

Healthy eating

Your guide to eating well

Health & wellbeing



AgeUKIG38

***Age UK is the new force combining
Age Concern and Help the Aged.***

***With almost 120 years of combined
history to draw on, we are bringing
together our talents, services
and solutions to do more to enrich
the lives of people in later life.***

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Age NI and Age Scotland. There are
also more than 170 local Age UKs.***

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Every effort has been made to ensure that the information contained in this guide is correct. However, things do change, so it is always a good idea to seek expert advice on your personal situation.

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Age UK is the new force combining

AGE
Concern

and

HELPTHEAGED **WE WILL**



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Introduction

It's never too late to start eating healthily. A healthy diet doesn't have to be boring and doesn't mean going without your favourite treats, although you might do well to eat them less often or in smaller portions. Eating well means that you are likely to feel healthier, stay active for longer and protect yourself against illness. You might be surprised by how much more energy you have.

This guide also looks at maintaining a healthy weight, including tips on eating well if you find that you've only got a small appetite. It includes important information about food safety too, so you can lower your risk of food poisoning, which is not only unpleasant but can also be a serious health risk.

Throughout this guide you will find suggestions for organisations that can offer further information and advice about your options. Their contact details can be found in the 'Useful organisations' section (see pages 26–28). Contact details for organisations near you can usually be found in your local phone book. If you have difficulty finding them, your local Age UK should be able to help (see page 26).

As far as possible, the information given in this guide is applicable across the UK.

Key



This symbol indicates where information differs for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.



This symbol indicates who to contact for the next steps you need to take.

Eating well

Eating well means enjoying your food and having plenty of variety and balance in what you eat. The eatwell plate can help you to follow a healthy, balanced diet by showing you how much to eat from each food group (see pages 6–7).

Fruit and vegetables

Research shows that people who eat plenty of fruit and vegetables are less likely to develop heart disease, certain cancers and eye conditions. Try to eat a variety of fruit and vegetables each day. Aim for five portions a day. A portion is roughly the amount you can fit in your hand – for example, two satsumas, three apricots, an apple or a banana. Frozen or tinned fruit and vegetables, dried fruit and fruit juice all count. Try to choose five different-coloured ones to have with or between meals.

Meat, poultry, fish, eggs, beans, lentils and nuts

Eat a portion of any of these foods at two of your daily meals. They all contain protein, which build and repair your body. You don't need to eat meat or fish every day – try cheese, well-cooked eggs, beans, lentils or tofu instead. Try to eat fish twice a week – one portion of white fish such as haddock or cod, and one portion of oily fish such as salmon or sardines. Oily fish are rich in vitamin D and a type of fat that helps to prevent heart disease. Avoid frying meat or fish.

Foods containing fat and sugar

Cut down on foods that are high in saturated fat or sugar. This includes foods such as butter, ghee, cakes, biscuits, sausages, meat pies, paté and fatty meat. Don't fill up on them at the expense of more nutritious foods. Saturated fats raise the level of cholesterol in the blood and increase the risk of heart disease and stroke.

Breads, other cereals and potatoes

Have a serving of starchy food (bread, chapatis, breakfast cereal, potatoes, yams, rice or pasta) with every meal. These foods give you energy. Wholegrain foods such as brown rice or wholegrain bread or pasta contain B vitamins, minerals and fibre that keep you well and help prevent constipation.

Milk and dairy foods

These foods contain calcium, which helps to keep bones strong. Try to have three servings a day and choose lower-fat versions, such as semi-skimmed milk, half-fat cheese and low-fat paneer where you can. A serving can be a cup of milk, pot of yoghurt, matchbox-size piece of cheese, or small pot of cottage cheese.

**what
next?**

List your favourite fruits and vegetables opposite. Which meals and snacks could include an extra portion of them?



**Favourite fruit
or vegetable**

Meal idea

Banana

Porridge with chopped bananas

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.

Fruit and vegetables



Meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein

Department of Health in association with the Welsh Government, the Scottish Government and the Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland. © Crown copyright 2011

Maintaining a healthy weight

Keeping to a healthy weight is important. It's not good for us to be overweight or underweight. It's easy for weight to creep up or drop off without us noticing, so it's a good idea to check that your weight is within a healthy range. If you're concerned about your weight then speak to your GP.

Worried about a poor appetite or unwanted weight loss?

If you're finding it difficult to eat well, it may result in you losing weight. Small amounts of food won't provide you with the energy, vitamins and minerals you need, and can cause tiredness and depression.

