



Eating well for healthier lungs

If you're living with a lung condition, eating well is especially important. A balanced diet with lots of variety can help prevent infections and keep your lungs healthy so you can lead an active life.

In this booklet, we cover what a healthy diet looks like and why it's important, and how you can stay at a healthy weight.

You'll find lots of tips about how you can adjust what you eat and drink to help ease your symptoms.

We've put this together for you, your family, your carers and friends.

Why is my diet important?

It's important to eat a nutritionally balanced and varied diet, and to maintain a healthy body weight. If you have a lung condition, eating well is especially important. Foods and fluids contain essential nutrients to help prevent infections and keep your lungs healthy.

What is a balanced diet?

Eating a well-balanced diet can help control your symptoms and keep you feeling as strong and fit as possible. A well-balanced diet includes five key food groups. Each of these food groups helps keep you and your lungs healthy:

- **Fruit and vegetables** have vitamins and minerals that boost your immune system to help you fight off chest infections.
- **Starchy carbohydrates** give your body energy for breathing and other tasks. Choose high fibre or wholegrain versions, such as brown pasta and rice or wholemeal bread. They'll make you feel fuller for longer, protect your heart and keep your bowels moving.
- **Protein** helps to keep your muscles strong, including your chest muscles that help your ribs expand as you breathe. It's also important for your immune system.
- **Dairy foods** are a good source of proteins, vitamins and minerals – including calcium for healthy bones. Calcium is important if you take steroids, which increase the risk of brittle bones or osteoporosis.
- **Oils** contain a range of vitamins, such as vitamins A and E which are important for fighting infections.

To find out more, see the eatwell guide over the page and have a look at the interactive eatwell guide at www.nhs.uk/goodfood

Eatwell guide

Fruit and vegetables

Eat at least 5 portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables every day

Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta, noodles, chapattis and other starchy carbohydrates

Choose wholegrain or higher fibre versions with less added fat, salt and sugar



Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins

Eat more beans and pulses, 2 portions of sustainably sourced fish per week, one of which is oily. Eat less red and processed meat

Dairy and alternatives

Choose lower fat and lower sugar options

Oil and spreads

Choose unsaturated oils and use in small amounts



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How much water do I need to drink?

It's very important to drink plenty of fluid. This helps to keep you hydrated and keeps mucus moving. If mucus sits in your airways and lungs, you're more likely to get an infection.

Aim to drink a minimum of **six to eight cups** of fluid a day. This can include water, tea, coffee, milk, squash or fruit juice.

“I don’t follow a diet, I choose to eat healthily”

Jude, who has bronchiectasis, shares her experience.

“When I found out I had bronchiectasis, I had lost 12kg in two weeks. A dietitian helped me to get back to a healthy weight.

I have a background in fitness and nutrition. Once I found out I had a long-term condition, I realised that to have the best chance to enjoy life, my exercise and nutrition had to be at optimum levels and were more important than ever before.

I want my immune system to be as good as it can be and my body needs the best fuel to fight infections. So alongside my other treatments, I exercise daily and think about what I eat. I also like to drink green and herbal teas.

I don’t follow a diet, I choose to eat healthily. Don’t ever cut out a food group, your body needs a balance of all main food groups.

My tip is to choose natural foods. Avoid processed foods as they’re likely to have added salt, sugar and preservatives. It’s a good idea to read the labels. I choose to go for whole foods – fruit and veg, meat or other protein, wholegrains and healthy fats. I enjoy experimenting with flavours by cooking with fresh ingredients and all sorts of herbs and spices.

My plan is flexible depending on how I feel. If I spot signs of a flare-up, I’ll eat more fruit and veg, because I need more vitamins and minerals.”

Do I need to take vitamins?

Most people can get everything they need to be healthy by eating a varied, well-balanced diet, so don’t need to take a multivitamin tablet. Some extra individual vitamins are sometimes recommended, check with your health professional or pharmacist.

Vitamin D

Recently there’s been a government recommendation that UK adults should consider taking a daily supplement of 10 micrograms of vitamin D, especially in winter. Vitamin D works with calcium and phosphorous in your body for healthy bones, muscles and teeth, and most of it comes from sunshine.

Some people are more at risk of becoming vitamin D deficient, and should consider taking extra vitamin D all year round:

- people over 65 as their skin is less good at making vitamin D
- people with darker skin tones, including those of Asian, African, Afro-Caribbean and Middle Eastern descent
- people who always cover most of their skin when they’re outside
- people who spend very little time outside during the summer, such as those who can’t leave the house, who work indoors or work night shifts
- pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers

Fact or fiction? Milk and mucus

You might worry that if you drink milk or eat cheese, butter or yoghurt, you'll produce more mucus. However, there's not enough scientific evidence to support this concern. So you should include dairy foods in your diet unless you've been diagnosed with an allergy.

