

Eat Well

A guide for older people in Scotland



Who we are

Age Scotland is the national charity for older people. We work to improve the lives of everyone over the age of 50 so that they can love later life.

Our vision is a Scotland which is the best place in the world to grow older.

Our mission is to inspire, involve and empower older people in Scotland, and influence others, so that people can make the most of later life.

Our three strategic aims are to:



Help older people to be as well as they can be



Promote a positive view of ageing and later life



Tackle loneliness and isolation

How we can help

We know that growing older doesn't come with a manual. Later life can bring changes and opportunities to your life and you may need to know about rights, organisations and services which are unfamiliar to you.

That's why we provide free information and advice to help you on a range of topics including benefits and entitlements, social care, legal issues such as Power of Attorney, housing and much more. All of our guides are available to download for free from our website, or you can contact our helpline team to have copies posted to you for free.

The Age Scotland **helpline** is a free, confidential phone service for older people, their carers and families in Scotland looking for information and advice.

Later life can bring times when you just need someone to talk to. Our **friendship line** is part of our wider helpline and older people can call us for a chat. We're here to listen, provide friendship and offer support.

For information, advice and friendship



Call us free on: 0800 12 44 222
(Monday – Friday, 9am - 5pm)



Visit [agescotland.org.uk](https://www.agescotland.org.uk)
to find out more.



Fruit and vegetables

Meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein

Oils and spreads

Milk and dairy food

Bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy food

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Introduction

It is worthwhile to take some time to think about the food you eat. You probably know a fair amount about what is good and bad for you and that eating a healthy balanced diet is one of the best ways to keep well. However, for many different reasons this does not always happen.

Whether you cook yourself, get help with meals or go to a local group for lunch, this booklet provides ideas and practical suggestions that can help you maintain a healthy diet. A good diet can help to help keep both physical and mental health complications at bay.

You should enjoy your food. Eating the same foods over and over can get you down, but trying something new, or re-visiting meals you have not had in a while, can be a good start towards to a happier and healthier future. You may not need all the information in this guide at once, so feel free to dip in and out of it to find the parts that are useful to you.

This guide includes information about organisations who can provide specialist advice, and has information at the back about the healthcare professionals who can help you.

For information and advice about any of the topics in this guide, call the **Age Scotland helpline** on **0800 12 44 222**. The helpline team can tell you about services in your area, benefits, housing, care, social opportunities and more. You can also just call us for a chat. If you are looking for medical or dietary advice, you should speak to your GP or dietitian.

1: Your health



Basic eat well guide

Some foods have more to offer nutritionally than others, but this doesn't mean you have to give up everything you enjoy eating to be healthier. Almost anything can fit into a healthy diet if eaten in moderation. Overall, it is the combination and quantity of food that is important to help your body stay healthy over time.

As you get older, your body needs slightly fewer calories to function as your metabolism slows down and you may be less active. However, you still need the same amount of vitamins and minerals in your diet. Older people need roughly 200 calories fewer per day (this is approximately two apples).

If you are underweight, have a reduced appetite or feel weak, perhaps due to a lack of the right balance of foods in your diet, you should get advice from your GP or a dietitian.

The **Eatwell Guide** plate image, found on the inside front cover of this guide, shows how much of each food group you should eat in order to have a healthy, balanced diet. The plate is divided into segments to demonstrate each food group, and the share of our plate it should take up. You do not have to follow this with every meal – it can be achieved over a day or even several days.

The main food groups that make up the Eatwell Guide plate are explained on the following pages.



Fruit and vegetables

Fruit and vegetables are good sources of vitamins and fibre, and it is recommended that everyone should eat at least five portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables every day. A portion could be an apple, pear or banana, a slice of melon or pineapple, or three heaped tablespoons of vegetables. Fresh, frozen, dried and tinned varieties all count towards your daily intake. Research shows that people who regularly eat plenty of fruit and vegetables are at lower risk of developing heart disease and some cancers, and of having a stroke.



Starchy foods

Starchy foods such as rice, pasta, bread and potatoes are important for energy and should make up around a third of everything you eat. Try to choose wholegrain or wholemeal varieties such as brown rice, wholemeal bread or wholewheat pasta, as these contain more fibre than the white varieties. Fibre helps with digestion and keeps you feeling fuller for longer. Starchy foods are also good sources of calcium, iron and vitamin B. One portion could be 2 tablespoons of cooked pasta, rice or noodles, an egg-sized potato or three tablespoons of cereal.



Dairy

Dairy foods such as milk, yoghurt and cheese are good sources of protein, and are rich in calcium which is important for healthy bones and teeth. A serving could be a glass of milk (200ml), a pot of yoghurt or a matchbox-sized piece of cheese. You should aim to eat three servings a day, but it is best to choose low fat versions such as semi-skimmed milk and low-fat cheese if you need to reduce your weight.



Meat, fish and protein alternatives

Try to eat a portion of protein, such as meat, meat substitutes, fish, eggs or beans, with at least two of your daily meals. Protein is important for building and repairing muscles and bones, and also contains important vitamins and minerals such as iron and vitamin B. Try to eat at least two portions of fish a week, particularly oily fish such as salmon and sardines. These are rich in vitamin D which is thought to help protect against heart disease, and Omega 3 which is believed to benefit the health of our brains. A portion of protein is 140g (5oz) of fish, 80g (3oz) of meat or 2-3 heaped tablespoons of beans or pulses.



Oils and spreads

You need a small amount of fat in your diet but it is important to be careful about the type of fat you are eating. There are two main types of fat – saturated fat and unsaturated fat. Unsaturated fats are healthier fats that can help reduce cholesterol levels, and are found in foods such as olive oil, rapeseed oil and vegetable oil.

