

# Guide to Healthy Eating

A healthy lifestyle that provides you with sufficient energy, health and wellbeing to enjoy life, is vital at all ages.

**Introduction** It is important to take good care of yourself, ensure you eat a healthy balanced diet and maintain a physically active lifestyle.

This guidance sheet highlights the fundamental guidelines for achieving a healthy balanced lifestyle and simple advice, so you can enjoy and live your life to the full.



# What is a healthy diet?

A healthy balanced diet incorporates a range of foods from each of the food groups as highlighted in the food pyramid. The food pyramid is a visual model, presenting the general principles of healthy eating. It divides food into five categories depending on their nutritional qualities and effects on health, and provides guidelines on the amount and the portion size of foods to be consumed from each food group.

Choose  
**very small**  
amounts

**Fats, High Fat/Sugar Snacks, Foods and Drinks**

Use sparingly – choose fats high in monounsaturates or polyunsaturates.  
Limit fried foods to 1-2 times a week. Only have small amounts of high fat/sugar snacks and drinks and not too often.



Choose any **2**

**Meat, Fish, Eggs & Alternatives** Choose lean cuts of meats.  
Eat oily fish.



Choose any **3**

**Milk, Cheese & Yogurt** Choose low fat varieties.



Choose  
any **5**

**Fruit & Vegetables** Choose green leafy vegetables  
and citrus fruit frequently. Fruit juice only counts for  
one serving, each day.



Choose  
any **6+**

**Bread, Cereals & Potatoes**  
Eat these foods at each meal – high fibre is best.



Source: Department of Health & Children (2005)

## • Bread, Cereal & Potatoes

This is the largest of the food groups. It includes carbohydrate-based foods which provide energy. It is recommended to consume six or more portions from this group per day, depending on your lifestyle. High fibre options should be chosen regularly.

## • Fruit & Vegetables

Fruit and vegetables are a source of essential vitamins and minerals and antioxidants. This group is also a source of dietary fibre. A wide variety of fruit and vegetables is recommended.

## • Milk, Cheese & Yogurt

Milk and dairy products (cheese and yogurt) are a source of calcium which is needed for normal growth and development of bone in children and the maintenance of normal bones. It is recommended that children and adults consume three portions from this food group every



day, while teenagers and pregnant /breastfeeding women should aim for five portions per day. (Semi-skimmed/low-fat milk is not recommended for children under two years of age – it may be introduced from the age of two years providing the child is eating a varied and balanced diet. Skimmed milk/fat-free milk is not suitable for children under five years).

- **Meat, Fish, Eggs & Alternatives**

This food group is a source of protein and essential vitamins and minerals. Lean cuts of meat should be chosen and fish should include 1-2 portions of oily fish per week e.g. trout, salmon, mackerel or herring. Alternatives refer to pulses and non-meat products such as Quorn.

- **Fats, High Fat/Sugar Snacks, Foods & Drinks**

This food group is typically composed of high-energy foods which are low in nutritional quality. These foods should only be consumed occasionally and in small amounts.

### Some other tips for a healthy balanced diet

- Establish a regular eating pattern, ideally consisting of 3 meals—breakfast, lunch or light evening meal and dinner, plus healthy snacks as required.
- Choose the healthier cooking method – grill, bake, boil or steam foods rather than frying.
- Limit salt intake – avoid adding salt while cooking or at the table.
- As more and more meals are consumed outside of the home, try to remember healthy eating options when dining out.

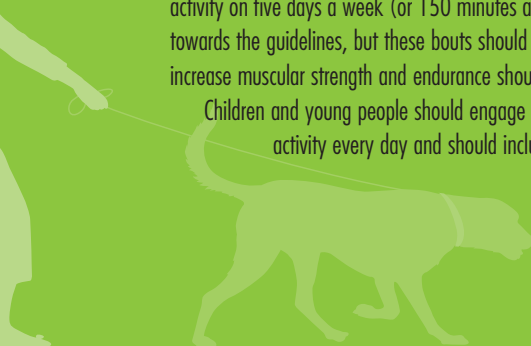
## Other factors for a healthy lifestyle

### Physical Activity

There is no doubt that regular physical activity is beneficial to health. Being physically active can reduce your risk of many chronic diseases such as diabetes and high blood pressure, and can also improve mental health and wellbeing. The National Guidelines on Physical Activity for Ireland recommend that adults (18-64 yrs) engage in at least 30 minutes a day of moderate activity on five days a week (or 150 minutes a week). Shorter bouts of activity can contribute towards the guidelines, but these bouts should last for at least 10 minutes. Activities which increase muscular strength and endurance should be addressed on 2-3 days per week.

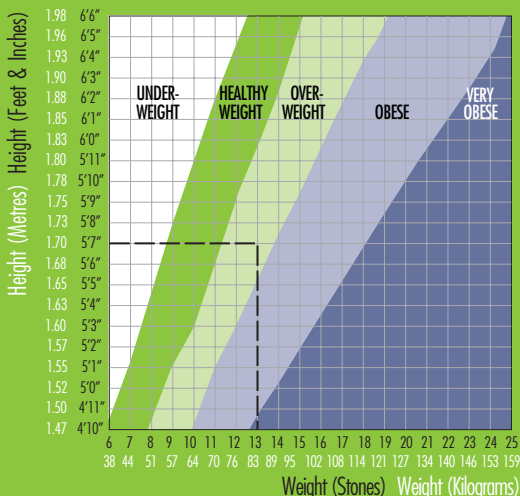
Children and young people should engage in at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity every day and should include muscle-strengthening, flexibility and bone-strengthening exercises three times a week.






Remember, if inactive – start slowly gradually increasing duration and intensity. If you have any concerns, contact your GP.



# Body Weight

Maintaining a healthy body weight is vital for health and wellbeing. Body mass index (BMI) is commonly used to assess body weight status. This chart will give you an idea of your current weight status. Simply draw a line across from your height and up from your weight to check what category you are in.



-  Underweight
-  Healthy weight
-  Overweight  
Losing weight will benefit your health.
-  Obese  
It is important that you lose weight.
-  Very Obese  
Weight loss is vital for your health.  
See your doctor/dietitian for advice and support.

# Alcohol

If you consume alcohol, ensure to comply with guidelines; a weekly limit of 14 standard drinks for women and 21 standard drinks for men is advised. It is important to spread these guidelines over the week. This corresponds to a daily limit of two or three standard drinks for women and three or four standard drinks for men, while leaving some alcohol free days. One unit is equal to a half pint of beer, small glass of wine, a glass of sherry or a pub measure of spirits.

For further information contact:



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# Smoking

Smoking is a major risk factor for a number of chronic diseases. Refraining from smoking is one of the most important lifestyle changes to enhance health and wellbeing. If you would like help to stop smoking, consult your GP.