried pasta shapes or rice (75g)
- o A bunch of spaghetti the size of a £1 coin, measured using your finger and thumb (75g)
- o the amount of cooked pasta or rice that would fit in two hands cupped together (180g)
- o A baked potato about the size of your fist (220g)
- o About 3 handfuls of breakfast cereal (40g)
- o A piece of grilled chicken breast about half the size of your hand (120g)
- o A piece of cheddar cheese about the size of two thumbs together (30g)
- o About 1 tablespoon of peanut butter (20g)
- o About 3 teaspoons of soft cheese (30g)

11 if you want to lose weight commit to do it now

Many adults in England are overweight or obese. You can check whether you're a healthy weight using the [BMI calculator](#).

If you need to lose weight, you can use the [Gloucestershire](#) Healthy Lifestyles Programme. The service is free and our coaches will work with you to help you lose weight and develop healthier habits that help you maintain your weight loss.

Whether you like to be part of a group, receive one to one support, or just have someone to be accountable to weigh in with, we have an offer to support you and help you achieve your goals.

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