Weight loss can be triggered by illness, or stressful situations including bereavement or moving house. Possible signs of weight loss include your clothes feeling looser, jewellery (such as a ring) becoming too big for you and your appetite decreasing. Speak to your GP if you're worried about a poor appetite, or your own or a relative's unwanted weight loss. The food diary on pages 20–23 may be a helpful way of tracking what you eat.

If you only feel like eating a little, it's important that the food you do eat is nourishing. Try our tips to make sure that you eat well.

- Eat two to three small meals and a few snacks every day. Snack on yoghurt, breakfast cereal with milk, cheese and crackers, a slice of toast, a milky drink or a fruit smoothie rather than biscuits and sweets.
- Keeping active will help improve your appetite. Try to go for a short walk to the shops or around the park every day.

- Keep food to hand for when you want a quick meal or snack, such as tins of soup or frozen meals.
- Drink plenty of fluids to stay hydrated.

If you have problems chewing and wear dentures or have a bridge, ask your dentist to check that they fit properly. Try easy-to-eat foods such as minced meat, casseroles, mashed potato, canned fruit and cooked vegetables.

what next?

Join a **fit as a fiddle** healthy-eating session. Find out more by visiting www.fitasafiddle.org.uk or calling Age UK Advice (see page 26).

- i** If you're finding it difficult to shop or cook for yourself, then consider getting help. Talk to your local social services (or social work department in Scotland) or Age UK to find out what's available in your local area.

Speak to your GP if you're worried about a poor appetite, or your own or a relative's unwanted weight loss.

Trying to lose weight?

Losing weight is tough, even when we know that being overweight can make us less mobile, and make it harder to control high blood pressure, diabetes, or high cholesterol levels. If you have gradually gained weight over the years you should try to lose it slowly but steadily, not by crash dieting but by losing 1–2lb a week.

Try keeping a food diary for a week by writing down everything you eat each day. You can then see where you might cut down or change your habits. We have included a food diary for you on pages 20–23.

Being physically active is good for everyone, and can also help you lose weight and successfully keep it off. Aim to be moderately active for at least half an hour on most days of the week. You don't have to do it all in one go – it can be split into ten minutes, three times a day or 15 minutes twice a day. For example, you could go for two 15-minute brisk walks. Think about walking, cycling, gardening and using the stairs more, as well as sport and exercise classes if you enjoy them. Use the page opposite to think about what you could do. Strength and balance exercises are a good way to reduce your risk of falling. See our free guide *Staying steady* to find out more about them.

what next?

Our free guide *Healthy living* has more information about staying active and different activities you may enjoy. **fit as a fiddle** produces a recipe book called *fit as a fiddle Cookbook: Recipes for healthy living*. Call Age UK Advice to order a free copy (see page 26). Join a **fit as a fiddle** healthy-eating session or exercise class. Find out more by visiting www.fitasafiddle.org.uk or by calling Age UK Advice.

If you live in England, contact Walking for Health to find out about easy, short walks in your area (see page 28).



In Scotland, contact Paths for All (see page 28).

Exercise

When can I do it?

Take the stairs
instead of the lift

Every day

Gardening

Saturday mornings



Staple kitchen supplies to keep in stock

It's useful to have a store of basic foods in case you can't get to the shops because of bad weather or illness.

If you have a freezer, you could use it to store a small supply of foods you enjoy. These may include, for example, frozen mince and chicken pieces, frozen vegetables, a selection of ready meals, frozen seasonal fruit and ice cream. Cooking large batches of meals, such as stew or homemade soup, and freezing individual portions is a good idea. You can then defrost the meal for eating when you feel like it.

Here are some suggestions for foods you could keep stocked in your cupboards.

- Milk – long-life, dried, or evaporated milk; tinned milky puddings.
- Meat and fish – tinned corned beef, ham, sardines, salmon, pilchards, mackerel and tuna.
- Fruit, vegetables and fruit juice – a variety of tinned fruit and vegetables (including baked beans), dried fruits, lentils and other dried beans and peas, long-life fruit juice, instant mashed potato and frozen vegetables.
- Cereals – breakfast cereals, wholegrain crackers, oatcakes, plain biscuits, pasta and rice.
- Drinks – tea, coffee, cocoa, malted milk.
- Other – tinned and dried soups, yeast extract (for example, Bovril, Marmite or Vegemite).

