



Public Health
England

A Quick Guide to the Government's Healthy Eating Recommendations

About Public Health England

Public Health England exists to protect and improve the nation's health and wellbeing, and reduce health inequalities. It does this through advocacy, partnerships, world-class science, knowledge and intelligence, and the delivery of specialist public health services. PHE is an operationally autonomous executive agency of the Department of Health.

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Published August 2014

PHE publications gateway number: 2014220

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Executive summary

Government healthy eating recommendations are visually depicted in the eatwell plate and are based on recommendations from the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy (COMA) and the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) that succeeded COMA in 2000.

This document provides a concise summary of government's healthy eating recommendations and the dietary reference values upon which they are based.

The eatwell plate

Use the eatwell plate to help you get the balance right. It shows how much of what you eat should come from each food group.



Public Health England in association with the Welsh Government, the Scottish Government and the Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland

Healthy eating recommendations



Base meals on starchy foods

Eat plenty of starchy foods such as potatoes, rice, bread and pasta. Choose wholegrain varieties or eat potatoes with their skins on for more fibre.



Eat plenty of fruit and vegetables

Eat at least 5 portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables a day
An 80g portion is:

- a slice of a large fruit such as a melon
- a whole piece of fruit such as an apple or banana
- two pieces of small fruit such as satsumas
- three tablespoons of cooked vegetables
- a bowl of mixed salad
- limit fruit juice to no more than 150 ml glass of unsweetened fruit juice (only counts once per day no matter how much you drink)



Eat some meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein

Eat two portions of fish a week, one of which is oily. A typical portion is 140g.

On average eat no more than 70g red and processed meat a day. Choose lean cuts, trim visible fat off meat, look at labels and choose those options lower in salt, fat (especially saturated fat) and sugar where possible.



Eat some milk and dairy products

Look at labels and choose those options with lower fat, sugar and salt where possible.

Eat products high in fat, sugar and salt in smaller amounts or eat them less often.



Eat foods and drinks high in fat, salt and/or sugar in small amounts or infrequently

For example, swap sugary drinks to water, lower fat milk, diet, sugar free or no added sugar drinks

Foods and drinks in this category are not essential to the diet.

The average energy requirement for a man is about 10.5 MJ (2,500 kcal); 8.4MJ (2,000 kcal) for a woman. See Table 1 at the end of this document for dietary reference values for the whole population.

By convention:

- breakfast should provide about 1.7 MJ/400kcal of your energy
- lunch about 2.5 MJ/600kcal
- evening meal about 2.5 MJ/600kcal
- leaving 1.7 MJ/ 400kcal for all the snacks and drinks consumed between meals



Drink between six to eight glasses (about 1.2 litres) of water, or other fluids, every day, to avoid dehydration.

Supplements

Certain groups of the population are recommended to take dietary supplements:

Women who could become pregnant or who are planning a pregnancy should take a dietary supplement of 400 micrograms (μg) of folic acid every day from before conception until the 12th week of pregnancy, to reduce the risk of neural tube defects (NTDs). In addition to this, they should also eat folate rich foods such as, green vegetables, some fruits (oranges for example) and fortified breakfast cereals.

Vitamin D supplements are recommended for:

- all pregnant and breastfeeding women (10 μg /day)
- people aged 65 and over (10 μg /day)
- people who are not exposed to much sun, such as people who cover up their skin when outdoors, or those who are housebound/confined indoors for long periods (10 μg /day for adults)
- Infants and young children aged between six months and five years should also be given a supplement containing vitamin D (7-8.5 μg /day depending on age), as well vitamins A and C

- formula-fed infants should not need vitamin supplements unless they are having less than 500ml of formula a day. Breastfed infants may need to receive drops containing vitamin D earlier (from one month of age) if their mother has not taken vitamin D supplements throughout pregnancy
- People who have darker skin, for example people of African, African-Caribbean and South Asian origin are also at risk of vitamin D deficiency as their bodies are not able to make as much vitamin D

Dietary reference values for macronutrients, vitamins and minerals, by age and gender

Table 1 provides the dietary reference values for populations aged from 1 to over 75 years. These dietary recommendations are taken from the Committee of Medical Aspects of Food Report on Dietary Reference Values for Food Energy and Nutrients for the United Kingdom.¹

The table does not take account of the subsequent Dietary Reference Values for Energy.² The government did not amend the energy recommendations following publication of this report given the considerable awareness of the energy requirements and the levels of overweight and obesity within the UK population. However, for some population groups, in particular those over 75 years who are inactive, it may be prudent to consider use of the revised (lower) recommended levels when setting catering provision.

