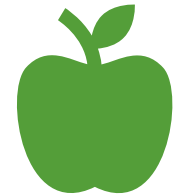


# Healthy Eating Guide





















The official NHS EatWell Guidance hasn't been updated for a long time, but the thinking and evidence about what we should be eating to stay fit and healthy has changed a lot over the past few years. Many of us have tried hard to eat more healthily according to the guidelines and have been left frustrated when that hasn't been something that we could sustain or simply hasn't worked for us to lose weight.

The best way to access this information in the way that suits you best is looking at the websites, podcasts and books that we have suggested. There is lots of really interesting info there, but this sheet is an attempt to summarise all that with a few simple suggestions.

# Ultra Processed Food



MINIMALLY PROCESSED	PROCESSED	ULTRA PROCESSED
 <b>CORN</b>	 <b>CANNED SWEET CORN</b>	 <b>CORN CHIP</b>
 <b>POTATO</b>	 <b>BAKED POTATO</b>	 <b>FRENCH FRIES</b>
 <b>CARROT</b>	 <b>CARROT JUICE</b>	 <b>CARROT CAKE</b>
 <b>WHOLE WHEAT</b>	 <b>FLOUR</b>	 <b>COOKIES</b>
 <b>APPLE</b>	 <b>APPLE SAUCE</b>	 <b>APPLE JELLY BABY</b>
 <b>MILK</b>	 <b>CREAM</b>	 <b>ICE CREAM</b>

UPFs are foods that have been significantly changed from their original state, with salt, sugar, fat, additives, preservatives and/or artificial colours added.

UPFs are bad for us as they are energy dense (calorific) but also the added sugars and additives mess with the hormones that drive appetite, making us overeat. Some of the synthetic chemicals (particularly emulsifiers) are thought to trigger inflammation in the gut and bloodstream. The individual additives are not toxic, they have been tested to check they are safe for human consumption in the short term. But we now believe that daily exposure to all these multiple additives is causing big problems with obesity and chronic disease.

Ultra-processed foods make up 50.7% of the average diet in the UK (higher in children). It doesn't have to be like this – in Portugal UPFs make up only 10% of the average diet.

For good health it is really important to have lots of different 'good' bugs in our gut (called our gut microbiome). A healthy gut microbiome helps to protect us from a lots of health problems that at first glance seem to be nothing to do with the gut. UPFs are very bad for our gut microbiome.

UPFs are now thought to drive obesity, reduce the diversity of our gut microbiome, cause inflammation in our bodies and put us at higher risk of developing multiple diseases (such as diabetes, cancer and dementia).

If you only read about one thing or want to start with one aspect of your lifestyle, make it reducing the amount of Ultra-processed food in your diet.

# How do I identify Ultra Processed Foods?

Not all processing is bad – tinned tomatoes, tinned tuna, tinned chickpeas are all processed but only have a single ingredient.

The BBC website has a useful section on this: [What is ultra-processed food? - BBC Food](#)

UPFs have very long lists of ingredients, most of which you wouldn't use if cooking in your kitchen. You may not recognise the names of these ingredients as many will be chemicals, colourings, sweeteners and preservatives. If a product has more than 4 ingredients it is ultra-processed. If it has more than 10 even more so! These products also have a much longer shelf life than if you made the equivalent food in the kitchen.

Often UPFs make a lot of health claims on the packaging about added vitamins or being low fat. This is because all the natural vitamins have been stripped out during the processing and are then artificially re-inserted. When fat is removed from these products it alters the taste, so sugar is added in to make *it taste more appealing*. Low fat does not equal healthy! (see below)

Food companies do constant research to get the right balance of salt, fat and sugar to make a product hyper-palatable, *almost addictively tasty*, so we will overeat it and they will make huge profits.

The NOVA Classification can also be used to identify UPFs. They have a website ([www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org)) where you can search items, but it is easier to use the golden rules below.

1. Unexpectedly long shelf life
2. Multiple ingredients – more than 4, especially more than 10
3. Ingredients you wouldn't find in a normal kitchen

## The obvious culprits:

**SOFT DRINKS** – sugar free aren't any better than normal versions, they are often more highly processed in fact.

**PROCESSED MEATS** – again processed vegetarian alternatives are just as bad from a processing point of view

**BREAKFAST CEREALS** – almost all UPFs, expect plain Weetabix, shredded wheat and unflavoured porridge oats

**SHOP BOUGHT CAKES AND BISCUITS** – full of sugar but also ultra-refined and processed ingredients with all the nutritional value stripped out. Home-made is better as a treat but will of course still be high in sugar and fat.

**CRISPS** – especially ones that are more heavily flavoured with reconstituted shapes – e.g. Pringles and Doritos much worse than a bag of cheap supermarket ready salted crisps or value tortilla chips.

## Surprise culprits:

**FLAVOURED YOGHURTS** – look at the number of ingredients! Usually full of processed sugar but often claiming to be natural and healthy. Use plain or Greek yoghurt and add toppings like fruit yourself.

**SHOP BOUGHT PLANT BASED BURGERS** – generally based on soy protein plus lots of emulsifiers and additives. Many people select vegan products to try and be healthier but ultra-processed meat substitutes are anything but.

