



Guide to eating well

This is the **first version** of a new resource developed to support people with practical, evidence-based guidance on eating well.



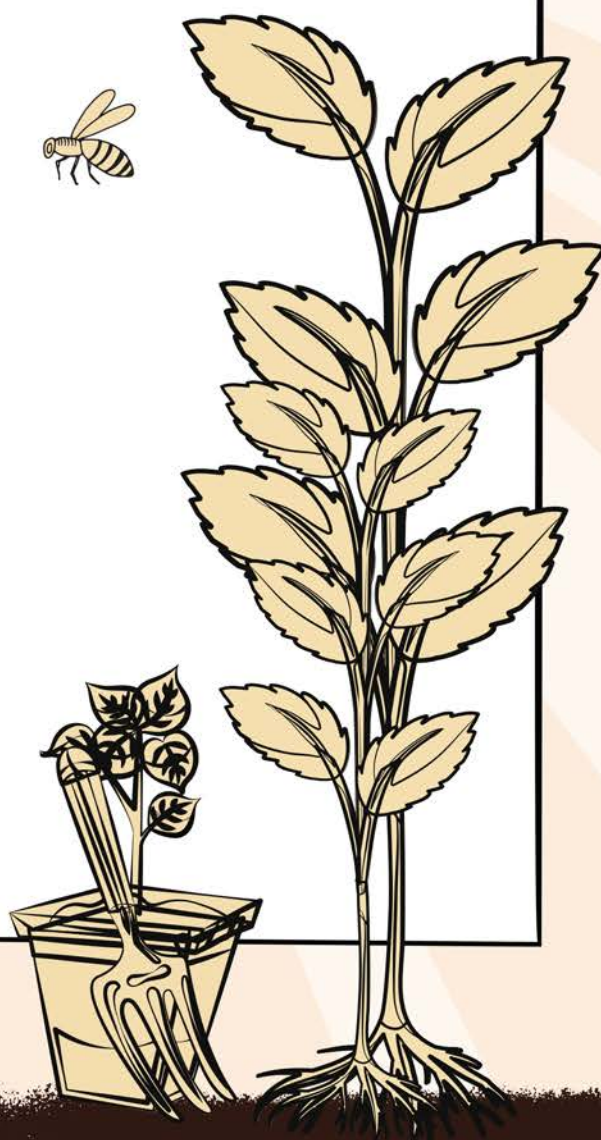
How to use this guide:

Use the **Contents** page to navigate the resource - each topic has a link so you can easily jump to the sections most relevant to you.



