

## Healthy eating and cancer

This information is about how to eat well during and after cancer treatment. It explains why a healthy diet is important and what a healthy diet should include. There are also ideas for simple changes you can make to improve your diet, and advice on food safety during cancer treatment.

Any words that are underlined are explained in the word list at the end. The word list also includes the pronunciation of the words in English.

If you have any questions about this information, ask your doctor, nurse or dietitian.

You can also call Macmillan Cancer Support on freephone **0808 808 00 00**, Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm. We have interpreters, so you can speak to us in your own language. When you call us, please tell us in English which language you need (say "xxxxx").

There is more cancer information in [language] at [macmillan.org.uk/translations](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/translations)

### This information is about:

- Why a healthy diet is important
- What is a healthy, balanced diet?
- Making changes to your diet
- Things you can do
- Using food labels
- Food safety during and after cancer treatment
- How Macmillan can help you
- Word list
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- References and thanks

## Why a healthy diet is important

Eating a healthy diet is one of the best things you can do for your health. Many people with cancer say that choosing to eat a healthy diet gives them back a sense of control.

A healthy diet can reduce your risk of:

- cancer
- heart disease
- stroke
- diabetes.

If you have already had cancer, a healthy diet can help reduce the risk of a new cancer.

A healthy diet will also:

- help you keep to a healthy weight
- make you stronger
- give you more energy
- help you feel better.

Being overweight increases the risk of some types of cancer. There are many reasons why people are overweight, but an unhealthy diet and lack of physical activity are common reasons. Having a healthy, balanced diet and being physically active will help you keep to a healthy weight. This can help reduce the risk of some cancers.

Some cancer treatments can cause weight gain, such as hormonal therapy or steroids. If this happens, try to keep your weight within the normal range for your height. You can do this by eating healthily and doing exercise when you can.

Your GP or practice nurse can tell you what your ideal weight is. If you are worried about your weight, ask your GP or a dietitian for advice.

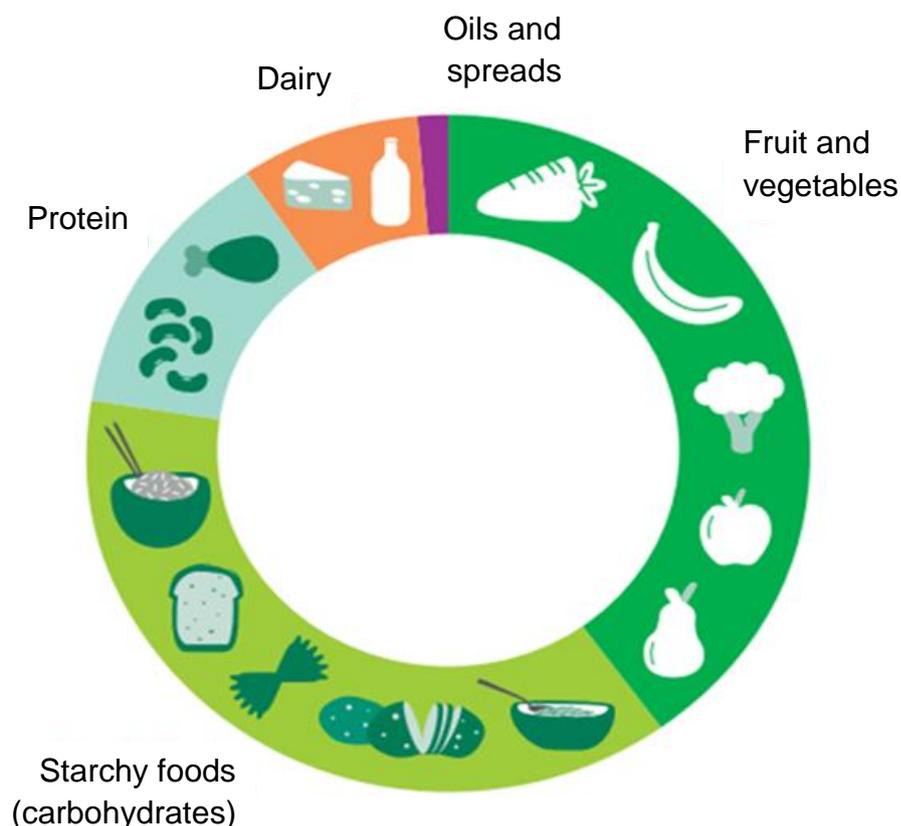
## What is a healthy, balanced diet?