Table 1. Dietary reference values for macronutrients*, vitamins and minerals, by age and gender

	Age Groups (years)																			
	1-3		4-6		7-10		11-14		15-18		19-50		51-64		65-74		75+			
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F		
Macronutrients																				
Energy (MJ/d)	5.2	4.9	7.2	6.5	8.2	7.3	9.3	7.7	11.5	8.8	10.6	8.1	10.3	8.0	9.7	8.0	8.8	7.6		
Energy (kcal/d)	1230	1165	1715	1545	1970	1740	2220	1845	2755	2110	2550	1940	2465	1900	2330	1900	2100	1810		
Protein (g/d)	14.5	14.5	19.7	19.7	28.3	28.3	42.1	41.2	55.2	45.0	55.5	45.0	53.3	46.5	53.3	46.5	53.3	46.5		
Fat (g/d)	not set	not set	66.7	60.1	76.6	67.7	86.3	71.8	107.1	82.1	99.2	75.4	95.9	73.9	90.6	73.9	81.7	70.4		
Saturated fat (g/d)	not set	not set	21.0	18.9	24.1	21.3	27.1	22.6	33.7	25.8	31.2	23.7	30.1	23.2	28.5	23.2	25.7	22.1		
Carbohydrate (g/d)	not set	not set	229	206	263	232	296	246	367	281	340	259	329	253	311	253	280	241		
Non-milk extrinsic sugars (g/d)	not set	not set	50.3	45.3	57.8	51.0	65.1	54.1	80.8	61.9	74.8	56.9	72.3	55.7	68.3	55.7	61.6	53.1		
Salt (g/d) [SACN max recommendation]	2	2	3	3	5	5	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6		
Fibre (g/d)	not set	not set	not set	not set	not set	not set	not set	not set	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18		
Vitamins																				
Vitamin A (µg/d)	400	400	400	400	500	500	600	600	700	600	700	600	700	600	700	600	700	600		
Thiamin (mg/d)	0.5	0.5	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.9	0.7	1.1	0.8	1.0	0.8	0.9	0.8	0.9	0.8	0.9	0.8		
Riboflavin (mg/d)	0.6	0.6	0.8	0.8	1.0	1.0	1.2	1.1	1.3	1.1	1.3	1.1	1.3	1.1	1.3	1.1	1.3	1.1		
Niacin (mg/d)	8	8	11	11	12	12	15	12	18	14	17	13	16	12	16	12	16	12		
Vitamin B ₆ (mg/d)	0.7	0.7	0.9	0.9	1.0	1.0	1.2	1.0	1.5	1.2	1.4	1.2	1.4	1.2	1.4	1.2	1.4	1.2		
Vitamin B ₁₂ (µg/d)	0.5	0.5	0.8	0.8	1.0	1.0	1.2	1.2	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5		
Folate (µg/d)	70	70	100	100	150	150	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200		
Vitamin C (mg/d)	30	30	30	30	30	30	35	35	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40		
Vitamin D (µg/d)	7	7	not set	not set	not set	not set	not set	not set	not set	not set	not set	not set	not set	not set	not set	not set	supplement	supplement	supplement	supplement

	Age Groups (years)																		
	1-3		4-6		7-10		11-14		15-18		19-50		51-64		65-74		75+		
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
Minerals																			
Iron (mg/d)	6.9	6.9	6.1	6.1	8.7	8.7	11.3	14.8	11.3	14.8	8.7	14.8	8.7	8.7	8.7	8.7	8.7	8.7	
Calcium (mg/d)	350	350	450	450	550	550	1000	800	1000	800	700	700	700	700	700	700	700	700	
Magnesium (mg/d)	85	85	120	120	200	200	280	280	300	300	300	270	300	270	300	270	300	270	
Potassium (mg/d)	800	800	1100	1100	2000	2000	3100	3100	3500	3500	3500	3500	3500	3500	3500	3500	3500	3500	
Zinc (mg/d)	5.0	5.0	6.5	6.5	7.0	7.0	9.0	9.0	9.5	7.0	9.5	7.0	9.5	7.0	9.5	7.0	9.5	7.0	
Copper (mg/d)	0.4	0.4	0.6	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.8	0.8	1.0	1.0	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	
Iodine (µg/d)	70	70	100	100	110	110	130	130	140	140	140	140	140	140	140	140	140	140	
Selenium (µg/d)	15	15	20	20	30	30	45	45	70	60	75	60	75	60	75	60	75	60	

*Fat, saturated fat, carbohydrate and non-milk extrinsic sugars calculated as a percentage of food energy

References

1. Dietary Reference Values for Food Energy and Nutrients for the United Kingdom. Report of the Panel on Dietary Reference Values of the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy. Department of Health (1991).
2. Dietary reference Values for Energy. Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition. Department of Health (2011).