**PACAKAGED BREAD AND BREAD PRODUCTS** – it is almost impossible to find a loaf of sliced bread in a supermarket that isn't ultra-processed (we have tried!). This is hard to avoid, especially with packed lunches, but try and have wholemeal bread with unprocessed fillings and mix up lunchboxes with soup, wholemeal pasta salad and leftovers.

# Calories



Calories are *a rough* measure of the amount of energy contained in food, but it's not as simple as you've been taught. The calorie content of a food tells us nothing about its quality. *Two* items may have the same calories on the packet, but those calories will be used differently by your body depending on the nutritional quality of the food, and depending on your unique genetics and microbiome (more on that later).



*For example*, 90 calories of sweetened diet yoghurt are not the same as 90 calories worth of boiled egg or almonds or carrot sticks. Protein and healthy fats fill us up and send messages to our brain to tell us that we're full. Sweetness drives more eating.



*It might sound strange but* if you are used to counting calories, we'd suggest you stop. Try and focus on *only* eating when you feel genuinely hungry and stopping when you're full. *Reducing* the amount of UPFs you eat will help you do this.





# Carbohydrates and Fibre



Most people have heard of low carb, high protein diets and there is good evidence that they can work well for many people, especially diabetics and pre-diabetics. But we all have different genetics and gut microbiomes, and they don't work for everyone.

What we do know is that most of us eat too many refined and processed carbohydrates. Often these are 'empty carbs' which don't fill us up as they are broken down into sugar *very quickly and give us a sugar rush. It lasts only a short time and then we feel hungry again.* White pasta and rice, most breads, processed potatoes and many UPFs fall into this category. Vegetables and wholegrains also contain carbohydrates, but they are *what is called 'complex carbohydrates'*, and it takes the body longer to break them down into sugar, so we don't get *that* dramatic sugar spike. They also have lots of fibre. *This all helps us to feel fuller for longer and helps keep our gut microbiome healthy and varied and happy.*

*We could* all try and eat more complex wholegrains to replace the 'empty carbs' in our diets *e.g.* try bulgur wheat, quinoa or brown rice, try to eat wholemeal pasta and bread when possible.

**FIBRE** - Most of us don't get anything like enough fibre in our diets. Good sources of fibre are fruit and vegetables and wholegrains like oats and brown rice, quinoa, bulgur wheat etc. Try and eat the skins of vegetables too as it is a great source of fibre.

# Retrain your palate

UPFs are specially designed to hit the human 'bliss point' with high levels of sugar and salt. As they are such a large part of our daily diets, when you are cutting down and trying to replace with more natural food, you probably won't like the real food as much. Food companies have trained our *taste buds* to enjoy sweeter artificially flavoured food. The good news is that it won't take too long to retrain your palate to enjoy more real food again. (That even works for children!)

## LOW FAT ISN'T HEALTHY

Fat is an important part of a healthy balanced diet and helps us absorb essential vitamins. There is now lots of controversy about how low-fat/high carb became the *main* public health message for so many years. *Some people believe that the research studies might have been deliberately manipulated.*

Fats help control hormones and appetite and there is evidence that low fat diets cause weight gain and contribute to chronic diseases. Part of the problem is that we have replaced fat with excessive consumption of carbohydrates, particularly ultra-processed ones.

When a food is marketed as low fat, the fat that has been taken out has usually been replaced with sugar and usually multiple other chemicals. Even in healthier examples, like plain reduced fat Greek yoghurt, the result is that the lack of fat stops it filling you up and can drive more overeating.



# Diets don't work

Many of us have had the experience of going on a diet for weeks or months and losing some weight, only to find that within weeks of relaxing a bit, or stopping the diet, it's piled back on and somehow you end up heavier than before.

The latest understanding of weight and appetite control is that we all have a natural 'set point' and the hormones in our bodies help us to stay roughly the same weight. Diets ruin this balance because your body interprets a diet as a famine (humans haven't really evolved much from our caveman hunter-gatherer days). When you relax your body starts piling on the lost weight and a bit of extra weight as protection for the next famine.

The best way to lose weight is to make a permanent change to the quality of your diet – it needs to be sustainable *for the long-term*, and the weight loss will be very gradual. For people who are very obese, it is probably not realistic to expect that dietary change will get them back into the healthy BMI range, but any weight loss and the change to a healthier diet will still help overall health enormously. There is good evidence for the benefits of some types of weight loss surgery for people with very high BMIs, along with healthy eating. If you think this may benefit you, please speak to our PCN Care Coordinators – 01253 54330



# Exercise

There are loads of health benefits of regular exercise. Exercise, especially with a social element, can improve mental health enormously and there is good evidence that exercise independently reduces your risk of lots of diseases like heart disease, cancer and dementia.

Alongside the dietary changes we have covered, additional exercise can help you lose a little bit more weight and is an important part of a healthy lifestyle. But evidence shows that your metabolism adapts very quickly to the increased exercise, and you don't really 'burn off calories' in the way we've been led to believe. Improved fitness and muscle tone will definitely make you feel better about your body though.