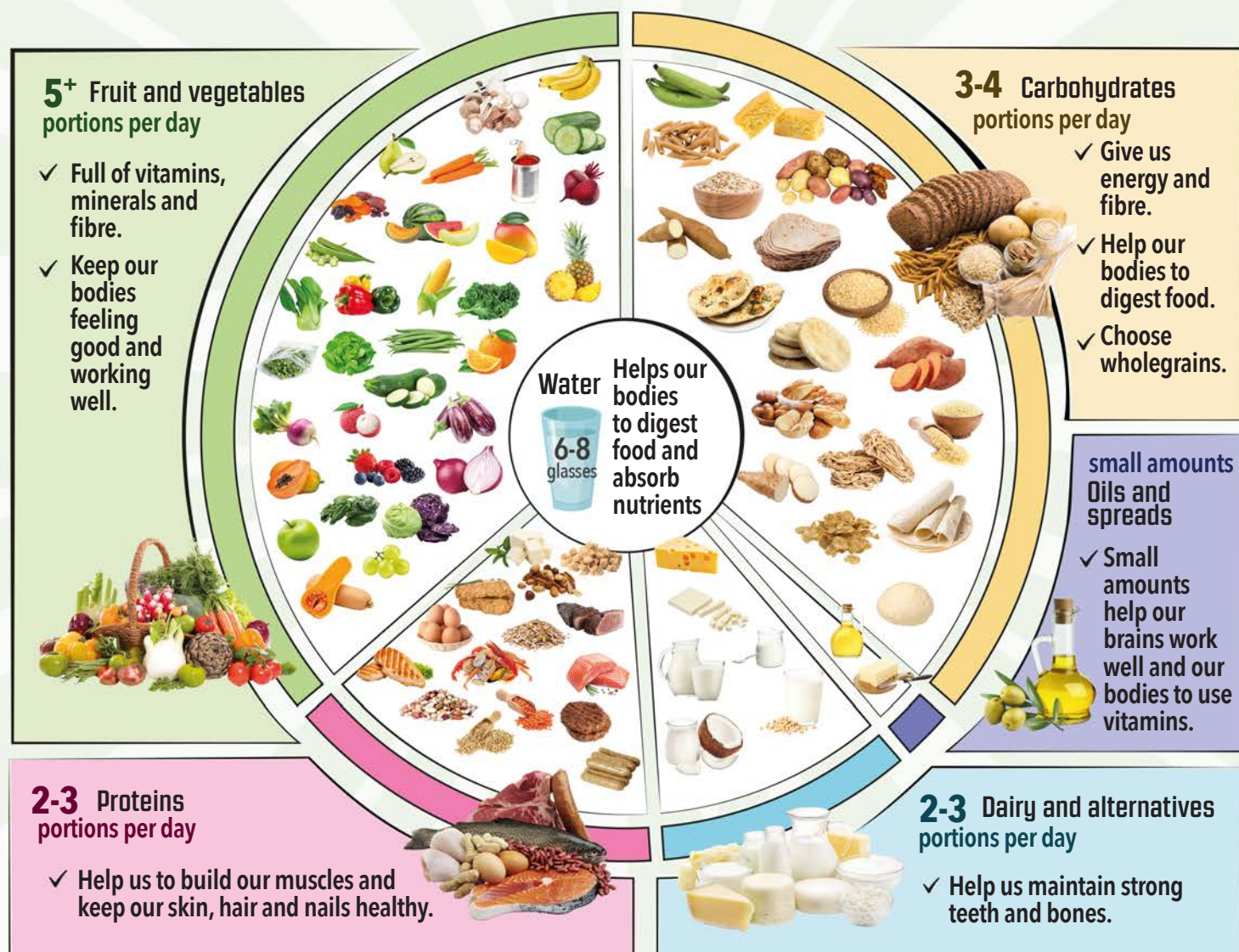
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Guide to eating well

Eating a healthy diet helps to give our bodies everything they need to work well and feel good. This guide shows how much of what you eat over a day or week should come from each food group.



Foods high in fat, salt and sugar

We don't need these foods, but it's okay to eat them occasionally and in small amounts. Eating too much of these foods can make us feel unwell.



We are all unique

Eating well looks different for everyone. We all like different foods. Some people need more or less food than others.

Many things affect how much food we need:

Recommended daily calorie intake:



2500 cals



2000 cals



age



current or previous health conditions



biological sex



pregnancy



hormones



level of physical activity

Key messages



Variety

Eat lots of different foods

We need to eat many different foods from each food group. This gives our bodies everything they need. We should try different types of fruits, vegetables and proteins.



Balance



Eat the recommended balance of each food group

We should eat foods from all the food groups and in the recommended amounts.

Eat the recommended portion sizes of foods

We need to follow portion size guidance to get the right amount of energy and nutrients.



Eat more of...

Eat at least 5 fruit and vegetables a day

Aim to eat lots of fruits and vegetables every day.

Include nutritious foods in all your meals and snacks

Include at least one nutritious food, like fruits, vegetables, beans, or pulses, in every meal and snack.

Eat more whole and less processed foods

We should choose wholegrains, beans, pulses, nuts, seeds, and a variety of fruits and vegetables, especially dark green leafy ones.



Eat less of...



Eat less fat, salt and sugar.

We should eat only small amounts of foods high in fat, salt, and sugar. This includes fried food, sweets, chocolate and crisps. We shouldn't eat these foods very often.



Eat less highly processed food

We should eat only small amounts of highly processed foods, such as crisps, confectionery and instant soups or noodles, and not very often.



Stay hydrated

Water should be our main drink

We should drink 6 to 8 glasses of water every day. Water in fruits and salads also counts. Tap water is good for us.

Drink less drinks high in sugar and fat

Drinks can have lots of sugar, fat, and harmful ingredients. We should drink less energy and fizzy drinks. Choose tea and coffee without added fat and sugar.