Saturated fat is found in foods like cakes, biscuits, sausages, pies, butter, cream, pastries and chocolate. It is known to raise the ‘bad’ type of cholesterol in the blood.

All types of fat are high in energy and you should not eat too much of them. A low-fat diet helps to reduce the chances of developing heart disease or having a stroke. It will also help you to maintain a healthy weight.

Foods high in fat, salt and sugar

These foods are not needed in the diet, so should be eaten infrequently and in small amounts. Too much of these foods can increase the risk of many illnesses and problems, including heart disease, weight gain, tooth decay and strokes.

A high level of saturated fat in food is:

more than 5g of saturates per 100g

A low level of saturated fat in food is:

1.5g of saturates or fewer per 100g

You can check the amount of saturated fat in foods by looking at their labels. In ready-made food, the 'traffic light' labels should say how much of the fat in the food is saturated. See the section on food labelling for more information.

Sugar is an energy source for the body. However, foods such as sweets and biscuits, which have high levels of sugar, should only be eaten occasionally and in small portions. They are high in calories and low in other nutrients, and cause weight gain and lead to health problems. Foods with more than 22.5g of total sugars per 100g (about 6 teaspoons) are classed as high in sugar. Some foods have sugar content that you might not notice. These can include low-fat foods, which often contain extra sugar to make them taste good. Some fizzy drinks also contain very high levels of sugar. Always check the label.

Eating a lot of **salt** can raise your blood pressure, which is a risk factor for a number of serious health conditions including heart disease and stroke. It is recommended that adults eat no more than 6g (about a teaspoon) of salt a day. Most of the salt we eat is hidden in our food, so adding extra salt often leads to eating too much of it. If you usually add a lot of salt to your food, try cutting down gradually to allow your taste buds to adjust.

Processed foods, ready meals and packet soups can be very high in salt so check the labels and aim to choose the lowest-salt option.

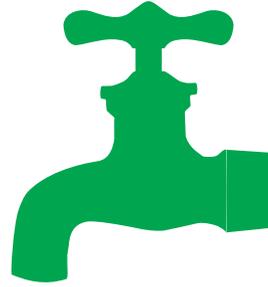
Staying hydrated

The amount of water you drink has a direct effect on your health and wellbeing. Drinking too little can lead to headaches, tiredness, lack of energy and light-headedness. These side effects can contribute to serious problems such as trips and falls, constipation, and low mood. Dehydration can also make the symptoms of some health conditions worse, including dementia.

The national guidance states that you should ideally drink around 6-8 glasses of fluid a day. Your best option is to drink water, but tea, coffee, hot water, herbal teas, milk, diluted fruit juices or squash are good too. Avoid having sugary, fizzy drinks on a regular basis as they can have a surprising amount of sugar in them. A 330ml can of fizzy juice could contain up to 10 teaspoons of sugar.

Eating foods that contain a lot of water can help you to stay hydrated too. These include soups, stews, custard, jelly, fruit and vegetables.

The amount of fluid you should drink depends on factors including your size, how physically active you are, any medicines you take, the temperature of your home and your health. As people get older, they can become less aware of feeling thirsty. Keep a drink next to you, or take a water bottle if you're going out, so you are more likely to drink regularly.



Alcohol

Alcohol is enjoyed by many people and it frequently plays a part in socialising in Scotland, but drinking too much can cause serious health problems. The alcohol content of drinks is measured in units, and the recommendations are:

- To keep health risks from alcohol to a low level it is safest not to drink more than 14 units per week on a regular basis.
- If you regularly drink as much as 14 units per week, it is best to spread your drinking evenly over 3 or more days.

**2 alcohol-free
days per week**

2-3 units per day



If you are taking any medications, check with your pharmacist or read the guidance that comes with them to find out if it is safe to drink alcohol.

NHS Inform can give advice about alcohol; visit their website at www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/alcohol or call **0800 22 44 88**.

If you are concerned about your own or someone else's alcohol consumption, you can contact Drinkaware's **Drinkline** for support, on **0800 731 4314**, or visit their website at www.drinkaware.co.uk.

Alcoholics anonymous provides group sessions and support to help people recover from drinking problems. Visit www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk or call their national helpline on **0800 917 7650**.

Worried about your weight?

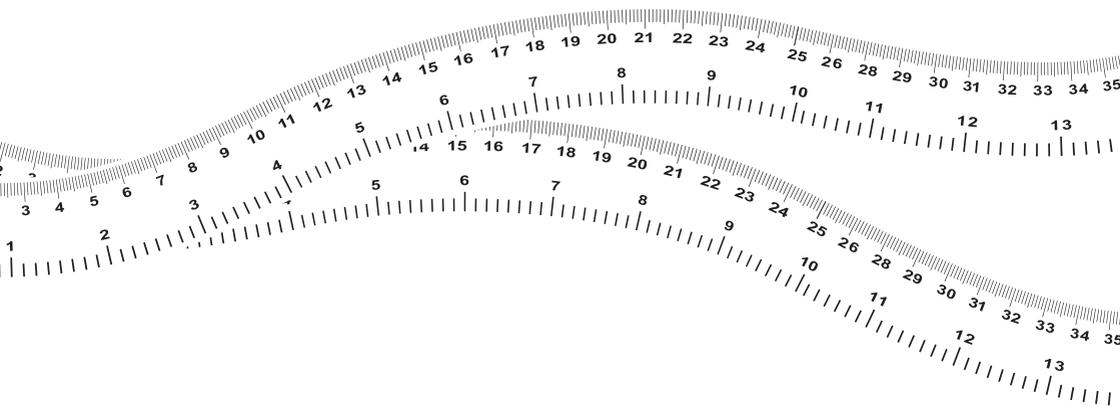
Small changes to our weight are perfectly natural but more significant changes can affect our quality of life.

