



World
Cancer
Research
Fund

WOMEN'S HEALTH GUIDE



Dear reader,

Thank you for picking up this copy of World Cancer Research Fund's Women's Health Guide.

Today's busy lifestyles mean that our own health can sometimes slip from the priority list. Women especially are renowned for putting others first, and when it comes to cancer, it is easy to see why it often isn't seen as a concern right now.

It is often thought that cancer is caused by bad luck or is due to our genes, however, only 5–10 per cent of cancers are due to genes. The really positive news for us women is that there are things we can do to help protect ourselves against cancer. In fact, if we all lived a healthier lifestyle, which includes eating a healthy diet, being physically active and maintaining a healthy weight, around 40 per cent of cancer cases could be prevented.

If like me, you have a busy lifestyle, the really positive thing is that by making small changes to your lifestyle today, you could start to see and feel the benefits to your health as well as making cancer less likely in the future.

This booklet was produced to provide you with information about some of the cancers we women are most at risk of and to provide you with practical advice and tips to enable you to be healthier and reduce your risk of cancer.

If you want to make changes for the good of your health, using the practical tips and advice contained throughout this booklet is a great place to start.

Please help to spread our Cancer Prevention Recommendations by sharing it with your family and friends.

Best wishes,

Kate Allen

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Common cancers in women

In the UK, around 177,000 new cases of cancer are diagnosed in women every year and almost 77,000 women die from the disease. The really positive message is that by knowing how you can reduce your risk and spot the early signs of cancer you can protect yourself from being one of these numbers.

1 Breast cancer

About 54,700 new cases in UK women a year



Possible symptoms: lump or thickened area of tissue, discharge from either of the nipples, change to the size or shape of breast or nipple, dimpling on the skin of the breast.

Lifestyle risk factors: drinking alcohol, being overweight, being inactive.

Screening: the NHS Breast Screening Programme provides free screening for all women aged 50 and over: [nhs.uk/conditions/breast-cancer-screening](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/breast-cancer-screening)

2 Lung cancer

About 21,800 new cases in UK women a year



Possible symptoms: a cough that lasts for more than three weeks, coughing up blood, unexplained weight loss, shortness of breath, chest pain.

Lifestyle risk factors: over 80 per cent of lung cancers are due to tobacco use, so the most important thing you can do to reduce your risk is not to smoke or to give up

smoking. Taking high-dose beta-carotene supplements can also increase lung cancer risk in both smokers and ex-smokers.

3 Bowel cancer

About 19,700 new cases in UK women a year



Possible symptoms: blood in poo, abdominal pain, change in bowel habits, a lump in the stomach.

Lifestyle risk factors: a diet high in red and processed meat, drinking alcohol, smoking tobacco, being overweight or obese, being inactive, a diet low in fibre (eg. vegetables, fruit and wholegrain foods).

Screening: the NHS Bowel Cancer Screening Programme provides free screening for those aged 55 or over: [nhs.uk/conditions/bowel-cancer-screening](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/bowel-cancer-screening)

4 Womb cancer

About 8,800 new cases in UK women a year



Possible symptoms: abnormal vaginal bleeding including vaginal bleeding post-menopause, unusually

heavy bleeding and bleeding between periods, vaginal discharge.

Lifestyle risk factors: being overweight or obese, being inactive, carrying excess fat around the waist. Other factors that can increase risk include taking oestrogen-only hormone replacement therapy (HRT).

5 Skin cancer (melanoma)



About 7,800 new cases in UK women a year

Possible symptoms: a mole that has increased in size, changed shape (especially with an irregular edge), become darker in colour, itchy, inflamed or started bleeding, the development of a new mole, or other changes to the skin.

Lifestyle risk factors: excess sun exposure or sunbed use.

Early detection: get any changes to your skin or moles checked out by your GP.

6 Ovarian cancer



About 6,800 new cases in UK women a year

Possible symptoms: irregular periods, bloating, lower abdominal pain, back pain, passing urine more frequently than usual, constipation, pain during sex.

Lifestyle risk factors: being overweight or obese, smoking and using tobacco.

7 Cervical cancer



About 3,100 new cases in UK women a year

Possible symptoms: abnormal vaginal bleeding, pain and discomfort during sex, unusual or unpleasant vaginal discharge, and pain in the lower back or pelvis.