Wider wellbeing



Make sure your lifestyle supports your wellbeing

What we eat is influenced by our lifestyle. This includes how much we sleep and engage in physical activity.

Enjoy what food adds to our lives

People of all ages and backgrounds can build connections when they eat together. Try new flavours and enjoy new foods. This helps to create healthy habits.



The Food Groups

Fruit and vegetables

Full of vitamins, minerals and fibre.
They keep our bodies feeling good
and working well.

5⁺ Fruit and vegetables

portions per day

Examples:



Cucumber



Apples



Carrots



Mushrooms



Cabbage



Oranges



Tomatoes



Onions



Pears



Grapes



Sweetcorn



Bananas



Spinach



Kale



What is a portion?

We should eat at least 5 portions of different of fruit and vegetables every day.

As a general rule:



A portion of fresh or frozen vegetables or fruit is a cupped handful.



A portion of leafy green vegetables is what fits into two cupped hands.



A portion of dried fruit is what fits in the centre of your palm.



A portion of fruit juice is a small glass (150ml).

Helpful hints



Eat a variety. Different types give your body different vitamins and minerals.



Try something new. Try fruits and vegetables you haven't tried before.



Stock up your freezer and cupboards. Canned and frozen last longer and are cheaper.



Try not to eat too much dried fruit or drink too much fruit juice or smoothies. Have them at mealtimes as the sugar can damage your teeth.



Add to meals. Add fruits and vegetables to your meals to stay fuller for longer.

Carbohydrates

Give us energy and fibre. Fibre helps our body to digest food.

3-4 Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates

portions per day

Examples



Yam



Oats



Brown Rice



Wholewheat pasta



Wholemeal and brown bread



Wholewheat noodles

Nutritious food swaps



swap...

...for

White bread

Wholegrain or 50/50 bread

White rice, pasta, noodles

Wholegrain varieties

Fried potatoes (crisps, chips, fries)

Baked or boiled potatoes

Breakfast cereals high in sugar (chocolate cereal, granola, honey cereal)

Breakfast cereals low in sugar wheat biscuits, bran flakes, no added sugar muesli

What is a portion?

We should eat 3-4 portions of starchy carbohydrates per day.

As a general rule:



A portion of cooked rice or pasta is what fits into two cupped hands.



A portion of jacket potato is the size of your fist.



A portion of bread is the size of your hand.



A portion of cereal is what fits into two cupped hands.



Helpful hints



Choose wholegrain. Wholegrain varieties have more fibre which helps our bodies digest food.



Balance your plate. Eat with protein and healthy fats.



Include at least 1 starchy food at each meal. They give our bodies energy to keep us going throughout the day.



Check food labels. Some cereals have a lot of salt and sugar. Look at the labels to compare them.



Eat potatoes with their skin on. The skin contains fibre and vitamins.

Proteins

Help us to build our muscles and keep our skin, hair and nails healthy.

2-3 Beans, lentils, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins

portions per day

Examples



Beans and lentils



Plant-based alternatives



Eggs



Fish



Meat



Nuts and seeds

Nutritious food swaps



swap... ...for

Processed meat (sausages, bacon, ham)

Sliced chicken breast, meat with fat removed

Fatty cuts of meat

Sliced chicken breast, meat with fat removed

Nut butters that contain palm oil or added salt and sugar

Nut butters that contain 100% nuts and no added salt or sugar

Processed plant-based meat alternatives

Pulses such as beans and lentils

What is a portion?

We should eat 2-3 portions of protein foods per day.

As a general rule:



A portion of meat or fish is what you can fit on the palm of your hand.



A portion of eggs is one for a child and two for an adult.



A portion of beans or lentils is a handful.



A portion of nuts and seeds is what fits into the centre of your palm.

Helpful hints



Champion pulses. Pulses give you fibre, vitamins, minerals, and protein.



Eat different types of protein sources. By eating different protein foods, your body gets all the amino acids it needs.



Two portions of fish per week. If you eat fish, make sure one portion is oily fish like salmon, trout, or mackerel.



Choose meat lower in fat. Be aware of the fat in meat products such as mince.



Limit processed meat. Foods such as sausages, bacon and ham can be high in salt and additives.



Grill, bake and steam. Use these methods instead of frying meat, fish and plant-based meat alternatives.