If you do find dairy makes your mucus stickier or harder to shift, try rinsing your mouth and drinking a little water after drinking or eating milk products.

If you have problems with cow's milk, try other milks such as:

- goat or sheep's milk
- rice milk
- soya milk
- oat milk
- coconut-based milk
- almond milk

Always consult a health professional before making any changes to your diet. This will make sure you find suitable alternatives to get all the nutrients you need.

How can food affect my symptoms?

I get out of breath when I eat

Sometimes people with lung conditions feel too breathless to eat much.

Top tips

- If you struggle to chew and breathe when you eat, go for softer, moist foods that are easier to chew and swallow.
- Try having more nourishing liquids such as milk, smoothies, juice and soups.
- Breathing can sometimes become harder after eating a large meal. Try eating smaller meals and snacks more often.
- Take time when you eat. Try to swallow every mouthful before going on to the next.

If you're losing weight without planning to, you may need a nutritional supplement. Talk to your doctor who may prescribe a supplement or refer you to a dietitian.

My mouth is dry

A dry mouth can be caused by breathing through your mouth, taking inhaled medications and using oxygen.

Top tips

- Make sure you drink enough fluids – at least six to eight cups a day. Ice cold drinks can be refreshing.
- Eat more soft foods, use more sauces such as gravy and cheese sauce, and eat moist dishes like stews.
- After using inhalers, remember to rinse your mouth out and gargle with water.
- Look after your teeth and mouth by brushing your teeth regularly and using dental floss.
- Try sugar-free gum or mints, frozen grapes, pineapple or orange segments to help you produce more saliva.
- Smoking and alcohol can irritate a dry mouth. Try to reduce or avoid these.
- If your dry mouth causes soreness or problems with eating, tell your doctor. They can prescribe products that help you produce saliva.

If you have problems swallowing your food, talk to your doctor. They may refer you to a speech and language therapist for a swallowing assessment.

My sense of taste has changed

A dry mouth often means your sense of taste changes. Experiment with herbs, spices, chutneys and pickles, but don't add extra salt.

I feel bloated and have trapped wind

If you're breathless, you may gulp air when you eat. This causes bloating. Talk to your doctor, as bloating is a symptom of many conditions.

Top tips

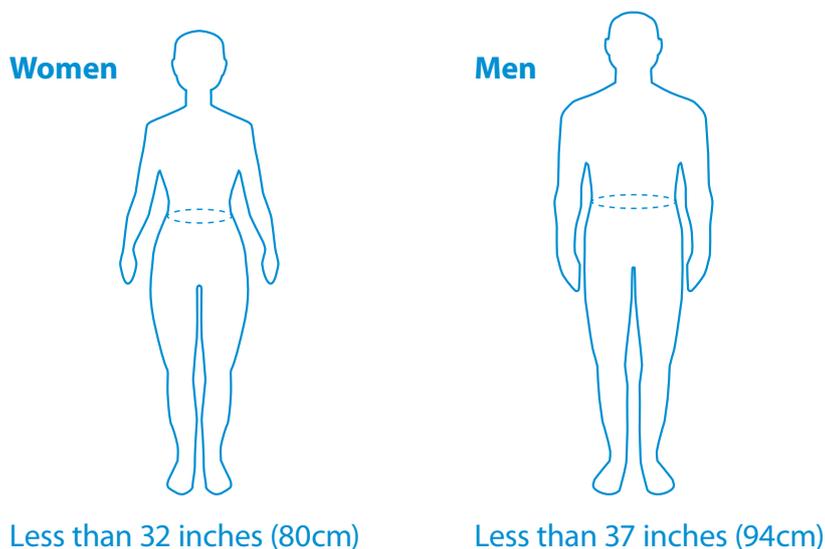
- Eat in a relaxed environment and sit upright.
- Don't rush, and make sure you chew your food well.
- Try not to have too many fizzy drinks.
- Watch your salt intake.
- Cut down on foods that produce more gas such as cabbage, sprouts, broccoli, cauliflower and beans.
- Try using peppermint. It can be taken as a tea, a cordial or a capsule.

Staying a healthy weight

When you have a lung condition, it's important to stay a healthy weight. If you're overweight, it can make breathing harder. If you're underweight, your breathing muscles will be weaker and your body will have less strength to fight off infections. Your doctor can help you work out a healthy weight for you.

Ideal waist measurement

The diagram below is a guide to the ideal waist measurements for men and women.



