

ACHIEVING A WELL BALANCED DIET



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ACHIEVING A WELL BALANCED DIET

Introduction

We all experience challenging situations in life which can lead to us feeling difficult emotions. Some of us can find it difficult to manage and regulate our emotions and we need some support to do this.

One of the common ways our emotions can impact us is by influencing our relationship with food and our body. This may mean that we no longer feel hunger cues because we experience low mood or high levels of anxiety.

Additionally, we may form irregular eating patterns of restricting our eating or on the other side of the spectrum eating more. Our eating can fluctuate on this spectrum and sometimes interact so one leads to the other for example, if we have eating more than we intended, we might feel bad about this and restrict our eating later.



EATING FOR WELLNESS

Why does our mood impact our relationship with food and body?

We live in a society with heavy focus on appearance and beauty which can make us feel like our appearance is the only thing that determines our self-worth. These messages about beauty standards can be intensified by media and social media. Often these standards of beauty are unrealistic, unachievable and make us feel unhappy with ourselves.

Often when our emotions feel intense and we don't know how to regulate them, we can feel a loss of control. This may mean that we seek control in other areas of our lives such as by focussing on controlling our eating or our bodies.

Why do we need to eat?

Your body is always using energy. Most of the energy it uses goes towards keeping your basic, essential functions working; your heart beating, your lungs breathing and your brain operating. The rest of the energy it needs goes into things like physical activity, temperature regulation and even digesting your food.

So, maintaining a healthy body weight is not simply balancing calories in and calories out because exercise accounts for only a small amount of the energy you need.

It is also important to remember that eating for pleasure and enjoying your food are essential factors in eating well and for your general wellbeing. Food is an important part of social events and special occasions. Viewing food solely as a source of fuel can be damaging to our mental and physical wellbeing.



BUT HOW CAN I DO IT?

Making sense of some of the nutrients that are needed to keep our bodies healthy

It can be really confusing knowing what foods to include in our diet for our bodies to be as well as they can be. As well as affecting our physical health, a poor dietary intake can affect how we feel and our mood. Eating well can help to improve the way that we think, our concentration, our mood and our sleep as well as many other aspects of our lives.

It is important to eat at regular intervals, including 3 meals and 2-3 snacks throughout the day. This helps to ensure that our bodies receive an adequate nutritional intake and a steady supply of nutrients. It is important to include foods from all the main food groups to ensure a balanced and nutritionally appropriate diet. This is because all the different nutrients have a role to play in keeping our bodies healthy.

The food that we eat provides three main nutrients: carbohydrates, fats and protein, known as macronutrients. In addition to this our diets also provide a large group of nutrients known as micronutrients or vitamins and minerals



CARBOHYDRATES

Starchy Carbohydrates

Starchy carbohydrates are the body's main source of energy. Starchy carbohydrates such as rice, potatoes and pasta, particularly those which are higher in fibre e.g. wholegrain rice, wholegrain bread help us to feel full after we eat them. These also play a role in maintaining a healthy digestive tract. They are also the brains preferred source of energy so are important for cognitive function and mood.



When they are digested, carbohydrates are broken down into glucose and cause a steady rise in blood glucose. This begins a few minutes after we start to eat, and when it is high enough that signals the brain to stop eating. Gradual release of glucose into your blood continues over the next few hours and regulates our blood sugar levels and provides a source of energy for our brain.



If we don't include enough of these foods in our diet, our blood sugar levels can fall leading to weakness, dizziness and confusion, affecting our memory and our ability to concentrate. This can lead us to having certain food cravings e.g. of high sugar foods and drinks; which can lead to uncontrolled eating patterns.

Certain starchy foods release glucose more gradually than others. These are typically foods that contain wholegrains, such as granary or seeded bread, porridge and muesli, oatcakes, pasta, sweet potato, brown rice, high fibre cereals like shredded wheat.

Current guidelines recommend that we eat some starchy carbohydrates with every meal e.g high fibre breakfast cereal in the morning, a sandwich made with wholegrain bread at lunchtime and a stir fry with wholegrain rice in the evening.



This group of high fibre starchy carbohydrates are a great source of B vitamins, Vitamin E, iron and zinc. If you are very active, you may need to increase the amount of these foods in your diet to give you the extra energy you need.