Dairy and alternatives

Help us maintain strong teeth and bones.

2-3 Dairy and alternatives

portions per day

Examples



Milk



Yoghurt



Cheese



Dairy alternatives

Nutritious food swaps



swap...

...for

Full fat whole milk

Skimmed or semi-skimmed milk

High sugar yoghurts such as split pots and pudding pots

Lower-sugar fromage frais or plain natural yoghurt

Plant-based milks and yoghurts that do not contain added vitamins and minerals

Plant-based milks and yoghurts that contain added calcium, vitamin D and B12

High fat cheeses (gruyere, mascarpone, full-fat cheddar)

Lower fat cheeses (feta, cottage cheese, mozzarella, reduced-fat cheddar, ricotta)

What is a portion?

We should eat 2-3 portions of dairy and alternatives per day.

As a general rule:



A portion is a 200ml glass of dairy or plant-based milk.



A portion of hard cheese is a piece the size of two thumbs.



A portion of yoghurt is a standard sized individual pot.

Pick plant-based milks and yoghurts with added calcium, vitamin D, and B12 (often called 'fortified').

Helpful hints



Choose skimmed or semi-skimmed milk. Children can have whole milk and semi-skimmed milk as a main drink from 1 year of age and skimmed and 1% milk from 5 years of age.



Check for added vitamins and minerals. When choosing plant-based options choose those with added calcium, vitamin D and B12.



Choose low or reduced-fat options. Dairy products can be high in saturated fat so choose lower-fat spreads and yoghurts.



Be aware of allergies and intolerance. Some people can be lactose intolerant or allergic to cow's milk.



Read labels. Dairy products can be high in fat, salt and sugar so check the nutrition labels.

Oils and spreads

Small amounts help our brains work well and our bodies to use vitamins.

small amounts Oils and spreads

Examples



Plant oils



Low-fat spreads



Butter



Ghee



Nut butter

Nutritious food swaps



swap...

...for

Butter and lard

Low-fat spread

Coconut and palm oil

Plant oils such as olive, sunflower and rapeseed

Ghee

Plant oils such as olive, sunflower and rapeseed



What is a portion?

We should have small amounts of oil and spreads each day.

As a general rule:



A portion size of oils and spread is the size of the tip of your thumb.



One teaspoon of oil.



Two teaspoons of salad dressing made with oil.



Butter or margarine spread thinly on one slice of bread.

Helpful hints



Choose oils containing unsaturated fat. This includes plant oils such as olive, sunflower and rapeseed.



Use lower smoke point oils for dressings. This is because the oil is not going to be heated.



Choose lower-fat spreads instead of butter, ghee and lard.



Watch your portion sizes. Oils and spreads are high in energy so be careful not to use too much.



Use higher smoke point oils for cooking such as rapeseed and sunflower oil.

Hydration

We should aim to drink 6-8 glasses of fluid per day. Tap water is good for us.

Water should be our main drink but lower-fat milk, tea, coffee and low sugar drinks all count.



Helpful hints



Drink regularly throughout the day.



Swap sugary drinks for diet, sugar-free or no added sugar drinks.



Drink more fluids if you have been exercising or active.



Check nutrition labels. Choose drinks with green traffic light labels because it means they're low in sugar and fat. Drinks with amber or red traffic light labels should be had less often.

Caffeine

Caffeinated drinks include coffee, tea and energy drinks. Adults should aim for no more than **400mg of caffeine per day** (that's no more than 4 single shot cups of coffee) and avoid caffeine **before bedtime**. Caffeine is not recommended for young children and energy drinks are not suitable for those under 16 years of age.

How much caffeine is in my drink?

DRINK	CAFFEINE (mg)
Tea	75mg
Coffee	100mg
Cola	40mg
Energy Drink (250ml)	80mg



Tip: try switching to decaf tea or coffee in the afternoon.

