

mywellbeing

support programme

Most of us understand the benefits of following a healthy diet, from giving us more energy and keeping us fitter, to helping us stay slimmer, and cutting the risk of disease and premature death. However, with so much advice on nutrition and wellbeing out there, it is sometimes difficult to know exactly how to get that balance right.

Counting calories

Counting calories, for example, can be misleading. While, on average, men should aim to absorb around 2,500 calories a day to maintain a healthy body weight, and women 2,000, those levels can vary greatly according to the amount of physical activity we are used to doing. For instance, someone who runs regularly will need more calories than a person who spends their day at a desk.

However, most adults in the UK consume more calories than they require and keeping our daily intake within recommended levels is important in avoiding obesity, something that in itself can lead to a range of health problems, including diabetes, heart disease and strokes.



Even with the right intake of calories, we might not be choosing the range of foods necessary for a healthy diet. A good starting point is the NHS's Eatwell Guide, which divides foods into five main groups, and suggests that we eat a variety of items from each of the groups in order to get as nutritious a diet as possible.

The guide acknowledges, for instance, that some fat – particularly unsaturated fats from plant sources such as vegetable oil – is important for any diet, so long as we bear in mind that it can be highly calorific. However, the advice excludes items that are high in fat, salt, and sugar. That is not to say that we should avoid cakes, biscuits and crisps at all costs, but they contribute little or nothing to a healthy, balanced diet, and we ought to keep them to a minimum.

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

 Eat Well, Live Well

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One type of food most of us could eat more of is fruit and vegetables. A recent update from the Food Standards Agency and Public Health England suggested that, despite the 16-year-old five-a-day message, most adults under 65 are failing to eat more than four of the recommended portions, while children and older adults are faring even worse.



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From talkhealth



Eating more fruit and vegetables is, with few exceptions, one of the best ways to achieve a healthier diet – fruit juice, for instance, should be limited to a small glass a day because of its high sugar content. Most fresh produce is an excellent source of fibre – essential for digestive health and regular bowel movements, and a good way of feeling fuller – and often vitamin C, which helps the growth and repair of body tissues.

What vitamins does my body need?

Vitamins are molecules that the body needs – usually in small amounts – to run a variety of processes. Most of them can be produced from the food we consume in a healthy diet, while we generate vitamin D, essential for strong bones, for instance, from sunlight on our skin.



In extreme cases, a shortfall in certain vitamins can lead to serious medical conditions, but in most cases not enough of the right vitamins will leave us feeling tired. Vitamin K, for instance, plays a major role in blood clotting and strengthening bones, and can be found readily in vegetables such as kale.

Even those following a supposedly healthy diet can lack certain essential vitamins. Avoiding all animal products, for example, can leave vegans without vitamin B12, a vitamin not found in fruit or vegetables, but available in meat and dairy, and necessary for healthy blood and to keep the brain and nervous system functioning. The advice to vegans is to eat two or three sources of B12 fortified food a day, such as cereal, yeast flakes or plant milk. The alternative is to seek out over-the-counter vitamin supplements.

The best way to ensure we are consuming the right vitamins is to ensure we are eating a balanced diet, with the essential nutrients found in each of the five main food groups. Occasionally though, vitamin supplements can play a part, and blood tests – available through your GP or by using a private blood testing kit – can be one way of discovering whether we have a vitamin shortfall that needs addressing.

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT



Your nutritional needs



Effects of a poor diet

Applebottomgenes story



Nobody could say the last six years have been easy. Despite being a military wife, having cancer myself, a child with cancer, a car crash, moving country twice, returning to full time work, and five hugely invasive surgeries, I have managed to lose over ten stone through diet and exercise AND keep it off. It has been an incredible journey and writing about it on talkhealth has been my way of exploring the feelings behind the physical and emotional repercussions. - [Read more of Applebottomgenes story and blog here](#)

Video



Foods high in fat salt and sugars The Eatwell Guide

The British Nutrition Foundation look at foods high in fat, salt and sugars and how to avoid them and replace them in a balanced diet.



next topic: *Sugar*

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