Only buy food that you will use. Store-cupboard foods don't keep for ever, so use them occasionally and replace them with new ones. Don't let things go out of date.

Have a look around your kitchen and make a list of basic foods that you need to keep in stock.

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Staying hydrated

Water makes up over 60 per cent of our body weight, and it's important to keep hydrated to maintain this. Not drinking enough can lead to dehydration, which can cause constipation, headaches, tiredness and irritability.

Drink about six to eight cups of liquid a day. This does not have to be water. Tea, coffee, fruit juice or squash will do, but avoid fizzy drinks as they contain a lot of sugar and calories, which can result in weight gain. Don't rely on feeling thirsty to tell you when to drink, as when we get older our sense of thirst gets weaker.

It is particularly important to drink plenty in hot weather. See our leaflet *Staying cool in a heatwave* for more tips on coping in the heat.

Alcohol

When it comes to alcohol, many of us enjoy a drink now and then. Government guidance is that we should drink in moderation, which means that:

- men should not regularly drink more than three to four units a day
- women should not regularly drink more than two to three units a day.

‘Regularly’ means every day or most days. A pint of beer (4 per cent alcohol) and a 175ml standard glass of wine (13 per cent alcohol) both contain two to three units.

Having wine or beer most evenings – perhaps with your meal or while watching TV – can be just as damaging as binge drinking. Regular drinking like this can damage your liver, brain, blood vessels and other organs. Keep at least two days per week alcohol-free so that your liver, in particular, can recover from the toxic effects of alcohol.

You should avoid alcohol when taking certain medicines, so always read the leaflet that comes with prescription medicines, over-the-counter medicines or herbal medicines. If in doubt, ask your pharmacist.

what next?

If you're worried about your own or another person's drinking, speak to your GP or practice nurse, or contact Alcohol Concern or Drinkaware (see page 26 and 27).



In Scotland, contact Alcohol Focus Scotland (see page 27).

Know what's in your food

The symbols found on many food labels can help you make healthy choices. Most pre-packed foods have a nutrition label on the packaging.

Nutrition				
Typical values (as consumed)	per 100g	per pack	%GDA	your GDA*
Energy	541kJ/ 128kcal	2011kJ/ 476kcal	24%	2000kcal
Protein	4.9g	18.2g		
Carbohydrates	20.8g	77.4g		
of which sugars	1.5g	5.6g	6.2%	90g
Fat	2.8g	10.4g	15%	70g
of which saturates	2.3g	8.6g	43%	20g
Fibre	2.1g	7.8g		
Sodium	0.1g	0.5g		
Salt equivalent	0.3g	1.3g	22%	6g

*Recommended guideline daily amounts for adults (GDA)

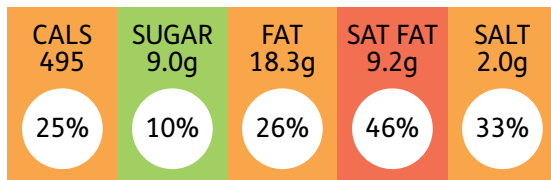
The label usually includes the number of calories and the amount of fat, saturated fat, sugar and salt in 100 grammes of the food and per pack, or per portion. Be aware that a manufacturer's idea of a portion may be different to yours.

Some labels include information on how the product fits into your daily diet. Guideline Daily Amounts (GDA) are guidelines about the amount of particular nutrients needed for a healthy diet. For example, a label might show that the food provides you with 1.3 grammes of salt, which represents 22 per cent of your GDA. In other words, it contains nearly a quarter of an adult's GDA of salt. Everyone will need different amounts of energy and nutrients so use them as a rough indication, not a precise guide or target.

Traffic light colour-coding

Some labels use red, amber and green colour-coding. If you're trying to choose between two similar products, this can help you quickly find the healthier choice.

Serves 2 – half a pizza provides



of your guideline daily amount

You can see at a glance if the food has high, medium or low amounts of fat, saturated fat, sugar and salt. Red means high, amber means medium and green means low. Amber lights mean the food contains neither high nor low amounts of sugar, salt and fat, so you can eat foods with all or mostly amber lights most of the time. The more green lights, the healthier the choice. Red lights indicate the foods we should try to eat less often and in small amounts.

'Use by' and 'best before' dates – what's the difference?

When buying food, check the 'use by' date. You will see this on food that goes off quickly, particularly fresh or chilled food including meat, poultry, fish, pâté and soft cheese. Even if it looks and smells fine, using it after the 'use by' date could make you ill. Don't take the chance – throw it out.