Lifestyle risk factors: being overweight or obese, smoking, early sexual experience and high number of sexual partners.

Screening: the best way to protect yourself from cervical cancer is by attending cervical screening: [nhs.uk/conditions/cervical-screening](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/cervical-screening)

If you want to read more about different types of cancer, visit our website: [wcrf-uk.org/cancer-types](https://www.wcrf-uk.org/cancer-types)

Please note: having any of the symptoms described above doesn't mean that you have cancer, but it's best to visit your GP and get checked out. It's also a good idea to find out if any types of cancer run in your family and to speak to your GP if you are concerned.

Cancer prevention checklist

Many of us will be affected in one way or another by cancer. In fact, one in two people in the UK will develop cancer during their lifetime. However, we are not powerless to help stop it happening to us.

Around 40 per cent of cancer cases (that's approximately 144,000 people every year in the UK) could be prevented if we all:



Stayed active, for example by walking, swimming, cycling, taking an exercise class, or gardening



Ate more wholegrains, vegetables, fruit and pulses (beans, peas and lentils)



Limited red meat and avoided processed meat, like bacon and ham



Drank little, if any, alcohol



Kept a healthy weight, which can be helped by:



Eating less high-calorie processed food, like crisps, chocolate and fried foods



Drinking less sugary drinks, like cola



Didn't smoke or gave up smoking



Were careful in the sun

Take action for your health

You may be doing some of the points in the above checklist already, for others, making small changes to your lifestyle could make a big difference to your health and your cancer risk.

Take the quiz on the next page to see how healthy your lifestyle is right now. Then keep reading to work out what changes you could make to help you towards a healthier, cancer-free future.

Or why not try our **Cancer Health Check**? Visit: wcrf-uk.org/cancerhealthcheck



How healthy are you?

1 In total, how much physical activity do you do a week? Any activity that raises your heart rate and makes you breathe deeper counts, such as brisk walking.

- a) 150 minutes or more a week
- b) 90–149 minutes a week
- c) Less than 90 minutes a week

2 How many portions of vegetables and fruit (80g, or a large handful is 1 portion) do you eat a day?

- a) 5 or more
- b) 3–4
- c) 2 or fewer

3 How often do you eat red meat? (beef, pork, lamb, venison)

- a) I don't eat red meat; or up to 3 times a week
- b) 4–5 times a week
- c) Every day

4 When you have bread, pasta or rice, do you tend to eat:

- a) Mostly brown or wholegrain
- b) Vary between brown and white
- c) Mostly white

5 When you're thirsty, what do you tend to drink?

- a) Water, sugar-free or diet soft drinks, or unsweetened tea or coffee
- b) Vary between a) and c)
- c) Sugary soft drinks like cola or energy drinks; fruit juice; or tea or coffee with sugar

6 How much alcohol do you drink?

One unit equals half a pint of lager or a single measure of spirits. A small glass (125ml) of wine contains 1.5 units.

- a) I don't drink alcohol; or only 1 or 2 units on special occasions
- b) Up to 14 units a week
- c) More than 14 units a week

7 Do you smoke?

- a) No, or I used to but have given up
- b) Yes, but I am trying to give up
- c) Yes

8 Are you a healthy weight?

- a) Yes, I am a healthy weight
- b) I don't know
- c) No, I need to lose weight

How did you score?

Mostly As

Well done, you seem to have a lot of healthy habits already. Keep reading for extra tips and suggestions to help you maintain your health.

Mostly Bs

You're on the right track, but there's room for improvement. Keep reading to see what else you can do to be healthier and to help protect yourself against cancer.

Mostly Cs

Your health could benefit if you made some healthy changes to your lifestyle. Even making small changes could make a big difference to your health and mean you're less likely to develop cancer. Keep reading for some simple tips to try.



Making changes
for a healthier you

Keeping a healthy weight

Did you know that being a healthy weight is an important way you can reduce your risk of cancer?

There is strong evidence that being overweight or obese increases the risk of many common cancers in women, including cancers of the:

- ▶ **Breast** (in post-menopausal women)
- ▶ **Bowel**
- ▶ **Gallbladder**
- ▶ **Kidney**
- ▶ **Liver**
- ▶ **Mouth, and throat**
- ▶ **Oesophagus**
- ▶ **Ovaries**
- ▶ **Pancreas**
- ▶ **Stomach**
- ▶ **Womb**

Around **62%** of women in the UK are **overweight or obese**



How to keep a healthy weight

We know that losing weight can be difficult, and probably unsurprisingly, almost three-quarters of us have tried to lose weight at some point. But, by making a few small changes, you will start to see a difference. Keep reading for some practical tips and advice to help you.