CARBOHYDRATES

Sweet Carbohydrates

Sugary foods include sweet carbohydrates. Sugar occurs naturally in some foods or can be added to provide a sweet taste. Our bodies use sugar as an energy source for our brains, muscles and organs.



Naturally occurring sugars can be found in foods such as milk, fruit and vegetables.

Added sugars may be found in foods such as cakes, chocolates, and biscuits where they are used as an ingredient or added when consuming i.e. sugar on cereal. These foods can be included as part of a well-balanced diet.

FATS

Fats provide a source of energy which our bodies need to function. Fat provides essential fatty acids which our bodies can't make, and enables fat soluble vitamins, A, D, E and K to be absorbed. Fats provide protection around our vital organs and are essential for brain and nerve cell functioning, as well as hormone production. They are also needed to keep us warm and regulate our body temperature.

If you don't include enough fat in your diet, you may notice that you feel cold, feel fatigued and struggle to concentrate. You may also notice hormonal changes such as loss of menstrual cycle in those who menstruate.

There are different types of fats including unsaturated and saturated fats. Sources of unsaturated fats include nuts, seeds, oily fish, olive and other vegetable oils and avocados. Sources of saturated fats include milk, cream, butter, cheese, coconut, meat and processed meats such as sausages.



Fats occur naturally in our food, i.e. meat, fish, butter and can also be added to our meals when consuming them i.e. margarine, oil, mayonnaise, creamy sauces, salad dressing. All of these different types of fat can be included as part of a well-balanced diet.

PROTEIN

Proteins are known as the building blocks in our bodies to make up muscles and bones. Protein is essential for growth and repair within our bodies. It is used to make things including hair, skin and hormones.



It is recommended that protein rich foods are included at mealtimes. Good dietary sources in our diets include lean meat, poultry, fish, eggs, nuts, legumes/beans, quorn, soya (tofu and tempeh), dairy products and meat alternatives.

Protein foods are also a good source of other nutrients in our diets such as iron.

FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

This food group contains a range of essential vitamins and minerals including vitamin C, folic acid, and other B vitamins.



To support you to get a range of essential vitamins and minerals in your diet, include a mix of fruit and vegetables in your meals and snacks and have as much variety as possible.

If you have too much of these foods, you can feel full and bloated, and find you can't eat enough of the other foods you need for a well-balanced diet. Too much of these foods can confuse natural appetite regulation, as they make your stomach feel full, but don't raise blood glucose or fat levels, giving your brain a mixed message.



MILK AND MILK-BASED FOODS

Milk, yogurt and cheese are rich in calcium. and an important source of protein and micronutrients such as vitamin D and potassium.



We need calcium to support bone and teeth health as well as muscle function, including heart muscle. During periods of rapid growth, such as the teenage years, your body responds to the changing levels of hormone in our bodies by laying down calcium in bones to make them hard and strong. This is an important time for bone development in our lives.



If your body weight is low and/or you have had a period of low body weight, production of these hormones can be reduced. A diet low in calcium and vitamin D at the same time can leave the bones at risk and lead to weak bones known as osteoporosis.

Vitamin D is also essential to support the body to use and absorb calcium. You can get this from food such as, oily fish, eggs, cheese, and yellow spreads on bread. However, we get most of vitamin D from sunlight, this can be more of a challenge in the winter months or if you tend to stay covered up or indoors. A vitamin D supplement, especially between October and April/ during the winter months is helpful to ensure you are getting adequate amounts of vitamin D.



If you prefer not to have cow's milk, use soya milk with added calcium. Other types of non-diary milk such as rice or nut milks may not be suitable, as they may not provide enough energy and protein.

FLUIDS

Your body needs water for every function. Your body loses water all the time, through your skin, in your breath and when going to the toilet. If you don't replace it, you can become dehydrated. Dehydration can lead to headaches, tiredness, moments of dizziness, for instance when you stand up quickly.



You need to take drinks regularly throughout the day. Most of us need 6-8 drinks a day, each one about 250ml or a large mug. Aim to have at least one drink with each of your three main meals, between meals and in the evening.

You need more fluid if you are very physically active, or the weather is hot, or you if you are unwell.



Fizzy drinks can be a helpful source of calories however if you drink a lot of diet fizzy drinks this can interfere with natural appetite regulation. If they also contain caffeine such as energy drinks, they may interfere with sleep and therefore general wellbeing.