Food has nutrients in it that our bodies need. A healthy, balanced diet gives you all the nutrients you need to keep your body working well.

For most people, a healthy diet includes:

- **Lots of fruit and vegetables** – These give you vitamins, minerals and fibre.
- **Lots of starchy foods (carbohydrates)** – These give you energy, fibre, iron and B vitamins. Foods include wholemeal bread, rice, pasta, noodles, couscous and potatoes.
- **Some protein** – Your body needs protein to function, grow and repair itself. Foods include meat, chicken, other poultry, fish, nuts, eggs and pulses (beans and lentils).
- **Some milk and dairy** – Foods include cheese and yoghurt.
- **A small amount of fat, salt and sugar.**

The diagram below shows how much of each food you should have.



Try to reduce the amount of processed meat and red meat you eat, and avoid 'fast food' restaurants. These foods contain a lot of fat.

## Fibre

Try to eat a variety of foods with fibre. Fibre helps keep your bowels healthy and prevents constipation. Foods high in fibre include:

- wholegrain bread
- brown rice
- oats
- beans
- peas
- lentils
- grains
- seeds
- fruit and vegetables

## Fat

Eat a small amount of fat and choose unsaturated fats, such as nuts, seeds, oily fish and avocados.

Avoid saturated fats, such as butter, ghee, chips, pies, cakes and pastries. Eat less fried foods and less fatty cuts of meat.

## Salt

Try to have no more than 6 grams of salt each day, which is about a teaspoon. Eating more than this can increase your blood pressure and your risk of cancer, heart disease and stroke. Try not to add salt to your food. You could use herbs, spices or black pepper for flavour instead of salt.

## Sugar

We need sugar for energy and it already occurs naturally in fruit and milk.

But many foods contain added sugar, such as sweets, biscuits, cakes, pastries and puddings. Fizzy drinks and alcohol often contain a lot of sugar too. Try to avoid foods and drinks with added sugar.

## Drinks

Drinks should be mainly water, or tea and coffee (without sugar).

If you drink fizzy drinks, cola or squash, try to reduce the amount you drink and have the sugar-free types instead. Try to limit the amount of fruit juice you drink as well, as this is very high in sugar.

## Alcohol

Alcohol contains lots of calories (see below) and can make you gain weight. Alcohol may also increase the risk of some cancers.

Following recommended drinking guidelines is good for your health and your weight. Government guidelines suggest that both men and women drink:

- no more than 14 units of alcohol per week.

If you do drink 14 units, it is best to spread this out over three days or more. If you want to reduce the amount you drink, try having several days each week when you do not drink.

### Number of calories and units of alcohol per drink

Drink	Units of alcohol	Calories (energy)
Pint of lager	2	170 to 250
Standard glass of white wine (175ml)	2	130 to 160
Single vodka (25ml) with a mixer	1	115

### Calories

Food and drinks give you energy. The amount of energy is measured in calories. On food labels, you will see this written as **kcal**. If you eat or drink more calories (energy) than your body needs, the body stores the extra calories as fat. Guidelines suggest that:

- Men eat no more than 2,500 calories per day.
- Women eat no more than 2,000 calories per day.

As people get older, they need even less calories.

## Making changes to your diet

It can be difficult to make changes to your diet when you are already coping with cancer. But some people find improving their diet is a positive change they can make in their life.

You can make changes to your diet gradually, when you feel ready. It doesn't have to be expensive – healthy foods like beans, lentils and some vegetables are cheap ingredients to use.

Try writing down what you eat for a few weeks, and then compare this with the advice on pages 3 to 4. Then you can look for small changes you can make to improve your diet.

If you don't have fruit with breakfast, you could try this. For snacks, try swapping chocolate or crisps for some dried fruit and nuts.