Even if you are a healthy weight, eating healthily is still really important to reduce your risk of cancer. Being a healthy weight can also help to protect you from other diseases such as type 2 diabetes and heart disease.



The average adult woman needs around **2,000 calories** a day

Your weight is a balancing act between the energy you put in (calories from food and drink) and the energy you use (for normal functions, such as your heart beating and by being active).

If you consume more calories than your body needs, you will put on weight. The reverse is also true: if you regularly use more energy (for example, through being active) than you consume through food and drink, you will start to lose weight.

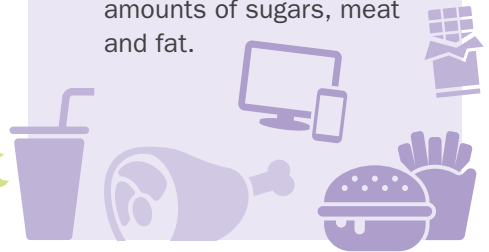
The following **decrease** the risk of weight gain and being overweight or obese:

- ▶ **Doing regular physical activity**, including brisk walking.
- ▶ **Eating food that contains dietary fibre**, eg wholegrain food, fruit and vegetables.
- ▶ **Eating a 'Mediterranean type' dietary pattern**, which is rich in vegetables, fruits, pulses, nuts, wholegrains, fish and unsaturated fats such as olive oil. It's also usually low in meat and dairy foods.



The following **increase** the risk of weight gain and being overweight or obese:

- ▶ **Too much screen time**.
- ▶ **Drinking sugary drinks**, such as sweetened milk drinks, excess fruit juice and cola.
- ▶ **Eating 'fast food'**, like fried chicken, chips and **high-calorie drinks** (like milkshakes).
- ▶ **Eating a 'Western type' diet**, which includes high amounts of sugars, meat and fat.



The more of this advice you can follow, the more you can help protect yourself against excess weight gain.

How body fat affects cancer risk

- ▶ Storing too much body fat can lead to insulin resistance (where insulin becomes less effective at controlling blood sugar levels), which encourages the body to produce certain hormones. High levels of these hormones, over a long period of time, can promote the growth of cancer cells.
- ▶ Body fat also stimulates a low-level, whole-body inflammatory response. Inflammation can promote the growth of cancer by encouraging cancer cells to divide. This inflammatory response may be the basis for the wide variety of cancers that have been linked to obesity.

Calories in food

The best way to keep your calories in check is to choose lower-calorie food and drink. Foods such as vegetables and fruit contain a large amount of water that adds bulk but not too many calories. They also contain fibre which helps keep us fuller for longer.

High-calorie food, like chocolate, crisps, biscuits, burgers and fried chicken tend to be high in fat and/or sugar (and salt) and offer little in the way of vitamins, minerals and fibre. Regularly eating these foods can contribute to weight gain.

Some high-calorie food, like oily fish, nuts, seeds, olive oil, rapeseed oil, and avocado contain good fats (unsaturated fats) and a number of essential nutrients, meaning they can be consumed in moderation as part of a healthy diet.

Focusing on healthier food can make a difference not only to your weight, but also to your overall health.

The number of calories (energy) that different food and drink contain can vary greatly.

For example, there are **41 calories in 100g of carrots**, but **100g of milk chocolate** contains around **530 calories** – **that's 13 times more!**

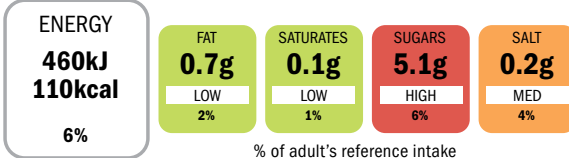


Check food labels

Checking the food label can be an easy way of seeing how many calories a food or drink provides. You may be surprised at how many calories it contains!

Front-of-pack nutrition label (example):

Each serving (30g) of cereal contains



If a food or drink has the following colours:

-  **Eat occasionally**
-  **Eat sometimes**
-  **Eat regularly**

For more information on understanding food labels, visit: wcrf-uk.org/food-labels

Are you a healthy weight?