Being **overweight** can make you less mobile and more likely to develop joint problems. It increases your risk of developing conditions such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes and some cancers.

Being **underweight** has risks too. Weighing too little can affect your immune system and bone strength, and may affect how tired you are.

Both can have a negative impact on mental health.

If you have noticed a change in your weight or have any worries at all about this, speak to your GP or practice nurse for advice. They can check if you are a healthy weight for your height and can give you advice about eating healthily and safely making changes to your diet. They may refer you on to a specialist for further advice to help you lose or gain weight.



Malnutrition

Malnutrition occurs when someone's diet does not meet their nutritional needs. It is estimated that 1 in 10 people over the age of 65 are at risk of, or suffering from, malnutrition.

Older people are at a higher risk of malnutrition than younger people due to factors such as a decreased sense of taste and smell, poor appetite and dental problems.

Other pressures such as loneliness, stress and isolation can also affect how well people eat. Malnutrition can result in illness, delayed recovery from illness, more GP and hospital appointments, increased hospital admissions, longer stays in hospital and a higher risk of having to go back into hospital after discharge.

Signs and symptoms of malnutrition

- loss of appetite
- weight loss
- clothes, rings, jewellery and dentures becoming loose
- poor concentration
- tiredness and loss of energy
- altered mood
- eating and drinking less than normal
- difficulties with swallowing
- low Body Mass Index (BMI of less than 18.5)

You can check your BMI by visiting the NHS Inform website at **www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/food-and-nutrition/healthy-eating-and-weight-loss/understanding-your-health-and-weight-body-mass-index-bmi**.

If you have a reduced appetite or are losing weight unintentionally then try eating little and often. Eating 3 small meals and 3 snacks a day can help you to maintain your weight.

To help prevent weight loss try fortifying your meals and drinks with high protein or high calorie foods - here are some ideas:

- full fat milk or cream – make milkshakes or add to teas, coffees, soups and puddings
- dried skimmed milk powder – whisk 2-4 tablespoons into a pint of milk
- add knobs of butter, margarine or cream to potatoes
- sprinkle grated cheese on top of dishes like baked potatoes or spaghetti bolognaise
- add creamy sauces to dishes - macaroni or cauliflower cheese
- adding cooked meat, fish, beans, lentils and other pulses to soups and sauces can increase the protein content of the meal
- honey, chopped nuts or dried fruit can be added to hot puddings, cold desserts, cereals or porridge
- add mayonnaise, salad cream or dressings to sandwiches and salads.

Losing weight is not an inevitable part of ageing. If you are concerned about your weight speak to your GP, who may refer you on to a dietitian.

Healthy bones

Keeping your bones healthy is important, and the food you eat plays a big part in this. As you get older, your bones become thinner. However, if you look after them and keep them as strong as possible, there is less chance of breaking a bone if you fall.

Weight-bearing exercises (such as walking), eating a well-balanced diet rich in calcium, limiting how much alcohol you drink and stopping smoking can all help to look after your bones.

Good sources of calcium include:

- milk, cheese and other dairy foods
- green leafy vegetables, such as broccoli, cabbage and okra (but not spinach)
- soya beans and tofu, or soya drinks with added calcium
- nuts
- bread and anything made with fortified flour
- fish where you eat the bones, such as sardines and pilchards.

As well as calcium, you need vitamin D for healthy bones. We get most of our vitamin D from sunlight during the spring and summer months. However, in colder months it may be beneficial to take a vitamin D supplement, particularly if you can't get out and about easily. You can read the Scottish Government's advice about vitamin D at www.gov.scot/publications/vitamin-d-advice-for-all-age-groups, or speak to your GP if you are concerned that you are not getting enough.

For more information about looking after your bones, or living with osteoporosis, visit the [National Osteoporosis Society](http://www.nationalosteoporosis.org.uk) website at <https://theros.org.uk>, or call them on **0808 800 0035**.

As you get older, your bones become thinner.

Healthy muscles

Your muscles become weaker as you age, because you are unable to use protein in the same way to build muscle mass. This process is called sarcopenia. Weakening of skeletal muscle, the muscles which produce movement, maintain your posture, stabilise your joints and generate heat, can make it difficult for you to stay independent and do the things you used to do. If you eat less protein and fewer calories, and have less exercise, your muscles can become weaker too. This can cause:

- frailty
- reduced ability to do everyday tasks
- an increased risk of falls
- taking longer to recover from illness or injury.

You can reduce your risk of these problems by having a healthy balanced diet that includes enough protein, and exercising regularly. Simple exercise, like going for a walk every day can help to prevent sarcopenia, and research shows that Tai Chi seems to be a particularly good form of exercise for older people.

Staying active

Keeping as active as possible can really boost your appetite. It is good for both physical and mental health and plays a big part in staying as independent as possible in later life. Getting out and about regularly can also help you keep in touch with family and friends. This is important as loneliness and isolation can contribute to poor health.

The recommended amount of physical activity differs from person to person. Factors such as weight, mobility and existing medical conditions should be taken into account. If you are not sure what you should and shouldn't do, speak with your GP before starting any new exercise.

There are many ordinary daily activities that you can do to keep active, such as walking, gardening or housework. **Paths for All** have information on health walks in your area. Visit their website at **www.pathsforall.org.uk** for more information. Many local libraries or information hubs also provide information about what's on in your area, at leisure centres or community centres.

Even if you are already reasonably active, you may still want to ensure your strength, balance and bone health are at their best. Tai Chi and any form of dancing are great activities that benefit your bones, muscles and balance.

