



Healthy Eating Messages: How far is too far?



South London and Maudsley 
NHS Foundation Trust

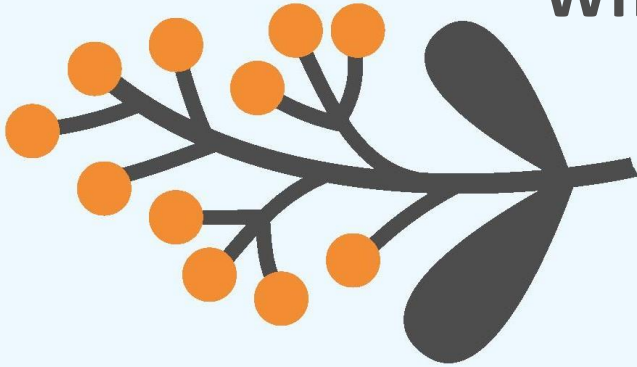
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Healthy eating messages aim to encourage people to choose more healthy foods from each food group in preference to the less healthy choices. For example, choosing wholemeal bread rather than white bread, or natural yogurt instead of sweetened, flavoured yogurt, or grilled mackerel instead of cod fried in batter.

Healthy eating advice promotes a diet high in vegetables, fruit, fish, nuts, seeds and whole grain cereals, with less of foods high in sugar, fat, and salt, and of course not too much alcohol. In practice, this means less processed food, as it is often high in sugar, fat and salt, and more food in a more natural state.

However, ideas around healthy eating can sometimes be taken too far. If “healthy eating” becomes too rigid and extreme then it can damage, rather than promote, our health.

Wholegrain & Refined Cereals



This is what we know

Refined flour and cereal foods such as white bread contain less fibre, and less of some vitamins and minerals, but are still good foods for providing protein, energy, and fibre. In the UK all these foods have added iron, calcium and B vitamins. They are nutritious foods that won't cause harm.

What do you think...?

Refined cereals: what are they and is it ok to eat them?

Sensible healthy eating with a basis of scientific evidence

You may wish to choose wholegrain cereals in preference to refined cereal foods. Refined cereals are also fine.

Fruit & Vegetables



This is what we know

Vegetables and fruit provide many essential vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and other nutrients. It is healthy to include a wide variety of them every day. Excessive intake of vegetables may mean you feel so full and bloated that you can't eat enough of all the other foods you need. This can disrupt the helpful bacteria in our gut, who need nutrients from all of the food groups to thrive. Without these nutrients you may experience the signs of an unhappy gut, like cramps, farting, and low mood. if you eat very large amounts of some vegetables you may even find your skin turns yellow from excessive carotene.

What do you think...?

How many fruit and veg should I have in my diet?

Sensible healthy eating with a basis of scientific evidence

Have at least five servings of vegetables and fruit a day, and make sure you get a good balance with other food groups.

Gluten

This is what we know

Gluten is a healthy plant protein found in certain cereal grains. Some people are sensitive to it, and need to avoid it, but it is of no benefit to anyone else to avoid it. In fact, gluten is an important source of protein in most UK diets. Cutting out gluten when you don't need to can also mean that you inadvertently cut out other helpful nutrients, compromising health and gut bacteria.

What do you think...?

What exactly is gluten?

Sensible healthy eating with a basis of scientific evidence

Foods that contain gluten provide a range of useful nutrients. Only avoid gluten if you have coeliac disease or other properly diagnosed gluten sensitivity.



Raw & Cooked Food

This is what we know:

Cooking damages Vitamin C and some B vitamins, so it's good to have some uncooked fruit and vegetables. Other nutrients are absorbed better from cooked foods, and some foods are not safe to eat raw (such as fish, potatoes, and chicken).

What do you think...?

What's a good balance between cooked vs raw food?

Sensible healthy eating with a basis of scientific evidence

Include some raw fruit and vegetables alongside other food groups.

Dairy

This is what we know:

Milk and milk products are very important sources of protein and calcium, and it is difficult to replace these with other foods. In parts of the world where milk is a traditional part of the diet, most adults digest it well. This ability has evolved to take advantage of this nutritious food. If you use an alternative to dairy milk, choose one with a similar amount of protein and calcium as cows' milk. Usually sweetened soya milk with added vitamins and minerals is best, it has the same calories as semi-skimmed milk. "Milks" based on oats, rice, or nuts are not usually nutritionally adequate.