Measuring your BMI

Body Mass Index (BMI) is a simple way to find out whether you're a healthy weight for your height.

1. Measure your height, in metres.
2. Weigh yourself, in kilograms.
3. Divide your weight by your height. Then divide your answer by your height again to work out your BMI.

| BMI | |
|----------------|----------------|
| Less than 18.5 | Underweight |
| 18.5 – 24.9 | Healthy weight |
| 25 – 29.9 | Overweight |
| 30 or more | Obese |

Your BMI:

$$\frac{\text{Weight (kg)}}{\text{Height (m)} \times \text{Height (m)}}$$

= BMI of

Example calculation:

$$\frac{\text{Weight: 70kg}}{\text{Height}^2: (1.7\text{m} \times 1.7\text{m})}$$

= BMI of 24.2

Or use our online BMI calculator:
wcrf-uk.org/bmi-calculator

If your BMI is below 18.5, this puts you in the underweight range. Being underweight isn't good for your health. Please speak to your GP as they can offer help and advice.



Target a healthy weight and shape

If you're already within the healthy weight range, that's a great start for your health. If your BMI or waist measurement is above the healthy range, your health could benefit from losing some weight.

The more body fat you have, the higher your cancer risk. Even if you're at the top of the healthy BMI range, trimming down could be good for you. Unless you are underweight, it is important to keep those pounds from sneaking on.

Your waist measurement

Not only is being overweight or obese a risk to our health but where we store our fat is also really important. In fact, carrying too much fat around the waist is linked to a greater risk of cancer, and also increases our risk of heart disease and type 2 diabetes, so measuring your waist is a good way of checking if you are a healthy shape.

To measure your waist:

- 1. Place the tape measure around your waist, halfway between your lowest rib and the top of your hip bone. If you have trouble finding this point, then lean to one side and see where the skin folds. This is the point where you can measure your waist.**
- 2. Make sure the tape is straight and snug but isn't digging into your skin.**
- 3. Breathe normally, and measure after you have breathed out.**

As a guide, a healthy waist measurement is:
Less than **80cm**
(**31.5 inches**)
for women

A healthy way to lose weight

If you set yourself the goal of losing weight, try to eat healthily rather than following a 'fad' diet or being too restrictive. This type of eating can't be healthily followed for a long period of time, and typically, when you go back to normal eating the weight can easily return too.

Instead, it's best to eat in a healthy way that suits you and your individual lifestyle, and importantly something that you can stick to for the long-term. Focusing on the quality of the food (the healthiness) rather than on the number of calories you are consuming can be an important first step.

Aim to gradually lose weight by making healthy changes to your diet and adding more activity into your daily routine: **losing between 0.2–0.9kg (0.5–2lbs) a week is a realistic goal** and one that you can achieve healthily. Once you have achieved your target weight loss goal, it's important to continue eating healthily and being active to help you maintain a healthy weight.



Keeping active

Life can often get in the way of us staying active, but making time for physical activity is important not just for your general health but also to help reduce the risk of cancer.

In the UK, the weekly physical activity guidelines for adults are:

- ▶ At least **150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity** such as brisk walking or cycling
- ▶ or **75 minutes of vigorous-intensity activity** such as running
- ▶ or even **shorter durations of very vigorous-intensity activity** such as sprinting or stair climbing
- ▶ or a **combination of moderate, vigorous and very vigorous-intensity activity.**

Only around just over **half of adult women** meet the physical activity guidelines.

(England, 2017)



How it helps to lower your cancer risk

- ▶ Helps to protect against cancer of the colon, breast and womb.
- ▶ Helps food move through your digestive system quicker, helping to reduce the amount of time that any cancer-causing substances are in contact with the lining of the bowel.
- ▶ Helps to lower insulin resistance which has been shown to have a role in cancer development.
- ▶ Helps to keep hormone levels healthy. This is important as having high levels of some hormones can increase cancer risk.
- ▶ Helps to maintain a healthy body weight, which in turn helps protect you against many types of cancer.

Other benefits of being active:

- ▶ Helps manage stress and anxiety.
- ▶ Helps to protect against and manage depression.
- ▶ Reduces your chance of joint and back pain.
- ▶ Reduces your chance of type 2 diabetes, heart disease and stroke.
- ▶ Improves sleep.
- ▶ Reduces your chance of falls.