You can find more information about staying active from **NHS Inform** on **0800 22 44 88** or at **www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/keeping-active**.

For a free copy of Age Scotland's Keeping Active in Later Life guide, call our helpline on **0800 12 44 222** or visit our website at **www.ageuk.org.uk/scotland/information-advice/health-and-wellbeing/keeping-active-in-later-life**.

Medicine and food

Some foods do not interact well with certain medicines. Speak to your pharmacist if you are taking medication, to check if there are certain foods or supplements that you should avoid.

Check the instructions on medication packs, leaflets or labels. Sometimes you may need to take medication in a certain way to make sure it works properly. This may be with just water, before or after a meal, or on an empty stomach so that it works effectively. Your pharmacist can also tell you whether it is safe to drink alcohol with the medication you are taking.

Some types of medicine can make food taste bland or different in some way. Try using strong flavours like Worcestershire, brown or sweet chilli sauce, or pickles to spice up the taste. You also lose taste buds as you age, so sauces and spices can really help with heightening the flavour.

If you take several different medicines, your GP should review them regularly in case you no longer need them, or the dose needs to be changed. Your pharmacist may organise your medication into a 'blister pack' or you can buy pill boxes to make sure you take the right medicine at the right time of day.



Specific diets

If you have a medical condition that means that you have to stick to a specific diet, you may feel confined by strict guidelines or confused because you have too little (or too much) information about what you can and cannot eat.

There are a few common conditions which affect the way you eat - and there are expert organisations that can help you.

Coeliac disease

Coeliac disease is a lifelong autoimmune disease caused by intolerance to gluten. Coeliac UK provides support to those living with coeliac disease, and advice on avoiding gluten when you are shopping, cooking at home, eating out and travelling.

Visit the **Coeliac UK** website at www.coeliac.org.uk, or call their helpline on **0333 332 2033**.

Diabetes

Diabetes is a condition where the amount of glucose (sugar) in your blood is too high because the body cannot use it properly. Diabetes UK Scotland can provide specialist advice about diabetes, including tips on how to manage your diet and enjoy your food.

Call the **Diabetes UK Scotland Careline** for advice on **0345 123 2399** or see their website www.diabetes.org.uk.

Inflammatory bowel disease

The two most common forms of inflammatory bowel disease are Crohn's Disease and Ulcerative Colitis. In both conditions, parts of the intestines or bowels become sore and inflamed.

For specialist information, call the **Crohn's and Colitis UK** information line on **0300 222 5700** or see their website **www.crohnsandcolitis.org.uk**.

Healthy eating and mental health

There is growing evidence that the food you eat can affect your mental health. Research has also shown that isolation and loneliness are risk factors for malnutrition.

You might want to find out if there are local activities you would enjoy such as a lunch club or walking sports club. Regular exercise and movement can have a positive effect on both mental and physical health.

The **Age Scotland helpline** can help with finding local activities and community groups. Speak to one of our friendly advisers on **0800 12 44 222**.

The **British Dietetic Association** has information on its website about food and depression: **www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts/depression_diet**.

Food Train is a charity that provides services and support to help older people eat well, live well and age well. Their team of volunteers can help by delivering groceries, befriending, meal sharing and more. Visit their website at **www.thefoodtrain.co.uk** to find out about the services available in your area.

2: The practicalities



Cooking on a budget

If you are on a limited budget you are not alone. Many people in Scotland are finding it hard to make ends meet and cannot always afford to spend a lot of money on grocery shopping. The following ideas could help you to keep an eye on the cost, whilst still enjoying a healthy, balanced meal.

Stick to simple recipes.

Avoid recipes that need small amounts of lots of different ingredients, as you may not use them up before they go out of date. Look for recipes with fewer ingredients, which often have the extra advantage of being quicker to prepare.

Take your time in the shop. Think carefully about 'special offers'.

Supermarket offers are not always the best value so it is worthwhile taking some time to look at the prices. The edge of the supermarket shelf will often be labelled with the price per 100g of a food which will help you to check whether a pack of three is cheaper than buying three items individually.

If you have access to the internet, visit www.moneysavingexpert.com where you will find information and useful ideas to help you cut costs.

4 FOR 5

3 FOR 2

2 FOR 1



Plan ahead.

Make a list of what you would like to eat for the coming week and try not to be enticed by offers on items which are not on your list.

Freeze food in batches.

Label and freeze leftovers or extra food in batches so you can take out one tub at a time, to heat up when you need it. If you have bought something in bulk or from a 'buy one get one free' offer, check if it is suitable for freezing. If so, it is less likely to go to waste, as it can be used at a later date.

Bread goes out of date fairly quickly, so if you do not eat it every day some of the loaf may not be eaten in time. As bread thaws very quickly, you can freeze it and take out just what you need. Slices of bread defrost quickly, and you can also put frozen bread straight into the toaster.

Bulk meals up.

Use foods that can be kept in your store cupboard or that you can buy cheaply to add to a meal. For example, you could add chickpeas, fresh vegetables or beans to a soup or a salad. Beans are packed with nutrients, such as fibre and protein, and they will also help you stay fuller for longer.



Try using a slow cooker.

Slow cookers are simple to use as most only have two or three settings. They can help you cut costs as you can use cheaper cuts of meat and still produce great tasting food, as the meat cooks gradually. To get the most out of this style of cooking, make a batch, leave to cool and then freeze for future meals. Slow cookers use less energy than a conventional oven, saving you money on your fuel bill.

If you need ideas about what to cook, there are many slow-cooker recipe books available to suit all tastes, or you can visit the BBC Good Food website at

www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/collection/slow-cooker.

Try to cut down on food waste.