VITAMINS AND MINERALS

Vitamins and minerals are provided by foods as part of a well-balanced diet. They all have a role within our bodies.

Vitamin A helps our immune system to fight infections. It is also important for growth of healthy eyes, hair and skin. It is found in full fat dairy products such as milk, yoghurt and cheese, as well as yellow, orange and red fruit and vegetables. A fat source is really important for the absorption of Vitamin A.

There are several **B vitamins** which include thiamine and Vitamin B12. The B vitamins play an important role in how our body turns food into energy as well as support normal functioning of our nervous system. Dietary sources include green leafy vegetables, nuts, beans and fortified bread and cereals.

Vitamin C is needed for healthy gums, teeth, hair and nails as well as skin. It also helps to promote the absorption of iron in our bodies. Sources in the diet include fresh fruit and vegetables such as broccoli, peppers and spinach.

Vitamin D has multiple roles within our bodies. It is essential for growth and maintenance of healthy bones and teeth. It also plays an important role in our immune systems and having a healthy heart. Vitamin D increases the absorption of calcium. Good sources in the diet are oily fish, fortified margarines and cereals. However it is also made from sunlight. During winter months a supplement is recommended.

Vitamin E plays an important role in our immune systems, as well as helping prevent tissue damage within our bodies. Sources of Vitamin E include oils, spreads, nuts, seeds and green leafy vegetables.

Vitamin K is needed for normal blood clotting and wound healing to occur in our bodies. It is also essential for growth and development of our bones and kidneys. Good dietary sources of Vitamin K include dairy products, cereals, meat and green leafy vegetables.



Sodium has multiple roles in our bodies. It is needed to help maintain our blood pressure levels within a healthy range, as well as being needed for nerve signals to travel around the body. It also has a role in the formation of new bone. It is found naturally in some foods however it is mostly found as an added ingredient such as in processed foods including crisps, pies, biscuits and butter.

Potassium is a mineral which helps our hearts to function normally. It is also needed for nerves and muscles to communicate with each other. Fruit and vegetables and wholegrain cereals are a great dietary source.

Calcium is essential for healthy bones, teeth and muscles. It also plays a role in the functioning of our hearts and in blood clotting. The best dietary sources are dairy products such as milk, cheese and yoghurt. Some cereals are fortified with calcium. Tinned fish which contain soft bones are also a good source. Non animal sources include sesame seeds, almonds, hummus and firm tofu.

Phosphorus is also needed to help our bodies form healthy bones and teeth alongside other nutrients. It also helps to break down fats and carbohydrates so that they can be used by our bodies. Dietary sources include wholegrain products, legumes, red meat, dairy products and nuts.

Magnesium helps to keep our teeth and bones healthy, however its main role is in our nervous system and functioning of our muscles. Good dietary sources include wholemeal bread, dairy products, green leafy vegetables, nuts and dark chocolate.

Zinc has multiple roles, including boosting our immune systems, involvement in growth and repair of tissues, thyroid function and regulation of cholesterol metabolism. Sources include nuts, tofu, beans, dairy products and red meat.

Iron is essential to make red blood cells which carry oxygen around the body. It is also needed for immune function. Good dietary sources are eggs, red meat, chick peas, nuts, dried fruit and fortified cereals.



HOW TO GET THESE FOOD GROUPS

Ways to get starchy carbohydrate foods

Breakfast: Cereal, muesli or porridge with milk or yogurt. Add toast, crumpets or bread rolls with spread or nut butters.

Lighter Meal: Have a sandwich (bread, wrap, bagel, panini) or a jacket potato with fillings. Rice, couscous or pasta salads with vegetables and fish or nuts. For a hot light meal, have beans or egg on toast.

Main Meal: Most hot meals have a starchy food as the base, i.e. potatoes, sweet potatoes, rice or pasta. Pizza has a dough base or pies have a pastry crust.

Snacks: Toast with spread, soup with a roll, cheese with oatcakes, a scone, crumpet or toasted teacake with spread.

Ways to get protein foods

Breakfast: Add nuts or seeds (whole, butters or ground) to porridge or muesli, or yogurt. For a hot breakfast have baked beans or egg on toast, or pancakes with nut butter, toast and nut butter or tahini.

Lighter Meal: Hummus, peanut butter, egg, meat or fish in sandwiches. Cheese, tuna or minced meat like bolognese sauce as topping are good with jacket potatoes.

