



Building yourself up in a healthy way

The importance of eating well

It is important to try and eat well to provide your body with energy and to help you feel stronger. This is particularly important during times of illness or medical treatment, if you have a poor appetite or have had unplanned weight loss.

This is because during times of illness or medical treatment, your body uses more calories and protein to heal and recover. Unplanned weight loss can then occur if your body is not receiving enough calories or protein.

If a person is overweight, they can still become malnourished due to the factors mentioned above.

A high-calorie / high-protein diet will provide your body with more energy and help prevent weight and muscle loss. Even though the amount of calories and protein in the diet needs to be increased during a period of illness, a relatively healthy diet still needs to be maintained to ensure long term heart health is not affected. The following advice gives you guidance on getting this balance right and what dietary factors to take into consideration.

If you are on a special diet or have other factors affecting dietary intake (e.g. swallow difficulties or taste changes), this information may not be appropriate for you. Please ask your doctor or GP to refer you to a dietitian for further support.

If your appetite is poor

- Try to eat little and often, have 6 small meals a day or eat every 2–3 hours
- Drink regular amounts of fluids, but avoid drinking large amounts right before a meal, as this may fill you up
- Add high calorie and protein extras to your meals / snacks / drinks (this booklet will give you lots of ideas)
- If your energy levels change throughout the week; try to make the most of the 'good days' by preparing extra meals that you can keep in your fridge / freezer to have on the 'bad days'
- It is important to make the most of moments / days when your appetite may be better and you feel most well, even if this is not at your usual meal times
- Choose food that you enjoy and are more likely to eat all of
- Have meals with friends or family, if you are able to. Eating socially can sometimes help you to eat more or eat more regularly

Whilst you are in hospital

Whilst you are in hospital, your relatives/friends may wish to bring food in for you. Whilst we encourage you to eat as well as possible, due to food safety regulations, we are unable to reheat food on the wards for you. However, cold snacks or shop bought items that can be eaten without heating are allowed.

The following snacks are available on the ward (free of charge) on request:

- Cheese and biscuits
- Rice pudding
- Yoghurts

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- Fruit
- Cake
- Biscuits

The following drinks are available on the ward (free of charge) on request:

- Milk
- Squash
- Orange juice
- Tea
- Coffee
- Hot chocolate

If you miss a meal time (e.g. being off the ward for a scan or procedure) we have 'snack boxes' available. These include a sandwich, a carton of fruit juice, a piece of fruit and a small snack. Please ask a member of staff and they can collect one for you.

Eating well whilst protecting your heart health

Weight loss and loss of muscle mass often occurs when you do not have enough calories and protein in your diet.

Calories are the energy in food which our body needs to function. Protein is a nutrient found in certain foods which helps to repair the body, build muscle and aids the immune system.

Ensure you still aim to eat a varied diet by including the different food groups including carbohydrates (starchy foods), protein, fruit and vegetables and dairy, see below for further information on some of these food groups. The pages below will provide information on how to increase the calories and protein of these food items and provide meal ideas which incorporate these food groups.

Starchy foods

At each meal make sure you have a portion of starchy food such as:

- Bread
- Potatoes
- Rice, pasta, maize or corn meal
- Green banana or plantain
- Crackers, crisp bread or oatcakes
- Chapattis
- Couscous

Protein

Aim to have protein with at least 2–3 meals, protein foods include:

- Meat, poultry or vegetarian alternatives e.g. soya protein
- Fish (aim for 2 portions of fish per week, at least 1 being an oily fish e.g. salmon / mackerel)
- Eggs
- Lentils, beans, chickpeas
- Nuts

Fruit and vegetables

Fruit and vegetables are a great source of vitamins, mineral and fibre. These play a role in protecting our heart health. It is important to eat fruit and vegetables, however they are low in

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calories and protein and can be filling, therefore consider fortifying these food items using ideas on pages 6 and 7.

Fats

Fats are high in calories and are therefore an effective way to increase your calorie intake, they also provide essential vitamins. However to protect your heart health, it is important you choose the right types of fats.

There are two main different types of fat; **Saturated Fat** and **Unsaturated Fat**. Both types of fat contain the same amount of calories.

You should try to reduce saturated fats in your diet as these will raise your 'bad cholesterol' levels. Having healthier unsaturated fats instead, will help improve your 'good cholesterol' and lower your overall cholesterol level.

Saturated fats ('bad fats')

These are some examples of foods which are high in saturated fats, try to limit or avoid these kinds of foods:

- Fatty meats & processed meat e.g. ham, burgers, sausages, corned beef, bacon, minced beef
- Full fat dairy products e.g. cream, yogurt, hard cheese, whole milk
- Fried foods e.g. fried chips, fried chicken, battered fish
- Baked products e.g. cakes, biscuits, pudding, pie, pastries
- Processed snacks e.g. crisps, chocolate
- Butter, ghee, lard, suet
- Palm oil, coconut oil

Unsaturated fats ('good fats')

These are examples of the kinds of foods which are high in unsaturated fats, you should choose these foods instead of the high saturated foods above:

- Oily fish e.g. salmon, mackerel, anchovies, sardines
- Avocado, olives
- Unsalted nuts e.g. almonds, cashews, hazelnuts, peanuts, pistachios, pine nuts, walnuts
- Seeds e.g. flaxseed, sesame seeds, sunflower seeds
- Olive oil, rapeseed oil, corn oil, sesame oil, sunflower oil
- Spreads made from the above oils

Tips to help you reduce intake of saturated fat

- Choose lean cuts of meat, trim off excess visible fat, remove the skin from chicken and turkey
- Swap butter, ghee, or palm oils with small amounts of olive oil or sunflower oil and spreads
- Opt to grill, bake, boil or poach food
- Choose lower fat cheeses for example, cottage cheese / ricotta. Try to grate cheese to make a smaller amount go a longer way

Food fortification in a healthy way and nourishing drinks

Adding high calorie / high protein extras to meals, snacks and drinks can make them more nutritious without increasing the amount you need to eat. It is important to make sure we do this in a healthy way to protect your heart health.