Scotland currently throws away 630,000 tonnes of food and drink from our homes every year, and most of this could have been eaten. This waste costs over £1 billion a year, or £460 for the average household. Meal planning, making shopping lists before going to the supermarket and storing foods correctly can all help to minimise food waste. See the **Love Food Hate Waste** website **www.lovefoodhatewaste.com** for more information.

If you have food that is no longer safe to eat, your council should provide a food waste collection so that it can be taken away for recycling. Contact your council to find out more about waste recycling and bin collections in your area.



Problems with cooking

A lot of older people find it difficult to cook regular meals for themselves. There may be many reasons for this, including disability, illness or lack of motivation. Whatever the reason, there are lots of services that can help if you need it.

If you have problems cooking, speak to your local social work department. They can assess the help you need day-to-day, and cooking and preparing meals is an important part of this. The assessment may include a visit from an occupational therapist, who can talk to you about equipment that may help in the kitchen.

You can find out more about equipment to help with daily life by visiting the **Disabled Living Foundation** website
<https://livingmadeeasy.org.uk>.

Disability Information Scotland provides information and advice on a range of topics including aids and adaptations, and health and social care. See their website
www.disabilityscot.org.uk or call them on **0300 323 9961**.

Lunch clubs can be a great way of meeting new people and having a chat over a cooked meal. Call the **Age Scotland helpline** and an adviser can help you find out what is available in your area.

Some people feel uneasy or unsafe when cooking due to memory problems. If this is the case, speak to your GP about your memory concerns and ask the local social work department to assess your care and support needs.

To help keep you safe in the kitchen the **Scottish Fire and Rescue Service** can arrange a free home safety visit. They can check your fire safety arrangements, help you to work out a plan in case of fire and provide information about smoke, heat and carbon monoxide alarms. For more information or to book a visit, see their website at **www.firescotland.gov.uk/your-safety/at-home/home-fire-safety-visit** or call them on **0800 0731 999**.



Problems with eating or drinking

People may have difficulty with eating and drinking for many different reasons. Sometimes difficulties are the result of a medical condition and sometimes just a normal part of becoming older.

A lot of the changes are very gradual and people just adapt to them. There are lots of things you can do to make your swallowing as safe as possible if it is not working as well as it used to.

Remember when you were told not to talk and eat at the same time? This was for a good reason. Every time you swallow, you halt your breathing for a split second. If you talk you open up your airway and leave it exposed for food and drink to go down the wrong way.

Other things you can do are:

- avoid distractions when you are eating or drinking and focus on enjoying your meal
- sit upright and stay upright for at least 20 to 30 minutes after your meal has finished to let the food and drink travel down safely
- as well as sitting upright, you can try tucking your chin in slightly each time you swallow. This helps to prevent food getting into your airway
- when drinking, it can be helpful to leave the bottom third of the cup or glass, or use a shallow cup or glass. This stops you tilting your head back and again, which helps to keep your airway protected
- try foods that are soft and easy to chew, or foods that be mashed with a fork so they are easier to swallow.



The practicalities

If you are taking certain medicines, your mouth may be drier and you may need more sauce or gravy with your meal.

If you have difficulty taking your tablets you can try taking them with a teaspoon of smooth yoghurt or custard to make them easier to swallow. You can also ask your doctor whether they can prescribe coated or soluble tablets, or a liquid form of the medication.

What to look out for

Some signs that your swallow may not be working as safely as it used to are:

- if you are experiencing increased coughing or choking when eating or drinking
- if your breathing changes when you are eating or drinking
- if your voice sounds wet or gurgly after you have swallowed.

If you are having problems with swallowing, you may need to be seen by a speech and language therapist, who can help you to learn new swallowing techniques. You can ask your GP to refer you, or in some areas you can call the speech and language therapy service directly and ask for an appointment. Many services offer home visits for those who are unable to get about easily.

Dental Health

It is important to look after your teeth or dentures, and gums. Regular cleaning reduces the risk of gum disease and tooth decay. Have regular check-ups with your dentist to keep your mouth as healthy as possible. Most people should avoid sugary drinks and snacks between meals. For information about dental health call **NHS Inform** on **0800 22 44 88** or visit **www.nhsinform.scot**.



Buying your food

If you cannot get to the shops you may feel less in control of the food you eat, or of your diet as a whole.

To help with this you could:

- contact your local social work department and ask for a care needs assessment – some councils provide a shopping and delivery service depending on your needs and service availability
- find out if there is a **Food Train** service in your area. They provide a range of services including grocery shopping, home deliveries, household support services and befriending. You can reach them on **01387 270 800**
- **Food Train Connects** is a one to one shopping service available to older people across Scotland. The service will match you with a local volunteer who will safely do and deliver your shopping. For more information see the Food Train Connects website **www.foodtrainconnects.org.uk** or call **0800 304 7924**
- the **Food Train Meal Makers** service operates in several areas of Scotland and involves a volunteer regularly cooking an extra portion of food for an older person. For more information see their website **www.mealmakers.org.uk** or call **0800 783 7770**
- if you have access to the internet, most major supermarkets offer a service where you can order online for home delivery. If you are not confident using a computer, consider asking a family member or friend to help or put in an order for you





The practicalities

- there are plenty of commercial companies that deliver frozen meals to your home. Ask your local social work department what is available locally. Check whether the portion sizes, salt and fat content, and delivery times are suitable for you
- if you are able to get out to shops there may be services in your area that could take you there and pick you up again. Call the **Age Scotland helpline** on **0800 12 44 222** and we will help to connect you with local services
- some shops provide home-cooked style meals that can be heated up in the microwave or cooker
- consider getting your milk delivered to your home. You can find out if you have a local doorstep milk delivery service by visiting the **Dairy Council UK** website, **www.findmeamilkman.net**. Some milk delivery companies also deliver other products such as eggs, cheese and bread.