Main Meal: A hot meal should have a generous helping of meat, fish, meat alternatives (tofu, tempeh or meat replacement) or beans. They could be served plain, or with sauce.

Snacks: Packets of nuts and seeds, or fruit and nut bars. Cheese and biscuits or fruit. Nut butter and crackers.



Ways to get fats

Breakfast: Use olive oil, vegetable spread or butter on toast. Nuts either whole, butter or ground can be added to toast, crumpets or cereal.

Lighter Meal: Have a dressing based on olive oil, nut or seed oil. Use an olive oil or vegetable spread for sandwiches. Bean based dips such as hummus with with pitta bread or tortilla chips.

Main Meal: Use a vegetable oil for cooking. Drizzle olive oil or oil-based dressing on vegetables, or dip bread into olive oil.

Ways to get fruit and vegetables

Breakfast: Fruit juice at breakfast or add fresh fruit or dried fruit to cereal, porridge or muesli.

Lighter Meal: Add salad or cut vegetables such as tomato, cucumber and carrot to a sandwich or have on the side with your meal.

Main Meals: Include a serving of cooked vegetables or a salad with a hot meal.

Fruit as a dessert with yoghurt or ice cream or many desserts are fruit-based, such as crumbles, pie and tarts/cake.

Snacks: Fresh fruit is a good snack, try to add some cheese or nut butter to include a protein choice. Dried fruit is a simple quick snack. Vegetable soup can be a more substantial snack or lighter meal with bread or crackers.



Ways to get milk or milk based foods

Breakfast: Cereal or porridge with milk at breakfast. Yogurt with fruit or muesli is good. Smoothies using yoghurt or milk or a hot milky drinks such as tea or hot chocolate.

Lighter Meal: Cheese, cream cheese, cheese spread as a sandwich filling or topping for a jacket potato. Yogurt is a simple dessert. Add feta or goats cheese to salad or sour cream, crème fraiche to top a hot meal.

Main Meal: Cheese based dish such as macaroni with cheese, cauliflower cheese, or pizza with cheese. Fruit with custard, or milk pudding is a simple dessert.

Snacks: Milky hot drinks such as coffee or hot chocolate from coffee shops. Cheese with oatcakes or with fruit makes a quick snack.

Sweet and fatty foods


Eating for health is not just about nutrients. Sweets, crisps, chocolate may not be the most important part of physical health but are often eaten during social events and celebrations such as special trips, the cinema, dinner with friends, birthdays. They play a really, important part in our emotional and social health.

We need to learn how to use these foods in a more normal way without having them harm our health.

Try to eat these foods when you are not hungry, so you are less likely to overeat them. One or two servings a day is fine. If you try too hard to avoid these foods, you can feel deprived, and this may trigger cravings and uncontrolled eating.

You might like a dessert after a main course sometimes, or crisps or chocolate as part of your light meal. Enjoy a piece of cake, or a biscuit with a hot drink. Enjoying these foods in moderation can be enjoyable and can help build connections and experiences with family and friends.

SUPER TIPS

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- A graphic of a clipboard with an orange border and a grey clip at the top. The clipboard contains a list of seven tips, each preceded by a green checkmark.
- ✓ Eat regular meals and snacks throughout the day
 - ✓ Stay well hydrated
 - ✓ Choose foods from all the different food groups to include in your diet
 - ✓ Include high fibre foods for a healthy digestive system and to help slow release of energy
 - ✓ Don't replace a nutritious snack with a dietary filler such as a diet fizzy drink
 - ✓ Fresh, frozen and dried fruit and vegetables all provide a great source of nutrition
 - ✓ Making dietary changes can be frustrating but remember one step at a time

FURTHER RESOURCES

The UK's Eating Disorder Charity - Beat

<https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/>

British Dietetic Association (BDA)

<https://www.bda.uk.com/>

PEACE Pathway

<https://www.peacepathway.org/>

The New Maudsley Approach

A resource for professionals and carers of people with eating disorders

<https://thenewmaudsleyapproach.co.uk/>

Mind - Food and mental health

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/food-and-mental-health/>



NOTES:

A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing notes.

With thanks to the young people, their carers and the staff within Hampshire CAMHS, for all their amazing ideas and contribution to this booklet.

A special thank you to the youth board at Hampshire and Isle of Wight Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust for their time and support in reviewing this resource.

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