Use a notepad to write down what you eat and how you feel, physically and emotionally. Making changes can be enjoyable. You may discover new foods that you have not tried before.

Before making changes to your diet, talk to your doctor or nurse. They can refer you to a dietitian, who can give you expert advice about how to make changes to your diet.

## Things you can do

- Only eat as much food as you need. Your doctor or dietitian can give you advice on portion sizes.
- Try to eat 5 portions of fruit and vegetables each day. Add a side dish of salad or roasted vegetables to your meals.
- Eat less sugar and fat. Choose healthy snacks such as fruit and nuts, rather than crisps and biscuits.
- Eat less red meat and processed meat, such as sausages, burgers, pies and sausage rolls. If you make stews or curries, add more vegetables and less meat.
- It's important to do some physical activity along with your healthy diet. Even just short walks, housework or gardening will improve your fitness.

## Using food labels

Many packaged foods use a traffic light system on their labels. The label tells you if the food has a high, medium or low amount of sugar, fat and salt in it. Red means high, amber means medium and green means low.

Eat more foods with green and amber labels, and less foods with red labels.

	Sugars	Fats	Saturates	Salt
High (per 100g)	Over 15g	Over 20g	Over 5g	Over 1.5g
Medium (per 100g)	5g to 15g	3g to 20g	1.5g to 5g	0.3g to 1.5g
Low (per 100g)	Under 5g	Under 3g	Under 1.5g	Under 0.3g

## Food safety during and after cancer treatment

If you are having cancer treatment, your immune system may be weaker. This is called having low immunity. It means your body is less able to fight infection and you are more at risk of food poisoning. You may also be less able to cope with the symptoms of food poisoning.

### Tips to reduce the risk of food poisoning

- Use ingredients that are as fresh as possible.
- Use foods before the use-by date on the packaging.
- Store food and drinks at the correct temperature (follow instructions on the packaging).
- Wash your hands before you handle food.
- Cook food thoroughly.
- Do not eat mouldy food.
- Keep pets out of the kitchen.
- Wash all fruit and vegetables well in cold running water – do not soak them (unless you are using lentils or beans).
- Clean cooking utensils and chopping boards thoroughly.
- Wipe worktops with hot, soapy water or an antibacterial spray, particularly if you have been preparing raw meat or eggs.
- Wash or replace dishcloths and tea towels regularly.

### Foods to avoid if you have low immunity

If you have low immunity, you will need to avoid certain foods. Ask your doctor, nurse or dietitian. Foods to avoid are:

- unpasteurised milk, cream or yoghurt
- cheese made from unpasteurised milk (usually soft cheeses, such as Brie, and blue cheeses, such as Stilton)
- all types of paté
- yoghurt or yoghurt drinks that contain probiotics
- fresh salads
- raw meat or seafood
- runny eggs.

**Storing, freezing and reheating food**

If you decide to keep food to eat later, let it cool down completely before storing it in the fridge or freezer.

If you feel able to, you could make extra portions and freeze them before treatment, so you will have meals that are quick to make when you need them.

Remember to defrost your food properly before reheating it. There are instructions on the packaging about how to freeze and defrost food. It is especially important to be careful if you have low immunity due to cancer treatment.

You should only reheat food once. When you reheat it, make sure it gets very hot, even in the middle. You can let it cool down before eating it. Be careful not to burn your mouth if you reheat food.

**Eating out**

It is best to avoid eating out if you have low immunity. If you do eat out, eat somewhere where you know the food is freshly prepared and make sure it is thoroughly cooked.

Avoid buying food from salad bars, buffets and street vendors, as it is difficult to know how fresh the food is. Also avoid having ice-cream from an ice-cream van.

