

DIET- HOW WE SHOULD EAT AND WHY?

Bread, cereals and potatoes

This food group also contains pasta, rice and noodles and is full of starchy carbohydrates - your body's main source of energy.

Unrefined and refined carbohydrates

You can be even healthier if you choose unrefined versions of these foods over refined versions. If you decide to increase the amount of fibre you eat, try to drink more water too. Your body doesn't digest fibre, so you need the extra water to help it flow through your digestive system with ease.

Refined carbohydrates refer to foods where machinery has been used to remove the high fibre bits (the bran and the germ) from the grain. White rice, white bread, sugary cereals, and pasta and noodles made from white flour are all examples of refined carbohydrates.

Unrefined carbohydrates still contain the whole grain, including the bran and the germ, so they're higher in fibre and will keep you feeling fuller for longer - great if you're trying to lose weight and hate feeling hungry. Examples include wholegrain rice, wholemeal bread, porridge oats and whole-wheat pasta.

Fruit and vegetables

Five a day

Scientific studies have shown that people who eat a lot of fruit and vegetables may have a lower risk of getting illnesses, such as heart disease and some cancers. For this reason, health authorities recommend that you eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables every day - and it doesn't matter whether they're fresh, tinned, frozen, cooked, juiced or dried.

Meat, fish, eggs and alternatives

This food group includes poultry, pulses, beans, nuts, seeds and soya products. They're grouped together because they're all rich in protein.

Protein plays an essential role in building and repairing your body. It is recommended that 15% of your diet is protein. It is no use bingeing on protein either as your body does not store it.

Milk and Dairy

Milk and dairy products are particularly rich in calcium.

The importance of calcium

Calcium is a mineral that strengthens your bones and teeth, and ensures everything runs smoothly with your muscles and nerves. It's especially important for growth. After the age of 35, your bones lose their density and grow weaker. If you haven't had enough calcium in your diet prior to this, there's an increased risk that your bones won't be strong enough to cope with any weakening, which can result in the brittle bone disease, osteoporosis, especially in women.

Will I have to increase my weight to get enough calcium?

There's exactly the same amount of calcium in skimmed milk, low fat yoghurt and reduced-fat cheese as the whole fat versions.

Fats and sugars

This group should be eaten sparingly but a certain amount of fat is an important contributor to good health.

Fat facts

- Fat transports fat-soluble vitamins A, D, E and K through your body.
- It cushions your internal organs.
- It makes food taste nicer.
- It can contain essential fatty acids (EFAs), which are thought to have a positive effect on the health of your heart and immune system.
- It's a concentrated source of energy.

Saturated and unsaturated

Fat can be divided into two groups - saturated and unsaturated.

Saturated fat is generally solid at room temperature and is usually from animal sources. It's found in lard, butter, hard margarine, cheese, whole milk and anything that contains these ingredients, such as cakes, chocolate, biscuits, pies and pastries.

Unsaturated fat is usually liquid at room temperature and generally comes from

vegetable sources. Unsaturated fat is a healthier alternative to saturated fat and can be found in vegetable oils such as sesame, sunflower, soya and olive; oily fish, such as mackerel, sardines, pilchards and salmon; and soft margarine.

How much is enough?

If you'd like to cut down on fatty and sugary foods, follow these suggestions:

- Snack on fresh or dried fruit rather than biscuits and chocolate.
- Trim any visible fat off meat and poultry.
- Buy lean cuts of meat and reduced-fat minces.
- Ditch the frying pan - try poaching, steaming, grilling and baking instead.
- Swap whole milk for semi-skimmed or skimmed alternatives.
- If you use lard, butter or hard margarine, switch.

Disclaimer: Consult with your healthcare professional before making any changes recommended especially if you have a medical condition

In Whelehans, our weight loss programme, Tone & Slim uses CLA to aid people acquire their desired weight. Our formula of combining CLA along with regular consultations with a consultant nurse has proven very successful for people over the past year.

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