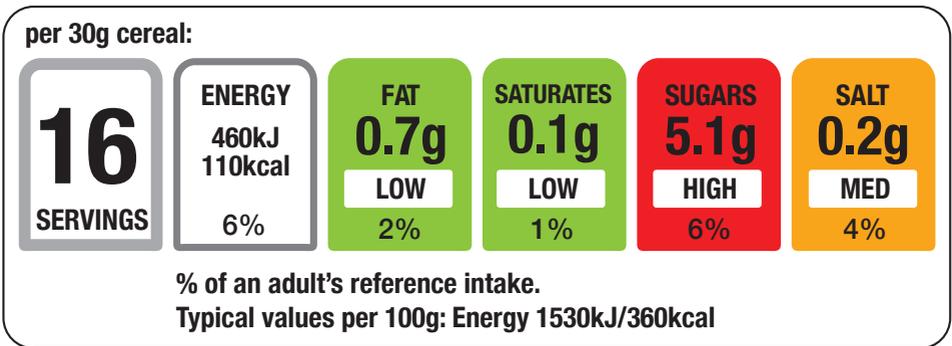


Food labelling explained

Labelling and symbols found on the food that you buy can help you to make informed choices about what you eat. However sometimes the information on packaging can make it even harder to judge whether its content is 'healthy' or not.

There are different types of food labelling:

Traffic light colour coding



This type of labelling is being used by all the major supermarkets to help people to be aware of the content of food, and to enable different foods to be compared. It is usually displayed on the front or side of food packaging so it is easily visible without having to pick products up and study them. The traffic light colours red (high), amber (medium) and green (low) symbolise the salt, sugar and fat content in food. Aim to buy foods that display the green or amber labelling as a rule of thumb. Red colour-coded foods are in no way out of bounds as they are there to be enjoyed – just not too often!

Why not cut out the card on the back cover and keep it in your purse or wallet as a general guide.

Nutrition labelling

Nutrition				
Typical values	100g contains	Each slice (typically 44g) contains	% RI*	RI* for an average adult
Energy	985kJ 235kcal	435kJ 105kcal		8400kJ 2000kcal
Fat	1.5g	0.7g	5%	70g
of which saturates	0.3g	0.1g	1%	20g
Carbohydrate	45.5g	20.0g		
of which sugars	3.8g	1.7g	2%	90g
Fibre	2.8g	1.2g		
Protein	7.7g	3.4g		
Salt	1.0g	0.4g	7%	6g

This pack contains 16 servings
 *Reference intake of an average adult (8400kJ / 2000kcal)

This is usually featured on the back of the packaging and gives a detailed breakdown of the amount of protein, fat, carbohydrate, fibre etc. in the food. This is usually measured per 100 grams of the food as well as per pack or portion.

Portion sizes

See pages 4-5 for information about portion sizes.

If you have access to the internet, see the website www.lovefoodhatewaste.com. It provides information about portion sizes and meal planning along with ideas about how to save money and reduce food waste.

General guidance about portion sizes does not take into account how physically active you are, your weight, mobility problems, existing medical conditions and cultural or religious beliefs. For advice tailored specifically to you, speak to your GP who may be able to refer you on to a dietitian for individual advice.

Use by dates and best before dates

Both dates are placed on food packaging as a guide. In the shop, check the **use by** date to make sure it won't go out of date before you plan to eat it. 'Use by' dates are usually found on fresh foods such as milk, meat, cheese and fish. If any food is past its 'use by' date – don't risk it, throw it away. **Best before dates** are less about safety and more about quality and texture. These dates will only be accurate if you store the food according to the instructions on the packaging.



Cooking if you live on your own

Many people find themselves living alone in later life. Some enjoy living independently and have done for many years. Others are on their own because a partner has died or a caring role has come to an end. Standing in the kitchen for a while cooking for just yourself may not be very appealing. But cooking for yourself can be creative and satisfying, and provide you with enjoyable food.

There are a few things to consider if you will be cooking for yourself:

- if you think that you may need support to cook safely at home, contact your local social work department and ask for a care needs assessment. Call the Age Scotland helpline for advice about this or see our guide **Care and support at home: assessment and funding**
- if you can get out to the shops, consider going with a friend who has more experience of cooking and who can help you choose what to buy
- try something simple to begin with then branch out to more complicated recipes when you are more confident. Some local councils run cookery classes as part of their adult education courses or community learning initiatives. Get in touch with your local council to find out what is available in your area.

If you have a carer

You may have a carer that comes in to your home to help you with food. It is likely that they will have limited time to prepare and serve a meal but it is important that they do this properly. In Scotland preparation of food, or assistance with preparation of food, is counted as personal care. If a care needs assessment shows you need this help, it should be provided free of charge. Preparation includes washing, peeling, cutting, chopping, pureeing, mixing or combining your food. If a carer prepares your meals, they should meet your dietary and cultural needs, even if they are only providing and heating ready meals. If this is not happening at the moment, speak to your care manager – their contact details should be in your care plan and you should have a copy of this. Call the **Age Scotland helpline** if you need more information and advice about your care.





Foods to keep in your store cupboard

It is a good idea to have a stock of food at home to provide basic cooking supplies and peace of mind if you cannot get out because of illness or bad weather.

An **Easy Store Cupboard Recipe** booklet is available for free from Eat Well Age Well. Visit www.eatwellagewell.org.uk/resources or call their advice line on **0800 13 88 220** if you would like to talk to someone about issues with eating well, including loss of appetite and loss of motivation to eat.