## How Macmillan can help you

Macmillan is here to help you and your family. You can get support from:

- **The Macmillan Support Line (0808 808 00 00).** We have interpreters, so you can speak to us in your language. Just tell us, in English, the language you want to use. We can answer medical questions, give you information about financial support, or talk to you about your feelings. The phone line is open Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm.
- **The Macmillan website ([macmillan.org.uk](http://macmillan.org.uk)).** Our site has lots of English information about cancer and living with cancer. There is more information in other languages at [macmillan.org.uk/translations](http://macmillan.org.uk/translations)
- **Information and support services.** At an information and support service, you can talk to a cancer support specialist and get written information. Find your nearest centre at [macmillan.org.uk/informationcentres](http://macmillan.org.uk/informationcentres) or call us. Your hospital might have a centre.
- **Local support groups** – At a support group you can talk to other people affected by cancer. Find a group near you at [macmillan.org.uk/supportgroups](http://macmillan.org.uk/supportgroups) or call us.
- **Macmillan Online Community** – You can also talk to other people affected by cancer online at [macmillan.org.uk/community](http://macmillan.org.uk/community)

## Word list

Word	In English	How to say in English	Meaning
	Constipation		When you find it difficult or painful to poo (pass stools).
	Dietitian		An expert in food and nutrition. They can tell you which foods are best for you. They can also give you advice if you have any problems with your diet.
	Food poisoning		An illness caused by eating food that contains bacteria. It can cause nausea and vomiting.
	Hormonal therapy		A type of treatment for cancer that some people may have.
	Immune system		Your immune system is your body's way of protecting you from harmful bacteria and fighting off <u>infections</u> .
	Infection		When bacteria gets into your body and causes an illness.
	Nutrients		Substances that your body needs to keep working properly and stay healthy.
	Probiotics		Live bacteria or yeast that might be in some yoghurts or yoghurt drinks.
	Steroids		A medicine that some people may have as part of their cancer treatment.
	Unpasteurised		This means the harmful bacteria in a food or drink has not been destroyed.

## More information in [language]

We have information in [language] about these topics:

<p><b>Types of cancer</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Breast cancer</li><li>• Large bowel cancer</li><li>• Lung cancer</li><li>• Prostate cancer</li></ul> <p><b>Treatments</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Chemotherapy</li><li>• Radiotherapy</li><li>• Surgery</li></ul>	<p><b>Coping with cancer</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• If you're diagnosed with cancer – A quick guide</li><li>• Claiming benefits</li><li>• Eating problems and cancer</li><li>• End of life</li><li>• Healthy eating</li><li>• Tiredness (fatigue) and cancer</li><li>• Side effects of cancer treatment</li><li>• What you can do to help yourself</li></ul>
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To see this information, go to [macmillan.org.uk/translations](http://macmillan.org.uk/translations)

### Speak to us in [language]

You can call Macmillan free on **0808 808 00 00** and speak to us in [language] through an interpreter. You can talk to us about your worries and medical questions. Just say [language] in English when you call (say “xxxxx”).

We are open Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm.

## References and thanks

This information has been written and edited by Macmillan Cancer Support's Cancer Information Development team. It has been translated into [language] by a translation company.

The information included is based on the Macmillan booklet **Healthy eating and cancer**. We can send you a copy, but the full booklet is only available in English.

The information has been reviewed by relevant experts and approved by our medical editor, Dr Tim Iveson, Consultant Medical Oncologist and Macmillan Chief Medical Editor.

With thanks to: Gemma Burgess, Macmillan Senior Specialist Dietitian; June Davis, National Cancer Rehabilitation Lead; Claire Donnolly, Dietitian; Rosie Hill, Macmillan Specialist Dietician; Barbara Parry, Senior Research Dietitian; Monika Seimicka, Senior Specialist Haematology and TYA Dietitian; Jaspreet Singh, Specialist Oncology Dietitian; Hannah Starling, Senior Specialist Dietitian; and Sarah Wheeldon, Macmillan Oncology Dietitian.

Thanks also to the people affected by cancer who reviewed this information.

All our information is based on the best evidence available. For more information about the sources we use, please contact us at **cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk**

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We make every effort to ensure that the information we provide is accurate but it should not be relied upon to reflect the current state of medical research, which is constantly changing. If you are concerned about your health, you should consult your doctor. Macmillan cannot accept liability for any loss or damage resulting from any inaccuracy in this information or third-party information such as information on websites to which we link.

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