

Healthy eating information

The eatwell plate



Use the eatwell plate to help you get the balance right. It shows how much of what you eat should come from each food group.



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The *eatwell plate* is a pictorial food guide produced by the Food Standards Agency to help people understand and enjoy healthy eating. It shows the proportion and types of foods that we need to make up a healthy, balanced diet. The plate applies to most people, regardless of weight, height, ethnic origins and whether you are vegetarian or otherwise. The exceptions are children under two years of age because they need full-fat milk and more dairy product, and those under medical supervision.

Healthy eating is all about balance, which means that there are no good or bad foods. All foods can be included in a healthy diet as long as the overall balance of foods is right by achieving the correct intake of those nutrients that is important for health.

No single food contains all the essential nutrients the body needs to be healthy and function properly. We eat food to provide us with energy to live but the balance between how much carbohydrate, fat and protein we eat must be right for us to remain healthy. Too little protein can interfere with growth and other body functions, too much fat can lead to obesity and heart disease. Different foods provide different vitamins and minerals, therefore a healthy diet should include a variety of foods to ensure all the vitamins and minerals are provided. For example, dairy products such as milk and yogurts are great sources of calcium, but they are a poor source of vitamin C; citrus fruits are good sources of vitamin C, but they do not provide any iron.

The plate is divided into five food groups. Foods from the largest groups should be eaten most often and foods from the smallest group should be eaten least often. The guide is shaped like a dinner plate which has been designed to make healthy eating simpler to understand and interpret.

The Eatwell Plate shows the types of foods that fit into the five commonly accepted food groups and the proportions of these foods that should be eaten from each group. People should be encouraged to choose a variety of foods from the four largest groups every day to ensure that they obtain the wide range of nutrients their bodies need to grow, develop and function properly to stay healthy.

Fruit and vegetables we all need to eat at least five portions of these everyday. Fresh, frozen, dried, canned and juiced varieties all count. Fruits and vegetables are low in fat and high in fibre; they also provide a range of important nutrients which are essential to maintain health.

Bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods group should make up a third of your diet because they provide us with energy. We should all eat more of this group. Potatoes form part of this group.

The **Milk and dairy foods** group provides calcium and are very important in the diet for good bone health. These foods should be eaten in moderate amounts every day. Choose lower-fat options whenever you can, such as semi-skimmed milk, low-fat yogurt and reduced-fat cheese.

Meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein foods provide protein for growth and development, as well as minerals such as iron, zinc and magnesium and also B vitamins. Leaner cuts of meat and lower fat versions of these foods should be included. Visible fat and skin should be trimmed from meat.

The smallest group – **Foods and drinks high in fat and/or sugar** – adds choice and palatability, but foods from this group should be used sparingly if they are eaten every day (such as butter and spreads), or not eaten too often (such as sweets and crisps).

It is not necessary to achieve this balance at each meal but it should be applied to food eaten over a day or even a week. The amounts that should be consumed will vary depending on energy needs (based on age, sex and physical activity levels), as well as appetite. Choosing different foods from within each group is also important as this adds to the range of nutrients consumed, as well as variety to the diet.

For further information about *The eatwell plate*, visit the Food Standards Agency website <http://www.eatwell.gov.uk>.

Eight tips for eating well

The *eatwell plate* is based on the 'Eight tips for eating well', which are published by the Food Standards Agency and provide practical guidance on ways to achieve a healthy, varied and balanced diet. They are:

1. Base your meals on starchy foods.

We should aim to eat starchy foods such as potatoes, bread, rice and pasta with every meal. Starchy foods keep us full and provide us with energy, as well as fibre, calcium, iron and B vitamins. They should make up a third of our diet.

2. Eat lots of fruit and vegetables.

Try to eat at least 5 portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables every day. Fruit and vegetables provide lots of vitamins, minerals and fibre which our bodies need to function properly.

3. Eat more fish.

Fish is an excellent source of protein and contains many vitamins and minerals. It is recommended that we all eat two portions of fish a week, one of which should be oily fish, such as mackerel, salmon, trout and herring. These types of fish contains omega 3 fatty acids, which can help keep our hearts healthy.

4. Cut down on saturated fat and sugar.

Eating too much saturated fat can increase cholesterol levels and the chance of developing heart disease, therefore try to avoid eating too many pies, pastries, hard cheeses, cakes and biscuits. Too many sugary foods and drinks can contribute to tooth decay, especially if you have them between meals.

5. Try to eat less salt (less than 6g a day).[†]

Keeping a normal blood pressure is important for your health. Eating too much salt may raise your blood pressure and lead to certain illnesses. Much of the salt in our diet comes from processed foods such as bread, breakfast cereals, soups, sauces and ready meals. Even if you do not add salt to your food, you can still be eating a high amount of salt. Children under 11 years have lower recommended amounts than adults.

6. Get active and try to be of healthy weight.

To achieve a healthy weight, we need to balance the energy we get from food with the energy we use up through activity. If we take in the right amount of energy to meet our needs, we are said to be in energy balance and our weight will remain the same. If we take in more energy than we use up, the unused energy is stored as fat and we will gain weight. Physical activity such as walking, running or playing sport can help balance the energy we get from eating food to maintain a healthy weight.

7. Drink plenty of water.

Around two-thirds of our body is made up of water. We lose water throughout the day when we sweat, breathe and use the toilet. Drinking enough water each day helps prevent headaches and dehydration. Remember not to drink too many soft or carbonated drinks that are high in sugar.

8. Try not to skip breakfast.

Eating breakfast provides us with energy, as well as some important nutrients that we need for good health. For example, a healthy breakfast of wholegrain cereal and a glass of fruit juice, will give our body the energy and nutrients it needs to start the day. If you skip breakfast, you are more likely to fill up on snacks that are high in fat and/or sugar as you get hungry before lunch.