What do you think...?

Should I have dairy foods?

Sensible healthy eating with a basis of scientific evidence

Include dairy foods or non-dairy alternatives as sources of protein and calcium. If you have properly diagnosed lactose intolerance, it is sensible to limit lactose, although it isn't usually necessary to avoid it completely. If you have a cows' milk allergy, use a nutritionally equivalent product, usually sweetened soya milk with added calcium.



Processed Foods

This is what we know:

Some food processing is just cooking done by someone else, such as soup in a carton or a tin. These foods can be as healthy as anything you would prepare at home. Small amounts of processed foods, such as an occasional ready meal, can enable you to eat healthily at times when you can't cook, or to share a meal with friends. Other processed foods (e.g. chocolate, crisps) may give comfort or pleasure and are fine to eat in moderation as part of a balanced, enjoyable approach to food.

What do you think...?

What is processed food and is it ok to eat it?

Sensible healthy eating with a basis of scientific evidence

Some processed foods are high in sugar, fat, and salt and its sensible to limit these, but there is no need to eliminate all processed foods.

Vegan Diet

This is what we know:

Vegan diets can be healthy but need careful planning. Even with a great deal of thought and care, vegan diets tend to be low in iron and calcium, and essential fatty acids. Vegans always need supplements of vitamin B12 (through fortified foods or as separate supplements), and usually also vitamin D. There is research suggesting that some people who eat a vegan diet are at greater risk of low bone density. People with eating disorders sometimes choose a vegan diet because this is a way of restricting food intake – it can be helpful to think about why you choose a vegan lifestyle.

What do you think...?

Should I eat a vegan diet?

Sensible healthy eating with a basis of scientific evidence

With careful thought and planning, you can eat a vegan diet and be healthy. Eat a variety of foods from all the food groups to meet your nutritional needs, and ensure you include fortified foods and / or separate B12 supplements. You can find reliable information about nutrition on the Vegan Society Website (<https://www.vegansociety.com/>).

Alcohol Intake

What do you think...?
Should I avoid alcohol?

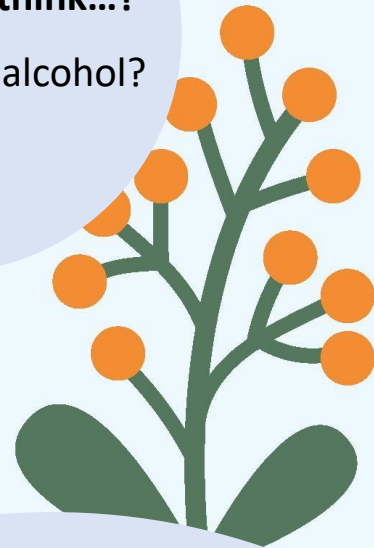
This is what we know:

Some people are very happy without ever drinking alcohol and that is fine. Others find that in moderation it is an enjoyable part of their social life.

Sensible healthy eating with a basis of scientific evidence

Men and women are advised not to drink more than 14 units of alcohol a week, and it is best to spread this out evenly over three or more days.

If you are trying to reduce the amount of alcohol you drink, it is a good idea to have several alcohol-free days each week.





Superfoods

This is what we know:

“Superfood” is a marketing term for food claimed to be exceptionally high in some nutrients. In reality there is no such thing as a “superfood” as many foods are particularly high in one or two nutrients. It is no better to take a concentrated amount of a nutrient in one food than to spread its intake over the day. We all need a wide variety of all essential nutrients, and that can only come from a wide variety of foods.

What do you think...?

What are “superfoods”, and will they help me?

Sensible healthy eating with a basis of scientific evidence

Some foods are rich in essential nutrients, but it takes a wide range of foods to make up a healthy diet.

Additives & Preservatives

This is what we know:

Preservatives keep us safe by preventing the growth of harmful organisms and reduce food waste by preventing spoilage. All additives used in UK food have been tested rigorously, though we cannot always be sure of the effects of a high intake of a mixture of them over many years. Some additives are not essential, for example colours, and you may prefer to avoid them when you can. Some individuals are sensitive to some additives, but for most people eating food with additives is fine.

What do you think...?

What do I need to know about food additives?

Sensible healthy eating with a basis of scientific evidence

For most people, strict avoidance of additives is of no benefit, and can limit the choice of food available and interfere with family life and social eating.

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