Store cupboard foods are designed to last but they can make their way to the back of a cupboard and never get used. Check now and again to make sure everything is still in date, use your supplies in date order and if you use something, replace it with a new one.

- **vegetable oil** – for frying and roasting
- **olive oil** – for frying, roasting, and salad dressings
- **soy sauce** – for stir-fries and for adding a salty flavour
- **tomato puree** – pizzas, pasta sauces, lasagne... the list of uses is endless. Once opened, keep in the fridge
- **rice** – a cheap food that will fill you up. Try brown rice – it's better for you and has more flavour but it does take longer to cook
- **lentils** – a good standby for soups and casseroles
- **pasta** – wholewheat versions are better for you and will keep you full for longer
- **dried spices** – curry powder, dried chillies, turmeric, paprika and your favourite flavours
- **dried mixed herbs** – thyme, basil, rosemary and your favourites.
- **stock cubes** – keep a supply of your choice of stock cubes, useful for soups, sauces etc. Look out for reduced salt versions
- **chopped tomatoes** – another really good and inexpensive standby for cottage pie, lasagne or pasta.



The practicalities

Useful supplies to keep at home which need little or no preparation include:

- cereals (low sugar)
- yoghurts (low sugar)
- instant mashed potato
- tins of fruit and rice puddings
- dried milk and/or jars of milky drinks
- pitta bread
- oatcakes
- crumpets or teacakes
- tins of tuna, salmon or sardines
- UHT milk
- tinned vegetables
- tins of pulses (beans or chickpeas to add to sauces).

Frozen food

Many foods such as crumpets or a sliced loaf of bread can be kept in the freezer and popped into your toaster when you need them. This way you can have a constant supply even if you are not eating them every day.

Supermarkets stock ready meals that can be frozen, and you can also freeze leftover meals you have cooked so you can eat them another day.

A good supply of dry and frozen foods can be especially helpful during winter when it might be more difficult to get out to the shops.



Food hygiene

Everyone knows that cleanliness is very important when preparing food. To reduce the risk of spreading bacteria and viruses:

- wash your hands with warm soapy water and dry thoroughly before and after preparing food – especially after handling raw meat, blowing your nose, smoking or going to the toilet
- keep your nails as short and clean as possible
- avoid touching your face or hair when you're preparing food
- if you've got any cuts or dry irritated skin, make sure they are completely covered with a waterproof plaster
- clean up any spills or drips as you go along
- keep raw meat at the bottom of your fridge to avoid cross-contamination with other foods
- keep your chopping boards as clean as possible and use separate boards for raw foods, and ready-to-eat foods, such as bread
- cool leftovers before you put them in the fridge so you don't raise the temperature of the fridge
- don't keep open tins in the fridge, use a sealed container
- never re-freeze foods that have been defrosted
- make sure to cook all meats thoroughly.

For further tips contact **NHS Inform** who have a 'food safety' section on their website and can give advice over the phone. You can call them on **0800 22 44 88** or see their website **www.nhsinform.scot**.

You can also find information on the **Food Standards Agency Scotland** website: **www.foodstandards.gov.scot**.

Before you see any health professional outside the NHS, always make sure that they are fully qualified and accredited with the relevant organisation.

You can do this by:

- Searching on the official website for the specific profession involved.
- Asking the person themselves who they are accredited with and then phone the organisation they gave to check.



3: Healthcare professionals you may meet



Dietitian

Dietitians can assess you, provide you with advice about nutrition and can help you to prevent food- or nutrition-related problems. They have a significant role in treating complex conditions where nutritional wellbeing is affected. For example, a dietitian will advise people with special dietary needs such as those with kidney disease, diabetes or cancer. If you would like to speak to someone about your diet you can ask your GP to refer you on to a dietitian.

Some people who give advice about food science and diet are **nutritionists**. Most are properly qualified but anyone can call themselves a nutritionist. If you decide to book an appointment privately, check their qualifications first.

The **British Dietetic Association** has information on their website explaining the difference between dietitians and nutritionists, their qualifications and how they are regulated. Visit www.bda.uk.com/about-dietetics/what-is-dietitian/dietitian-or-nutritionist.html for details. They also produce a range of food factsheets, available at www.bda.uk.com/food-health/food-facts.html.

General Practitioner (GP)

Your GP can help you to understand how your diet is affecting your health or how your health difficulties may be affecting your nutritional wellbeing. They may decide to refer you to a dietitian, speech and language therapist or other specialist for more specific help and advice.



Occupational therapist

Occupational therapists can help you to carry out the activities you need or choose to do in your daily life, by advising on adaptations and equipment you may need for your home. They can help you to manage some of the practicalities of eating and drinking, by providing adapted cutlery and other helpful equipment and advice. Your GP can refer you to an occupational therapist or you may be referred by a social worker.

Pharmacist

Pharmacists are qualified to prepare and dispense medicines. They are highly trained to give you advice on health issues, how to use medicines safely and how medicine can be affected by certain foods, or can affect your appetite. They are often open at times when other healthcare services are not and you do not usually need to make an appointment.

Social worker

Social workers help people to access the services that they need and are entitled to, including support to prepare and eat food. Contact the social work department of your local council for an assessment of your needs and the needs of any carer you have. For more information about the types of care that may be available, contact the Age Scotland helpline on **0800 12 44 222** to request a free copy of our **Care and Support at Home: Practical Help** guide.

Speech and language therapist

Speech and language therapists can assess, diagnose and treat your difficulty with eating, drinking and swallowing. They often work closely with dietitians to help you maintain your nutritional wellbeing with a balanced diet. In many areas you can self-refer to see a speech and language therapist or you can ask your GP or another health professional to refer you.

