

Let's Talk...

LET'S TALK GUTS

Healthy Eating

It can be hard to know where to start when it comes to gut health and diet. From unhelpful 'advice' on social media that lacks credibility to an overload of information that can leave you feeling confused and overwhelmed. We're here to break healthy eating information down into bite-sized chunks you can easily digest!

An introduction to healthy eating

To keep your body healthy, it's vital to follow a balanced and varied diet. Eating well supports your overall wellbeing and helps your body work at its best. Along with keeping active, healthy eating is a core part of a lifestyle that directly benefits your gut, lowering your risk of chronic conditions like heart disease, stroke, Type 2 diabetes and certain cancers. You'd hope it was straight forward, right? Yet, many of us struggle to find a sustainable balance amidst busy routines.

The recommended intake for a healthy diet involves eating a wide range of foods across the different food groups each day, including aiming for at least five portions of fruits and vegetables, no more than 6g of salt, and maintaining a fluid intake of around two litres (eight to ten glasses) of water.

Healthy eating is an important part of a healthy lifestyle but changing how you eat should be done gradually. Setting rigid rules or trying to completely transform your plate overnight can be hard to maintain and might leave you and your gut feeling overwhelmed.



Please note, this information is intended to provide general health and lifestyle guidance only. If you live with a digestive condition and need tailored information and support about healthy eating, please speak to your healthcare team or a gastroenterology dietitian.



What is a healthy diet?

A healthy diet includes a good variety of different foods, ensuring your body gets the right nutrients to stay well, while avoiding substances that can be harmful when consumed in excess. A simple way to picture a balanced diet is by looking at the food groups that should make up the bulk of your meals:

Fruit, vegetables and starchy carbohydrates

These should form the foundation of what we eat. Starchy foods like bread, rice, potatoes, pasta or oats provide essential energy, and choosing wholegrain versions instantly bumps up your fibre. Fruits and vegetables are packed with vitamins and minerals. Together, these groups provide the essential fibre your gut bacteria need to thrive.

Proteins, dairy and healthy fats

Protein sources like beans, pulses, fish, eggs and lean meat help our bodies repair, with pulses doubling up as excellent fibre sources. Dairy foods, or calcium-fortified alternatives, keep our bones and teeth strong. Finally, replacing saturated fats like butter or lard with unsaturated fats like olive or vegetable oils keeps our hearts and guts much happier.



Good to know: Food does so much more than nourish us. It brings joy, holds sentimental value and connects us with others. Viewing foods strictly as good or bad can create an unhelpful relationship with eating. Healthy eating focuses on what you eat most of the time, so straying from your normal every now and then is completely fine!



Five top tips for a healthy eating routine:

1. Mix up your fruits and veggies

Aim for at least five portions a day and try to get as much variety as you can. Fresh, frozen and tinned options all count. Frozen mixed vegetables or tinned fruit in natural juice are convenient, cost-effective ways to add a splash of colour and nutrients to your plate.

2. Use the handy portion guide

It can be hard to know if you're eating the right amounts. As a simple rule of thumb for meals, aim for a fist-sized portion of carbohydrates (like brown rice or wholemeal pasta) and a palm-sized portion of protein (like fish, lean chicken or tofu). For a portion of fruit or vegetables, aim for an 80g serving, which is roughly a small handful or two to three tablespoons.

3. Be mindful of processed and red meats

The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends avoiding processed meats like sausages, ham, bacon and salami, as regular consumption increases the risk of bowel cancer. Try to limit red meat to no more than three portions a week. This is about 70g a day, or 160g three times a week. Go for lean cuts to keep excess fat down, too.

4. Add fish to the menu

Aim to eat two portions of fish per week, making sure one of them is an oily fish, like salmon, mackerel, trout or sardines. Oily fish are rich in omega-3 fatty acids, which provide fantastic anti-inflammatory benefits for your overall health.

5. Keep tabs on the extras

Try to reduce your intake of foods that are very high in fat and sugar and aim for less than 6g of salt per day to keep your blood pressure healthy. When it comes to drinks, minimise fizzy or sugary beverages and try to limit fruit juice to one small glass (100ml) a day.



Want to learn more?

We provide information and support on more than 40 digestive conditions and symptoms, as well as health and lifestyle. Go to gutscharity.org.uk/information to discover more.