Hydration ladder



Water



Milk



Fruit juices and smoothies
(one small glass per day)



Sports drinks
(only if needed)



Tea, coffee and other hot drinks



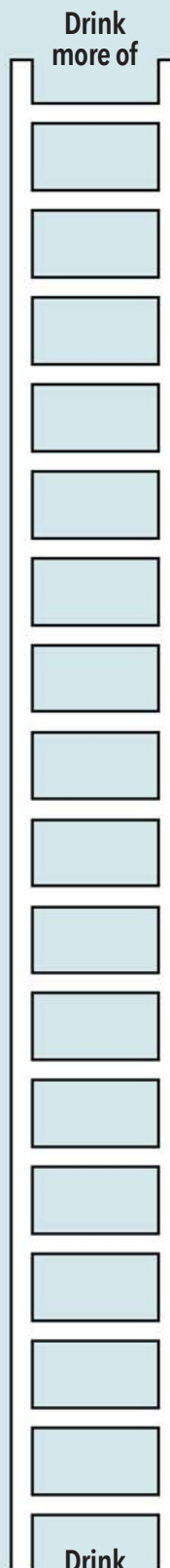
Sugar-free drinks



Sugary drinks
(limit)



Energy drinks
(limit)



Fat, salt and sugar

Eating too much food high in fat, salt and sugar can make us feel ill. It can make us gain weight and damage our teeth.

Nutrition labels help us to tell if a food is high in fat, salt and sugar. It's important to note that food labels don't always show the traffic light colours, which can make it tricky to determine if a food is high in fat, salt, or sugar. Remember, it's only if the label shows green that it's low in fat, salt, and sugar.



Each serving (150g) contains

Energy 1046kJ 250kcal	Fat 3.0g LOW	Saturates 1.3g LOW	Sugars 34g HIGH	Salt 0.9g MED
13%	4%	7%	38%	15%

of an adult's reference intake

Typical values (as sold) per 100g: 697kJ / 167kcal

Traffic light labelling Check the label

		Low (green)	Medium (amber)	High (red)
SUGAR	Sugar in food (per 100g)	5g or less	Between 5g and 22.5g	More than 22.5g
	Sugar in drink (per 100ml)	2.5g or less	Between 2.5g and 11.25g	More than 11.25g
SALT	Salt in food (per 100g)	0.3g or less	Between 0.3g and 1.5g	More than 1.5g
TOTAL FAT	Total fat in food (per 100g)	3.0g or less	Between 3g and 17.5g	More than 17.5g
SATURATED FAT	Saturated fat in food (per 100g)	1.5g or less	Between 1.5g and 5g	More than 5g

Understanding traffic light labelling



The traffic light label shows if a product has high, medium or low amounts of sugar, salt, saturated fat and total fat.



Green labels = Contains low amounts
We should eat lots of foods with green labels.



Amber labels = Contains medium amounts
We can eat some foods with amber labels.



Red labels = Contains high amounts
We should eat less foods with red labels.
Eat them only sometimes and in small amounts.



The labels also tell us how much energy is in the product (in kilojoules and calories).

Use the NHS Food Scanner app to scan food packaging while you shop and get healthier swap options:

Apple



bit.ly/3V6gN6S

Google Play



bit.ly/4eL4Uu4



Spotlight on fat



Fat

Consume in small quantities and choose unsaturated fats
A small amount of fat is essential for a healthy, balanced diet.

Why is it important we limit saturated fat?

Too much fat in our diet, especially saturated fats, can increase our risk of:

- High cholesterol
- Heart attacks
- Strokes
- Weight gain

Learn how to reduce saturated fats with the British Heart Foundation:



bit.ly/4nAN5n3

How can I reduce my fat intake?

- Aim to cut down on saturated fats and choose unsaturated fats.
- Measure oil with a spoon to control the amount you use.
- Check the nutrition label when shopping.
- Grill, steam, boil and bake food instead of frying.
- Choose low-fat dairy products or dairy alternatives.
- Remove visible fat from meat.



Types of fat

Saturated fat – comes from animals, like meat and dairy, and some plants, like palm and coconut oil. Foods high in saturated fat include cheese, cakes, pastries and fatty cuts of meat.

Unsaturated fat – is found in oils from plants and fish. Foods that contain unsaturated fats include plant oils, nuts and oily fish.

We should try to reduce the amount of saturated fat we eat and choose unsaturated fats.