4: Where can I go for advice?



Age Scotland helpline 0800 12 44 222

The Age Scotland helpline provides information, friendship and advice to older people, their relatives and carers.

If you need an interpreter call **0800 12 44 222** and simply state the language you need e.g. Polish or Urdu. Stay on the line for a few minutes and the Age Scotland helpline will do the rest.

You can call us on for a copy of our publications list or download copies from our website at **www.agescotland.org.uk**.

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Eat Well Age Well

Eat Well Age Well is a national project that can provide older people in Scotland with advice about malnutrition and dehydration, along with helpful tips and information about how to stay well nourished.

0800 13 88 220 / www.eatwellagewell.org.uk

The Food Train

The Food Train provides vital services to older people who are no longer able to manage independently through age, ill health, frailty or disability. Food Train services are delivered by volunteers and support older people with a range of services including grocery shopping, home deliveries, household support services, befriending services, a library service and Meal Makers neighbourhood meal sharing project.

01387 270800 / www.thefoodtrain.co.uk



Meal Makers

Meal Makers is a local neighbourhood food-sharing project that connects people who love cooking, and who are happy to share an extra portion of home cooked food, with an older neighbour who would really appreciate a freshly prepared meal and a friendly chat.

0800 783 7770 / www.mealmakers.org.uk

Food Train Connects

Food Train Connects is a one-to-one shopping service available to older people across Scotland. The service will match you with a local volunteer who will safely do and deliver your shopping.

0800 304 7924 / www.foodtrainconnects.org.uk

Food Standards Scotland

Food Standards in Scotland produces information about safe food and healthy eating.

01224 285100 / www.foodstandards.gov.scot

Vegetarian for Life

Vegetarian for life produces a range of healthy eating publications and recipe booklets for older vegetarians and vegans. These include seasonal recipe leaflets, cooking for one and simple recipes.

They also have a charitable grants scheme for older vegetarians and vegans in financial need.

0161 257 0887 / <https://vegetarianforlife.org.uk>

5: Where to find further cooking tips and recipes



BBC Good Food

Whether you're looking for healthy recipes or ideas to use up last night's chicken, BBC Good Food have more than 7000 tested recipes to choose from on their website. They also have a 'how to' section that is full of help and tips, including a volume and weight convertor calculator, step by step guides and videos.

www.bbcgoodfood.com



General guide to colour coding

Amount of each nutrient in 100g of food

	High	Medium	Low
(Total) sugar	over 22.5g (over 27g / portion*)	5g - 22.5g	5g and below
Fat	over 17.5g (over 21g / portion*)	3g - 17.5g	3g and below
Saturate	over 5 g (over 6g / portion*)	1.5g - 5g	1.5g and below
Salt	over 1.5g (over 1.8g / portion*)	0.3g - 1.5g	0.3g and below

*portion size criteria apply to portions / serving sizes greater than 100g

Food labelling at a glance

Example of the traffic light system labelling:

per 30g cereal:



% of an adult's reference intake.

Typical values per 100g: Energy 1530kJ/360kcal

Remember to check the serving sizes and take into account that this may not be the typical serving size for you.

Cut out and keep this card in your wallet or purse to use as a guide while you are shopping.

Food labelling at a glance

Example of the traffic light system labelling:

per 30g cereal:



% of an adult's reference intake.

Typical values per 100g: Energy 1530kJ/360kcal

How you can help

Our vision is a Scotland which is the best place in the world to grow older.

All the information and advice we provide is free and completely impartial and in helping people access their rights and entitlements, it can be life changing.

We are an ageing population and more people than ever are coming to us for support. You can help us be there for those that need us most.



Make a donation

No matter how small or large, donations make a massive difference and help us continue our important work.

- ▶ Call **03330 15 14 60**
- ▶ Visit **age.scot/donate**
- ▶ Text **LATERLIFE** to **70085** to donate £5.*



Fundraise

Whether it is having a bake sale, running a marathon or knitting small hats for the Big Knit, there are so many ways to raise vital funds to support our work. To find out more, call **0333 323 2400** or visit **age.scot/fundraise**.



Leave us a gift in your Will

By choosing to leave us a gift in your Will, you can help Age Scotland to continue being there for vulnerable older people in the years to come. To find out more, call **0333 323 2400** or visit **age.scot/legacy**.

* Texts cost £5 plus one standard rate message

Let's keep in touch



Sign up to our newsletter

Our regular newsletters by email contain details of our campaigns, services and how you can support our work.

Sign up today by visiting [**age.scot/roundup**](https://age.scot/roundup)



Follow us on social media

Our social media channels are a great way to keep up to date with our work and issues that affect older people.



[**/agescotland**](https://www.facebook.com/agescotland)



[**@AgeScotland**](https://twitter.com/AgeScotland)



[**@age_scotland**](https://www.instagram.com/age_scotland)



[**/AgeScotland**](https://www.linkedin.com/company/AgeScotland)

General guide to colour coding

Amount of each nutrient in 100g of food

	High	Medium	Low
(Total) sugar	> 22.5g	5 - 22.5g	≤ 5g
Fat	> 17.5g	3 - 17.5g	≤ 3g
Saturate	> 5 g	1.5 - 5g	≤ 1.5g
Salt	> 1.5g	0.3 - 1.5g	≤ 0.3g



Age Scotland is the national charity for older people. We work to improve the lives of everyone over the age of 50 so that they can love later life.

Our vision is a Scotland where everyone can love later life.

Contact us:

Head office

0333 323 2400

Age Scotland helpline

0800 12 44 222

Email

info@agescotland.org.uk

Visit our website

www.agescotland.org.uk

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Document endorsed by



The Association of UK Dietitians