# 5 a Day v 30 a week

We are all familiar with the official advice that we should eat 5 pieces of fruit and veg a day. This is good advice if the fruit involved is fresh and unprocessed (i.e. not fruit juice/puree/smoothies). But it doesn't take account of the need to get the right diversity of microbes in our gut microbiome.

Research has *shown* that people who eat at least 30 *different* plant-based food a week had more diverse gut microbes than those who ate less than 10. It's not that *simple* of course but aiming for 30 *different* plant based foods a week can be a really useful target.

Getting as *wide* a variety as possible of lots of different coloured fruit and veg is important. *And* nuts, seeds, pulses and wholegrains all count. Bags of plain mixed nuts and mixed seeds are easily available in supermarkets.



# 5 a Day v 30 a week

30 a week can seem like an intimidating and potentially expensive target, but it doesn't need to be. Frozen and tinned fruit and veg absolutely count. Here's a possible meal plan for just 2 days:

## Monday

Breakfast – porridge made with plain oats and whole milk, topped with blueberries and mixed seeds (4 types in standard Aldi pack)

Lunch – Homemade tuna pasta salad (including cucumber, cherry tomatoes, frozen sweetcorn and spinach leaves) followed by a tangerine

Snacks – Handful of almonds and a banana

Dinner – Mixed bean chilli (4 types in typical mixed bean can, also made with onion, peppers) on a microwaved sweet potato with grated cheese and sour cream. (If you had brown rice instead of the sweet potato that would also count as a wholegrain).

## Tuesday:

Breakfast – Greek style full fat yoghurt with granola and chopped mixed nuts (4 types in standard Aldi pack) and grapes

Lunch – Homemade lentil and vegetable soup (onions, carrot, celery, red lentils) with a roll

Snacks – Handful of cashew nuts and an apple

Dinner – Sausages/Pork chops with potato and swede mash, peas, green beans and gravy

In just 2 days, that gives you more than 30 healthy plant based foods, many of these food are frozen or can be stored for long periods, plus leftovers can be used later in the week. All the above are available in standard supermarkets like Aldi or Morrisons.



# The Gut Microbiome

Our body is full of bacteria, viruses and fungi – these are known as our ‘microbiome’. While some microbes can cause disease, most of them are extremely important for our immune system, heart, weight and many other aspects of health. The microbes in our digestive tract (our gut microbiome) are especially important for health and can be thought of as another organ of our body.

It is important to have a diverse range of microbes in our intestines, and to make sure the good microbes outnumber the bad. The diversity and balance of microbes in our guts has a small genetic element but is mainly affected by our diet and lifestyle. If we don’t have a healthy microbiome, we are more likely to struggle with appetite control and obesity as well as a host of chronic diseases (diabetes, heart disease, cancer) and low mood.



If we have a really diverse microbiome with lots of good microbes, they improve our health by:

- Training our immune cells
- Increasing our resilience to infection
- Strengthening our gut barrier
- Communicating with our brain
- Balancing our blood sugar, lower fat levels in the blood and preventing many chronic diseases
- 

How do I improve my gut microbiome?

By making dietary changes, especially reducing the amount of ultra-processed foods and increasing fibre in our diets.

Probiotics are foods that contain good bacteria - like live yoghurt, kefir, kimchi, miso, kombucha and sauerkraut. If we build 1 or 2 of these into our regular diets that can make a big difference to our gut microbiome.

Prebiotics are food that provide fuel for the good microbes in our gut – these are vegetables and fruit, nuts, seeds, beans, pulses and wholegrains.



- Don't go on a diet – they don't work in the long term. Focus on improving the quality of your diet and only eating when hungry and stopping when full
- Reduce the amount of ultra-processed food in your diet as much as possible (food with more than 4 ingredients and ingredients not found in a normal kitchen)
- Read the ingredients – many items labelled as 'healthy', 'low fat', 'lunchbox approved', 'vegan' are heavily processed and full of additives – look at the length of the list of ingredients
- We are all used to ultra-processed food now – expect that it might take some time to retrain your *taste buds*
- Reduce the amount of processed carbohydrates in your diet (chips and potato products, white pasta, white rice, bread)
- Try and replace processed carbohydrates with more wholegrains (brown rice, oats, bulgur wheat, quinoa)
- Eating lower carb generally can help with weight loss for most people but don't go so low carb that it can't be sustained long term
- Increase the fibre in your diet – eat more fruit and veg, but also nuts, seeds and pulses
- Ignore the 'low fat' messaging on products - it usually means high sugar or full of additives. It's fine to use full fat milk and full fat yoghurt and cheese. Butter and olive oil (especially extra virgin) are better for you than vegetable, nut and seed oils as the latter are so highly processed.
- Increase your exercise because it is fantastic for physical and mental health and reduces your risk of chronic disease – but don't expect exercise alone to reduce your weight
- Try and get as great a variety of different fruit, vegetables, nuts, seeds, pulses and wholegrains as you can to improve gut health and reduce the risk of chronic diseases
- Consider eating probiotic foods like live yoghurt, kefir and sauerkraut to help our gut microbiome

