

Healthy eating and why it is so important

What do you think of when you hear the words **healthy eating**? Some people may think that this means eating as little as possible, that carbohydrates and fats are bad for you or even that you can eat whatever you like as long as you exercise. All of these statements are common myths and misconceptions as to what healthy eating really consists of.

A healthier diet is not about strict limitations or depriving yourself of the food you love, it should be focused towards having more energy, improving your health, boosting your mood and most importantly that you feel great! Therefore, it is important to note that healthy eating is hugely different from dieting and does not aim to reduce a significant amount of body weight in a short amount of time.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”. There are lots of influencing factors that contribute towards being healthy such as getting the right amount of sleep, being physically active and having lower stress levels. Healthy eating contributes to all of these in some way so the key to promoting all round good health is through having a balanced diet.

Carbohydrates are often thought of as bad for your diet and people that wish to lose weight often significantly reduce their intake of carbs, but did you know that carbohydrates are the brains primary energy source?! A lack of carbohydrates can often affect your mood and mental health and even give you brain fog, therefore it is important to make sure you are getting enough of this macro nutrient in your diet. It is currently recommended that around 1/3 of what we consume per day is carbohydrates, ensuring that we choose higher fibre and wholegrain varieties such as wholewheat pasta or brown rice.

The most common phrase you may have heard is ‘eat your 5 a day’ **this** refers to your daily fruit and vegetable intake **which** can be easier to achieve than you think. An adult portion size is roughly 80g and **it** is recommended to eat a wide variety of fruits and vegetables to ensure that you are also consuming enough vitamins and minerals within your diet. A 150ml glass of 100% fruit juice or a smoothie will contribute towards 1 of your 5 a day however even if you exceed this amount it will still only count as one portion. You could try eating a piece of fruit for breakfast or as a snack during the day or you could even try grating vegetables such as carrots or courgette into your usual dinners such as lasagne to **boost** your intake.



The Eatwell guide The Eatwell Guide - NHS (www.nhs.uk) is an easy to use guide on just how much of each food group we should be consuming per day.

Making small gradual changes to your eating habits will help you to improve your diet in the long run. Simple quick changes could include swapping your usual full fat dairy items such as yoghurts or cheeses to low fat alternatives. Try to swap high calorie sugary drinks for an alternative such as lightly carbonated water with a dash of fruit juice. Fresh fruit and vegetables are also favoured over tinned products because they contain less sodium (salt).

When we eat well we sleep better which in turn gives us more energy and better concentration. It is important to have a good sleep routine however the things we eat can also play a role in aiding sleep for example almonds contain sources of the hormone melatonin which helps to regulate your body clock and sends signals to prepare you for sleep.

Healthy eating combined with a healthy lifestyle can help us to reduce the risk of certain health problems such as type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, the risk of developing cardiovascular disease and some cancers. Foods rich in antioxidants such as blueberries and raspberries help to protect our body's cells from free radical damage and aid disease prevention

Something that often gets overlooked when taking about healthy eating is our daily fluid intake and in particular our water intake. It is recommended that we consume at least 2L of water per day plus more if exercising or if the weather is hot!

Water is extremely important for our bodies to function properly, aside from keeping you hydrated water suppresses the appetite naturally and helps the body speed up its metabolism aiding weight loss. Staying hydrated is essential for maintaining body temperature especially when we are exercising as we lose water through sweating. Although sweating will keep our bodies cool our temperature will continue to rise if we do not replenish the water lost which will result in dehydration.

Overall choosing healthier foods and adopting healthier long term eating habits all add up to healthier, happier lives.