The 'best before' date is more about the quality of the food than its safety. It is frequently found on foods packaged in cans or jars or on dried food such as pasta or rice. Food past its 'best before' date won't make you ill, but it might have lost some of its flavour and texture.

**what
next?**

See 'Storing and preparing food safely' (page 18) to find out more.

Storing and preparing food safely

Many of us assume that food poisoning comes from cafés and restaurants, but we're just as likely to get ill from food prepared at home. Food poisoning can be more than just unpleasant – it can make us seriously ill. There are a number of bacteria that can cause food poisoning, but people over 60 are at a higher risk of food poisoning caused by *Listeria monocytogenes*, commonly known as listeria. This is a type of bacteria that can live and grow in food. It may be found in chilled ready-to-eat foods in particular, such as pâté, soft cheese, pre-packed sandwiches, cooked sliced meat and smoked salmon. It is rare, but severe cases can be life-threatening.

A few simple precautions can prevent food poisoning.

- 1 Set your fridge temperature at 5°C or below. This helps stop food-poisoning bacteria from growing. Bring chilled foods home from the shops as quickly as possible and transfer them straight to the fridge.
- 2 Wash your hands thoroughly before handling food and after handling raw food (such as meat, poultry, eggs, fish) and its packaging.
- 3 Wash worktops with hot soapy water before and after preparing food.
- 4 Use a separate chopping board for raw meat. It contains harmful bacteria that can spread very easily to anything it touches.

- 5 Don't wash raw meat such as chicken before cooking it – it isn't necessary and can actually spread germs further. Thorough cooking will kill any bacteria present.
- 6 Cover raw meat, poultry and fish, and keep it on the bottom shelf of the fridge, where it can't touch other foods or drip on to them.
- 7 Cook food thoroughly until it's piping hot. Chicken, pork, burgers, sausages and kebabs should be cooked all the way through with no pink meat inside.
- 8 Don't refreeze raw food that has already thawed. Prepare and eat it, or throw it away.
- 9 Reheat food thoroughly until piping hot, and never reheat more than once.
- 10 Avoid dishes containing raw eggs, such as homemade mousse or mayonnaise. Always cook eggs well until the yolk is solid. Raw or lightly cooked eggs can contain salmonella, a harmful bacteria. Older people are more likely than others to become severely ill if they eat contaminated eggs.

**what
next?**

In England, find out more by searching for 'food safety' at www.nhs.uk



Search for 'food safety' at www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk in Wales and at www.nhsinform.co.uk in Scotland.

Food diary

Try keeping a food diary for a week. It may help you see where you can change your eating habits and eat more healthily. Use the eatwell plate on pages 6–7 to help you make changes for the better.

Day	Meal	What you ate and drank
Day 1	Breakfast	
	Lunch	
	Dinner	
	Snacks	
Day 2	Breakfast	
	Lunch	
	Dinner	
	Snacks	
Day 3	Breakfast	
	Lunch	
	Dinner	
	Snacks	

This section of the page is a large, light green rectangular area designed for handwriting practice. It contains ten sets of horizontal lines. Each set is composed of three lines: a solid top line, a dashed middle line, and a solid bottom line. These lines are spaced evenly down the page, providing a template for practicing letter formation and alignment.

Day

Meal

What you ate and drank

Day 4

Breakfast

Lunch

Dinner

Snacks

Day 5

Breakfast

Lunch

Dinner

Snacks

Day 6

Breakfast

Lunch

Dinner

Snacks

Day 7

Breakfast

Lunch

Dinner

Snacks

Handwriting practice area with four sets of lines. Each set consists of a solid top line, a dashed middle line, and a solid bottom line.

Help with healthy eating

fit as a fiddle is Age UK's leading physical activity, healthy-eating and wellbeing programme for England, funded by the Big Lottery Wellbeing Fund. **fit as a fiddle** supports a range of healthy-eating activities and projects across the nine English regions – from cooking to weight management and physical activity programmes. These activities and projects support people in later life to eat well and healthily. **fit as a fiddle** also produces information and resources to encourage healthy eating in later life, including:

- *fit as a fiddle Cookbook: Recipes for healthy living* – a recipe book for eating and cooking well in later life
- *Add Flavour* – healthy-eating booklet for older people in residential care.