Foods you may not realise are high in fat



Processed meat



Fried food

Pre-made pasta, curry and stir fry sauce



Ready meals



Mayonnaise



Cakes, pastries and biscuits



Whole milk



Ghee



Cream



Butter



Cheese

Pre-made sandwiches and wraps



Maximum daily amount of saturated fat



Children (4-6 years old):
18 grams



Children (7-10 years old):
22 grams



Children and adults (11 years and older):
28 grams

Spotlight on salt



Salt

Consume in small quantities

Why should we limit salt?

Too much salt can cause high blood pressure, which increases our risk of:

- Heart disease
- Heart attacks
- Heart failure
- Strokes
- Dementia

There are lots of different types of salt, such as pink and rock salt. They may be less processed but all contain a similar amount of sodium to table salt.

How can I reduce my salt intake?

- Check the nutrition label when shopping and watch out for hidden salt in ready made products. 
- Try to reduce salt gradually as our taste buds don't notice the change if we do it slowly.
- When cooking at home experiment with herbs and spices instead of adding salt for flavour. 
- Choose low-salt or low-sodium options.
- Leave the salt shaker off the dinner table.



Learn how to reduce your salt intake with the British Heart Foundation:



bit.ly/3OpYQws

Foods you may not realise are high in added salt



Processed meat



Stock cubes and pots



Canned and pre-made soups



Instant noodles

Pre-made gravy and gravy powder



Soy sauce



Pre-made pasta, curry and noodle sauces



Ready meals

Pre-made sandwiches and wraps



Maximum daily amount of added salt



Children (4-6 years old):
3 grams (1/2 a level teaspoon)



Children (7-10 years old):
5 grams (around 3/4 of a level teaspoon)



Children and adults (11 years and older):
6 grams (1 level teaspoon)

Spotlight on sugar



Sugar

Some foods, like fruit and milk, have natural sugars but give us other good things our bodies need. When sugar is added to food, it's called "free sugar," and we should reduce how much of it we eat.

Why should we limit added sugar?

Eating too much added sugar increases your risk of:

- Tooth decay
- Type 2 diabetes
- Weight gain
- Fatigue and mood disorders such as depression and anxiety

How can I reduce my sugar intake?

- Check the nutrition label when shopping. Look for the "Carbohydrates of which sugars" section.
- Instead of adding sugar to meals try different ways to make food tasty, such as adding fruit to breakfast cereals.
- Swap sugary drinks for water, lower-fat milk, or sugar-free drinks.
- If you add sugar to drinks like tea and coffee, use a little bit less each time so you don't notice the change.
- Enjoy your favourite sweet treat, but have it less often and in smaller portions.



Learn how to reduce your sugar intake with the British Heart Foundation:



bit.ly/4hWS9iS

Check how much sugar you and your family may be eating with the NHS Sugar Calculator:



bit.ly/3A00l4u

Foods you may not realise are high in added sugars



Flavoured yoghurts



Breakfast cereals



Fruit juice



Cereal bars



Pre-made marinades



Condiments like tomato ketchup



Squash or cordial with added sugar



Pre-made pasta, curry and stir fry sauce



Canned and pre-made soups

Maximum daily amount of free sugar



Children (4-6 years old):
19 grams (5 cubes)



Children (7-10 years old):
24 grams (6 cubes)



Children and adults (11 years and older):
30 grams (7 cubes)

It's not just about food



Six building blocks of wellbeing

Ensure your lifestyle supports your wellbeing



Eating well

Eating a varied and balanced diet helps to give our bodies everything they need to work well and feel good. It gives us the energy to carry out our daily activities.



Physical activity

Being physically active keeps our bones and muscles strong and our hearts healthy. Moving our bodies is also great for our mental wellbeing.



Sleep

Sleeping well allows our bodies and minds to recharge. It boosts our mood and energy levels. Going to sleep and waking up at the same time each day can improve our sleep.



Mental health and wellbeing

Our mental health and wellbeing is just as important as our physical health. Finding ways to reduce stress and talking about how we are feeling to others can support our wellbeing.



Positive activities

Some activities can harm our wellbeing, like too much screen time and social media, smoking, drinking alcohol, and gambling. It's best to limit these and do more positive activities like exercising and getting enough sleep.



Healthy relationships

Connecting with others is important for our health. Building meaningful friendships and positive social connections enhances our wellbeing. Mealtimes are a great opportunity to spend quality time with those around us.

