



## Healthy eating

Eating healthily is a way of life, rather than a quick diet fix. It's a long-term goal that we should all be aiming towards. But there's no doubt that many of us aren't eating as healthily as we might be.

The figures (and our figures) speak for themselves. In 2006, 24 percent of adults were classed as obese, up from 15 percent in 1993. What's more, 16 percent of children aged 2 to 15 were already classed as obese, up from 11 percent in 1995<sup>1</sup>.

If we are to reverse this worrying trend, it's clear that we need to get back to basics and rediscover the essential ingredients of healthy eating.

### The whole of the grain

Whole grains such as barley, oatmeal, whole wheat, rye and millet are full of fibre and protein as well as plenty of vitamins and minerals. Eat plenty of wholegrains, such as wholegrain bread, breakfast cereal and brown rice will help you to feel fuller for longer, because they take longer to digest.

Wholegrains offer many more health benefits too. As well as stabilising your blood sugar levels, eating plenty of wholegrains could significantly lower your risk of developing cardiovascular disease, including heart disease and stroke<sup>2</sup>. Yet nine out of ten adults in the UK don't eat the recommended three servings of whole grain per day<sup>3</sup>.

### Plentiful sources of protein

Protein is more satisfying than carbohydrates or fats, so including a source of protein in every meal is another way to help you feel fuller for longer. Eating enough protein helps to preserve muscle and encourages fat burning<sup>4</sup>.

There are many healthy sources of protein, including: lean cuts of red meat; poultry (without the skin); wild game such as venison; soya proteins such as tofu and mycoprotein products like Quorn™. Vegetarian sources of protein like yoghurt, cheese and nuts can all be incorporated into your diet to add flavour and variety.

Dairy products such as low fat milk, cheese, yoghurt and fromage frais are also great sources of calcium, which is vital for strong bones and healthy nerve and muscle function. Offering a good balance of protein, carbohydrate and vitamins and minerals, dairy products are low GI (glycemic index) too. (In essence, the lower a food's GI ranking, the slower it is digested, helping you to feel fuller for longer).

Another great source of protein is pulses such as beans, chickpeas, peas and lentils. Pulses are super-healthy and full of fibre and iron, as well as complex carbohydrates, so they release energy slowly into your bloodstream and keep you full up for longer. With their low glycemic index, pulses are ideal for people who want to reduce their risk of heart disease or diabetes, or manage an existing condition<sup>5</sup>.

### **Fish for Omega-3s**

Fish is naturally low in fat, yet is as high in protein as red meat<sup>6</sup>. What's more 'fatty fish' such as salmon, tuna, mackerel and sardines contain omega-3 fatty acids which are good for your heart and potentially also improve brain function while lowering blood pressure.

General recommendations are that you eat six ounces of fish a week, but no more than that of canned tuna. Current advice is to avoid shark and swordfish entirely due to the toxins in these fish<sup>7</sup>.

### **Veg out and stay young**

Vegetables are a great way to bulk up your dinner, without bulking up your waistline. Loading up your plates with lots of lovely dark green and brightly coloured vegetables will help to fill you up and provide a super-healthy balance to more modest portions of protein and carbohydrates.

Fruit is something we should all incorporate into our diets for a whole host of health reasons. Apples have pectin, which will make you feel more full while limiting the fat absorption in your cells. Orange and grapefruit can boost your metabolism, while grapefruit will also lower your insulin levels and therefore reduce hunger pangs. Blueberries and other berries are packed with antioxidants to help your immune system<sup>8</sup>.

According to the International Journal of Food Science and Technology, "Naturally occurring compounds impart bright colour to fruits and vegetables and act as antioxidants in the body by scavenging harmful free radicals, which are implicated in most degenerative diseases..."

"Studies have established a positive correlation between the intake of fruits and vegetables and prevention of diseases like atherosclerosis, cancer, diabetes, arthritis and also ageing. So pronounced has been their effect on ageing that they have been called 'fountains of youth'.<sup>9</sup>"

### **The spice of life**

Adding spices, chillies and herbs to your food will not only add interest and flavour to stimulate your taste buds and make your meal more satisfying, it could also have a multitude of health benefits. As well as being very low in calories, spices such as cinammon, ginger, cloves and herbs like oregano and sage are thought to prevent inflammation caused by high blood sugar and are full of anti-oxidants<sup>10</sup>.

## Fats aren't always the enemy

Actually, we do need a little fat in our diet for various important physical processes<sup>12</sup>. The secret is to choose 'good' fats in your diet. These are the monounsaturated fats found in olive oil, peanut oil, avocados, nuts and seeds, plus the polyunsaturated fats found in sunflower, corn and flaxseed oils, and foods such as walnuts, flax seeds and fish.

It hardly needs to be said that not all fats are so beneficial. For any healthy eating plan, it's important to avoid deep fried foods, fatty meats and hydrogenated fats, found in many shop-bought bakery products. Sorry about that.

## Don't forget to drink water

Finally, drinking plenty of water is an easy way to give yourself a health boost. Staying hydrated increases your metabolism and helps the body to get rid of toxins<sup>13</sup>. If you don't like plain water, add a splash of juice, sugar-free squash or a squeeze of lemon to cold water, or discover the huge choice of fruit and herbal infusions available today.

## Summary

- Eat wholegrains to stabilise your blood sugar levels
- Include a source of protein in every meal
- Eat six ounces of fish a week
- Increase your intake of fruits and vegetables
- Add spice for a multitude of health benefits
- Choose 'good' fats in your diet
- Don't forget to drink water.

## References

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A wide range of women's health resources are available at [www.healthywomen.org.uk](http://www.healthywomen.org.uk)

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