For more information about these resources and **fit as a fiddle** generally, visit www.fitasafiddle.org.uk or call Age UK Advice on 0800 169 65 65.

fit as a fiddle runs healthy-eating schemes in some areas. Contact your regional co-ordinator to find the one nearest to you.

East Midlands – Julie Folkett

emfaaf@gmail.com
01158 524 305

Eastern – Emily Bradbury

fitasfiddle.eastern@googlemail.com
01284 757 743

London – Alice Westlake

awestlake@ageuklondon.org.uk
020 7820 6784

North East – Carole Gourdie

carole.gourdie@ageuknorthtyneside.org.uk
01912 808 484

North West – Roger Jones

rogerjonesfaaf@yahoo.co.uk
07833 715 753

South East – Martine Ellis

ellismartine@yahoo.co.uk
01483 446 656

South West – Linda Bennett


lindajbennett@btinternet.com
07879 118 420

West Midlands – Sue Abbott

sabbott@achw.org.uk
01905 740 950

Yorkshire & Humber – Joanne Volpe

joannefaaf@googlemail.com
01132 441 860

-  In Wales, there is a similar programme called Ageing Well in Wales. This is funded by the Welsh Government. There are Ageing Well groups across Wales that offer a range of health and wellbeing activities and support, including healthy eating.

For more information on Ageing Well in Wales, visit www.ageuk.org.uk/cymru and click on the 'Health & Wellbeing' tab.

Contact Age Cymru to find an Ageing Well group in your area. Call 029 2043 1555 or email ageingwell@agecymru.org.uk

Useful organisations

Age UK

Age UK is the new force combining Age Concern and Help the Aged. We provide advice and information for people in later life through our Age UK Advice line, publications and online.

Age UK Advice: 0800 169 65 65
www.ageuk.org.uk

Call Age UK Advice to find out whether there is a local Age UK near you, and to order free copies of our information guides and factsheets.

In Wales, contact

Age Cymru: 0800 169 65 65
www.agecymru.org.uk

In Northern Ireland, contact

Age NI: 0808 808 7575
www.ageni.org

In Scotland, contact

Age Scotland: 0845 125 9732
www.agescotland.org.uk

Alcohol Concern

National organisation offering information and support about alcohol abuse and local services.

Tel: 0800 917 8282
www.alcoholconcern.org.uk

Alcohol Focus Scotland

National charity providing information and support about alcohol issues in Scotland.

Tel: 0800 7 314 314

www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk

British Heart Foundation

Provides free publications on looking after your heart health.

Tel: 0300 330 3311

Publications order line: 0870 600 6566

www.bhf.org.uk

Drinkaware

An organisation funded by alcohol firms and offering tips on responsible drinking.

Tel: 020 7766 9900

www.drinkaware.co.uk

Food Standards Agency

Carries out a range of work to make sure that food is safe to eat.

www.food.gov.uk

NHS Choices

Website that enables you to find out about local NHS services and get advice on healthy living.

www.nhs.uk

In Wales, visit **NHS Wales**

www.wales.nhs.uk

In Scotland, contact **NHS Inform**

Tel: 0800 22 44 88

www.nhsinform.co.uk

Paths for All

Charity promoting walking for health in Scotland.

Tel: 01463 725 152

Email: info@pathsforall.org.uk

www.pathsforall.org.uk

Walking for Health

Supports a large network of healthy-walking schemes across England, offering regular short walks over easy terrain with trained walk leaders.

Tel: 0300 060 2287

Email: wfhinfo@naturalengland.org.uk

www.wfh.naturalengland.org.uk

You may be interested in other guides in this range

- Bereavement
- Caring for your eyes
- Going into hospital
- Going solo
- Health services
- Healthy living
- Managing incontinence
- Staying cool in a heatwave
- Staying steady
- Winter wrapped up



To order any of our **free** publications, please call Age UK Advice free on:

0800 169 65 65

www.ageuk.org.uk/healthandwellbeing

What should I do now?

For more information on the issues covered in this guide, or to order any of our publications, please call Age UK Advice free on **0800 169 65 65** or visit **www.ageuk.org.uk/healthandwellbeing**

Our publications are also available in large print and audio formats.

The following Age UK information guides may be useful:

- *Going solo*
- *Healthy living*
- *Staying steady*

The Age UK Group offers a wide range of products and services specially designed for people in later life. For more information, please call **0800 169 18 19**.

If contact details for your local Age UK are not in the box below, call Age UK Advice free on **0800 169 65 65**.

