

Healthy Eating

Healthy eating can make you look different and feel different. This topic will tell you about the various food groups, why they are important, and how to put all the information together for healthy eating. And don't worry, even small changes in the way you eat can make a difference.

Benefits of healthy eating

There are some effects of healthy eating that you will notice pretty quickly. For example, a healthy diet can:

- Help you control your body weight, so that you are not underweight or overweight.
- Give you more energy to enjoy all kinds of physical activity, like surfing, football, netball or dancing.
- Support your body while you are growing and developing so that you reach your full physical potential.
- A good balanced diet will make sure you have all the essential nutrients needed for your brain to function well.

There are also some benefits that you may not notice straight away, but are worth thinking about. Scientific evidence shows that a healthy diet can help you avoid diet-related diseases. These are diseases that usually develop when people are over the age of 40. For example:

- Heart disease
- High cholesterol
- High blood pressure
- Strokes (brain damage due to blood supply problems)
- Adult-onset diabetes (the most common form of diabetes)
- Some cancers
- Osteoporosis (thinning of the bones).

Think of your parents or grandparents – do they have any of these diseases? Wouldn't it be good if you could avoid having the same problems they do? Healthy eating now can reduce the risks of developing these diseases later on.

Why is it called 'junk' food?

Eating patterns are linked to the development of health problems. The foods that are more likely to lead to health problems are often called 'junk foods'. Foods that contain lots of fat, salt and sugar are the villains! Also, foods that do not have enough fibre are a problem.

Here's why:

- Diets high in fat (especially saturated fat) have been linked to increased risk of heart disease - like heart attacks. Part of the reason is that fatty deposits (plaques) can develop inside blood vessels, so not enough blood can get through to your heart, or brain or other important organs. These changes start to happen in

many young people, even under the age of 20, although usually heart attacks don't happen until people get older.

- Salt plays a very important and complicated role in the body. But diets that are high in salt can put you at risk of high blood pressure, which in turn can affect your brain... your eyes... your heart...
- Foods that contain a lot of fat and sugar are high in kilojoules. That is, they provide the body with LOTS of energy. If you are not using energy - ie. not exercising much - then you are likely to put on weight.
- Too much sugar, especially when you don't brush, contributes to tooth decay!
- Not having enough fibre makes you more likely to suffer from constipation, plus you may be more likely to develop appendicitis and cancer of the colon (bowel).

Modern life is fast! There is a lot to do and not much time. So many people rely on ready-to-eat foods and 'fast foods'.

Because fat and salt and sugar make foods taste good, 'fast foods' tend to have high levels of all of these, to make people buy more. That is OK for once in a while, but not for every day.

Healthy food – what to buy

We have talked about junk food. So what's left? You may have heard about the basic food groups – if you go shopping and make sure you have a few food items from each group in your basket, you are likely to be eating healthily:

- Cereals – bread, pasta, rice and other foods from grains all provide carbohydrates, which are important sources of energy.
- Meat and fish – chicken, red meat, fish and seafood all provide protein which is very important. Be sure that fat and skin is trimmed off, and that the food is cooked using a low-fat method, such as grilling or steaming. If you are a vegetarian, there are non-meat sources of protein available.
- Fruit and vegetables – contain LOTS of different nutrients, like vitamins, minerals and carbohydrates. 2 serves of fruit and 5 serves of vegetables every day is recommended.
- Dairy – milk, cheese, yoghurt, ice cream and other dairy products all contain calcium, which is important for the development and health of bones, teeth and nerves. There are varying levels of fat in these products, but almost everything can now be bought in a low-fat version.
- Sugars – avoid sweets in general, especially those with lots of fats – see the 'junk food' section above.
- Water – everyone forgets about water but it is important and the best drink for you. Try to drink several glasses a day. (Cordial or fruit juice are fine too. But try not to drink too much soft drink).

Choosing to change & making healthy choices

If you have read all this and decided that your eating isn't as healthy as you'd like, you can make changes. The best way to do this is to make gradual changes, and give yourself time to develop new habits.

For example:

- Add one piece of fruit a day to your eating.
- Start to drink two more glasses of water a day.
- Try a new low fat recipe or snack food each week.
- Eat something healthy for breakfast. Research shows that breakfast helps young people maintain a healthy weight and to be active.
- Choose wholemeal or whole grain bread instead of white.
- Trim the visible fat from raw meat, and grill meat rather than fry it.
- Try spreading less butter on your bread, only buttering one piece of bread in a sandwich, or leaving off butter altogether if you are having mayonnaise.
- You could choose to eat a smaller portion than you used to, or eat more slowly and give your body a chance to tell you when you are full.
- If you like hot chips... did you know that the thicker the chip, the less fat it absorbs? So, if you can't resist chips, choose thick chips rather than thin french fries or 'shoe-string' chips.
- Many energy drinks and bars contain lots of sugar and caffeine/guarana. These ingredients can give you a short brief feeling of energy, but they are not very good for you. You can end up putting on weight, feeling anxious, finding it hard to sleep, and maybe getting addicted. Try dried or fresh fruit and water as an alternative - they will give you a natural energy boost.

If you decide to make a huge change overnight - eg "NO MORE CHOCOLATE! I swear I'm going to live on nuts, lentils and raw fruit and vegetables"- you're being way too hard on yourself, and what's worse, you're setting yourself up for likely failure.

Also remember that starving yourself will make you more likely to binge eat. It is not a good idea to choose to starve yourself for any reason.

Healthy eating guidelines for young people

Enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods

- Eat plenty of vegetables, legumes and fruits
- Eat plenty of cereals (including breads, rice, pasta and noodles), preferably wholegrain
- Include lean meat, fish, poultry and/or alternatives
- Include milks, yoghurts, cheese and/or alternatives. Choose reduced-fat varieties.
- Choose water as a drink. Alcohol is not recommended.

Care should be taken to

- Limit saturated fat and have a moderate total fat intake

- Choose foods low in salt
- Consume only moderate amounts of sugars and foods containing added sugars.

Care for your food: prepare and store it safely.

Everyone is different. We all have different body shapes and types. It is impossible for us all to look like the supermodels, male or female. Ask your doctor what is the best weight for your body type and height, then you will have a realistic idea of what you should weigh.

Follow the healthy eating guidelines, exercise regularly and leave time to have fun in your life.