

Diet guidelines for good health

At times we get confused about what we should or should not eat. The following recommendations come from authorities on nutrition, such as government Health Departments. These guidelines ensure an adequate intake and balance of all important nutrients—carbohydrates, proteins, fats, fibre, vitamins and minerals.

1. Choose a nutritious diet

Choose from a wide variety of foods to provide meals that are healthier, cheaper, tastier and easier to prepare.

2. Control your weight

Prevent obesity by cutting back fats, sugar and alcohol. Reduce the size of servings (say 'no' to seconds) and increase physical activity.

3. Eat less fat

Select fish, poultry and lean meats; trim excess fat from meat and the skin from poultry. Limit the amount of butter or margarine on vegetables and bread. Use the minimum of cooking fats. Limit the intake of full-cream products, fried foods, fatty takeaway and snack foods.

Use monounsaturated (e.g. olive) oils for cooking rather than polyunsaturated oils.

4. Eat less sugar

Avoid or reduce sweet foods such as lollies, sugar, soft drinks, syrups, biscuits and cakes. Reduce the sugar in recipes. Use fresh fruit instead of canned fruit.

Instead, increase your intake of complex carbohydrates that contain starch and fibre. Eat more wholegrain breads and potatoes prepared without added fat.

5. Eat more breads and cereals, fruit and vegetables

Eat more fruit and vegetables, including dark-green vegetables, potatoes and corn. Choose wholegrain products—cereals, bread, bran, rice and oatmeal. Learn about the value of complex carbohydrates. Base your meals around a variety of fruit and vegetables.

6. Drink less alcohol

Limit alcohol to no more than two standard drinks a day. Drink with smaller sips each time. Reserve alcohol for special occasions and to only one occasion in the day.

7. Use less salt

High sodium intake may raise your blood pressure. Use few salty processed foods, including canned vegetables, meats, chips, crackers, sauces and meat pastes. Read labels on canned and packaged foods for their sodium content. Use little salt for cooking and at the table.

8. Encourage breastfeeding

Breastfeeding gives the best nutritional start to life.

9. Drink more water

Use water in preference to soft drinks, coffee and tea, cordials and alcohol. Use water filters and purifiers if your water supply is not pure. It is good to drink about 2 litres a day and more in hot conditions.

Extra tips on diet

- Do not eat animal meat every day, and only eat small portions.
- Limit tea and coffee intake.
- Eliminate or reduce takeaway foods (high in salt and fat). Limit to once a week.
- Eat fish* at least twice a week, preferably daily.
- Plant food is good for you—have it as part of breakfast.
- Limit cheese and ice-cream to twice a week.
- What you *usually* eat matters most, not what you *occasionally* eat.

* Avoid regularly eating larger fish known to have high mercury levels (e.g. swordfish, tuna).