Everyone is different, so if you want to find out more about your ideal waist measurement and weight, speak to your doctor or practice nurse. They can take an accurate waist measurement and tell you the healthy range for you.

I've lost weight

If you have a lung condition, you might lose weight. You may eat less because eating makes you feel breathless. If you feel tired or out of breath, perhaps you find it more difficult to shop and prepare your own meals.

If you're losing weight without planning to, it's very important to talk to your doctor or health care professional. You may be at risk of malnutrition, which can weaken your breathing muscles and lead to chest infections.

You can also contact your local social services team for an occupational therapy assessment. You may get equipment around your house to make life easier. You can also get advice about local meal delivery services.

Tip: To gain weight, add extra calories to foods by:

- adding butter, cream or cheese to mashed potatoes and vegetables
- pouring custard and cream over fruit or puddings
- using more butter or mayonnaise on sandwiches, scones or pancakes

Try our suggestions on this page, but if you continue to lose weight, speak to your doctor or health care professional. They may recommend a nutritional supplement or refer you to a dietitian.

Top tips to gain weight

- **Eat little and often.** When you have a small appetite, eating smaller amounts more regularly helps you to get enough energy and protein. Try three to four small meals and two to three small snacks spread through the day.
Snacks can include toast, scones or pancakes with butter and jam; crackers or biscuits with spread or cream cheese; a small cake; full-fat yoghurt or rice pudding. Nourishing drinks are full-fat milk, hot chocolate, malted drinks, flavoured milk and milkshakes, smoothies or fruit juice. You can also buy nutritional drinks, or add three to four tablespoons of dried skimmed milk powder to a pint of milk.
- **Don't skip meals.** If you skip meals, you won't get enough energy. Try to eat a smaller meal or snack even if you don't have any appetite.
- **Avoid foods labelled 'sugar-free', 'low fat' and 'diet'.** Choose higher calorie options like full-fat milk and yoghurts.
- **Avoid drinking before a meal.** It can make you feel bloated and full.
- **Exercise or get out into the fresh air** to stimulate your appetite. Check with your doctor before starting a new activity and don't overdo it. You don't want to become too tired to prepare food or eat.

I'm putting on too much weight

You may find your lung condition causes you to put on weight. This may be because you become less active and burn fewer calories. Taking some kinds of steroids can increase your appetite.

Being overweight makes breathing more difficult because stored fat squashes your lungs. This is more likely if the weight is around your middle. If you're carrying excess weight, it also takes more effort to be active. Bending becomes difficult and will make you feel short of breath.

If you want to lose weight, speak to your doctor or health care professional. They can refer you to a dietitian or a local scheme.

Top tips to lose weight

- **Keep an eye on your portion sizes, especially if eating out.** You could try using a smaller plate.
- **Fill up on vegetables or salad.** These should cover about half your plate. Vegetables are a good source of fibre which can help you to feel full. Use a vinaigrette or fat-free dressing on salads rather than mayonnaise or salad cream.
- **Avoid frying foods.** Try grilling, steaming, boiling, baking, dry roasting or microwaving instead.
- **Choose low-fat options.** Have skimmed or semi-skimmed milk, low-fat spread and low-fat yoghurts.
- **Choose diet or no-added-sugar drinks and puddings.** If you take sugar in tea and coffee, use sweeteners or gradually reduce the amount of sugar you add.
- **Check food labels.** Often low fat products replace fat with high amounts of sugar, and low sugar or sugar free products can be high in fat. Look for less than 3g per 100g of total fat and less than 5g per 100g of sugar.
- **Think about why you eat.** Why do you snack between meals? Are you really hungry? Perhaps you're actually thirsty. Thirst is often mistaken for hunger, so you may eat more than you need. Are you bored and eating out of habit or for comfort? Try distracting yourself with another activity.

Information and support

Explore the interactive version of the eatwell guide at www.nhs.uk/goodfood

For more information on healthy eating go to www.nhs.uk or the British Dietetic Association food facts website www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts

Go to www.gov.uk to find details of your local council and ask about food delivery services near you. Our friendly helpline team can also help. Call them on **03000 030 555**.

Visit blf.org.uk/support-for-you to read or order our information, including:

- exercise and pulmonary rehabilitation
- why it's never too late to stop smoking
- looking after someone with a lung condition

Get in touch with us to find support near you.

Helpline: 03000 030 555

Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm

Ringing our helpline never costs more than a local call and is usually free, even from a mobile.

helpline@blf.org.uk

blf.org.uk

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We value feedback on our information. To let us know your views, and for the most up to date version of this information and references, call the helpline or visit blf.org.uk