The following examples are ways you can increase the calories and protein in your food in a healthier way from unsaturated fats:

- Add a small handful of unsalted nuts or seeds, try along with dried fruit* to cereal

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- Add rapeseed or olive oil to salads and vegetables
- Try avocado mashed on toast or with a meal as a vegetable
- Use peanut butter as a topping on toast or oatcakes with jam*
- Add an unsaturated fat spread such as olive oil spread to roast potatoes, or mashed potatoes
- Add peanut butter or jam* to porridge
- Add pesto/low fat cream cheese to pasta, a sandwich or salad

All foods with * can be high in sugar and should be limited in those with Type 2 Diabetes.

Nourishing drinks

Nourishing drinks are a simple and easy way to get extra calories in your diet and can often be easier to manage in those with a low appetite. You should choose drinks that will provide both calories and protein. It is good to drink fluids throughout the day, but avoid drinking large amounts right before a meal, as this may fill you up.

Milk is a nourishing drink, aim to have one pint of milk per day. You can add this to cereal or have in hot drinks. Dairy alternatives e.g. soya, rice or oat milks can be used as an alternative to cow's milk or if cow's milk is not tolerated/ is preferred, make sure you choose a plant milk that has added calcium and vitamins.

Milk can be fortified to increase the amount of calories and protein.

How to make fortified milk using skimmed milk powder (e.g. Marvel or supermarkets own brand)

1. Take 4 tablespoons of skimmed milk powder
2. Add a little bit of milk to make a paste
3. Whisk in the remainder of the milk (total milk used: 1 pint)
4. Store in the refrigerator and consider using as below

Nourishing drinks

This milk can be used to make up some of the following drinks:

- Tea
- Horlicks* or ovaltine*
- Hot chocolate*
- Milkshakes* - Yoghurt drinks such as Lassi
- Milky coffee such as a latte or cappuccino

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Add to:

- Porridge or cereals
- Custard and milky puddings*
- Savoury sauces e.g. parsley sauce, cheese or white sauce to add to pasta, vegetables, and fish

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Snack and meal ideas

Small snack ideas

- A pot of thick and creamy yoghurt*
- Handful of unsalted nuts e.g. Brazil, cashew or peanuts
- Rice pudding* or custard* with fruit
- 2 digestive biscuits
- 1 small chocolate bar or biscuit*
- Plantain chips or puff puff*

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- Handful of chevda
- Hummus, reduced fat pate or cheese spread on crackers or pitta bread
- Slice of toast with peanut butter

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Meal ideas

- Jacket potato with olive oil based spread and a filling such as baked beans and grated cheese/cottage cheese and tinned peach/tuna and reduced fat mayonnaise
- Soup with a bread roll – use an olive oil based spread, add extra beans, lentils or a small amount of cream
- Omelette or scrambled egg made with olive oil/rapeseed oil/sunflower oil with a slice of bread, added beans, ham or grated cheese
- Sardines/mackerel/pilchards in tomato sauce on toast
- Peanut butter, beans or mashed banana on toast
- Porridge with mango and honey* or unsalted nuts and dried fruit*
- Hard boiled egg and reduced fat mayonnaise sandwich with tomatoes and olive oil based spread
- Bowl of cereal with added dried fruit*/unsalted nuts/seeds
- Slice of quiche with salad dressed with low fat mayonnaise/olive oil/ rapeseed oil

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Nutritional supplement products

Your dietitian may suggest that you have a nutritional supplement drink on prescription, to increase your calorie and protein intake further. Individual advice will be given on the best nutritional supplement and amount for you.

Supplement tips

- Serve chilled or over ice cubes
- Add lemonade or tonic water to juice–style drinks*
- Add milk to dilute the milk-based supplement
- Freeze and eat as an ice-cream/sorbet/ice lolly
- Remove from the bottle and gently warm in a microwave (do not allow to boil)

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Additional tips to help improve appetite

- Larger portions of food can put you off eating altogether; take a smaller portion and you can always go back for a second helping
- Try to always have something at meal times, and avoid missing meals
- Take time to relax between meals or courses
- Eat slowly and chew your food well
- If food tastes differently to you, add herbs and spices to increase flavour
- If you are feeling nauseous, keep away from cooking smells, opt for colder foods or ready meals which produce less cooking smells
- Dry foods, e.g. toast, crackers or plain biscuits, may help prevent nausea
- Regular exercise can help increase your appetite and improve your strength – start slowly and gradually increase the intensity

If, after following this advice in this leaflet you are continuing to lose weight, or if there is no improvement with your appetite or diet, please contact your GP /Dietitian for further advice or help.

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When your appetite returns, and your weight is right for you, please ask your dietitian, GP or practice nurse for information about healthy eating.

Sustainability Ideas

Increase Plant-Based Proteins: more plant-based protein sources.

Batch Cooking & Freezing: Prepare larger portions and freeze for convenience, reducing waste.

Sustainable Packaging: Choose foods with little or recyclable packaging and use reusable containers for meals and drinks.

Energy Saving: Use energy-saving cooking methods like steaming, microwaving, air-fryer or using a pressure cooker to reduce energy use.

Contact details:

Queen Elizabeth Hospital

Telephone: 0121 371 3485

Heartlands Hospital, Good hope Hospital or Solihull Hospital

Telephone: 0121 424 2673

Please use the space below to write down any questions you may have and bring this with you to your next appointment.

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Nutrition and Dietetics

University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust

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