Practical tips for getting active

Active transport

Rather than using public transport or driving to work, try cycling, jogging or even power walking for part or all of your journey.

Choose physical activity

Make small adjustments to your normal routine like taking the stairs, walking up the escalator, getting up to talk to a colleague, or having a meeting whilst walking.

Lunch break

If you work in an office, use your lunch break to get active. Maybe you have a gym nearby where you can go for a swim or attend a class? Or simply put on your trainers and go for a jog or brisk walk. Bringing in your lunch makes this even easier.

Keep it fun

Inviting a friend, family member or colleague for an exercise class, or to join you for a jog or a brisk walk can make it more fun for you and helps make them healthier too.

Remember that something is better than nothing, start small and build-up gradually. Make a start today – it's never too late!



If you're new to exercise or haven't exercised for a while, it's a good idea to see your GP for a check-up before getting started.



Challenge yourself to get active

Aim to do at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity activity every week. If that sounds like a lot, remember, it all adds up – even doing smaller-chunks of activity at a time will benefit your health.

To increase the benefits even more and to help you maintain a healthy weight, aim to do 45–60 minutes of moderate-intensity activity every day.

- ▶ **Moderate-intensity activities:** this includes things such as brisk walking, cycling, swimming, and gardening.
- ▶ **Vigorous-intensity activities:** this includes things such as running, squash, football, Zumba and fast cycling.

Finding an activity that you enjoy will mean you will be more likely to stick to it.



Mix up your movement

Being active doesn't just mean going for a run. There are three basic types of physical activity: aerobic activity, strengthening (also called resistance exercise) and stretching. Each one helps your body in a different way so aim to include all three in your routine.

Aerobic activities

Frequency: Fit in some aerobic activity every day.

Duration: Aim for at least 30-60 minutes each day. This can be all in one go or spread throughout the day.

Intensity: Aim for moderate (where you are still able to talk) to vigorous (where talking becomes difficult and you might be more out of breath).

Type: Includes brisk walking, jogging, tennis, netball, cycling and swimming.

Strengthening exercises

These are activities that work your muscles against resistance to increase strength. UK guidelines advise that we do muscle-strengthening activities at least two days per week. Many women might not consider this type of exercise as important as they aren't aiming to build big muscles. However, from the age of 30, we start to lose muscle, and that can negatively affect our strength, bone health and balance. Doing strengthening exercises can help to combat this and help to keep us toned.

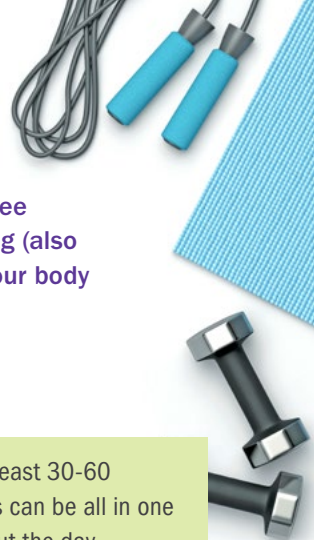
Any new weight exercises should initially be supervised by a trained fitness professional to ensure safe technique to help avoid injury.

Frequency: Two or more days a week.

Intensity: Aim to complete 10-12 repetitions of each exercise.

Duration: Three lots (sets) of 10-12 repetitions of each exercise with a 30 second to 1-minute rest between sets.

Type: Includes using free weights, resistance bands, weight machines or exercises that use your own body weight, such as squats. Try to work all the major muscle groups across the week (chest, back, shoulders, arms, legs and stomach muscles).



Stretching

Stretching is important for improved flexibility and balance. Aim to include exercises that work your joints through their full range of motion as part of your exercise routine. But be careful to not over stretch. These exercises are important to do, but as they tend to be gentle they don't count towards your total of 150 minutes of weekly physical activity.



Sit less

As well as moving more, it's important to limit the time spent being sedentary – this means not sitting or lying down more than necessary, when not sleeping. There is strong evidence that excess screen time (time spent doing television or using a computer) is a cause of weight gain. If you spend a lot of time sitting or lying down, try to take regular standing breaks.



How many calories can you burn?

These are some examples of the number of calories you can burn in 30 minutes*

DANCING



280 calories

CYCLING



273 calories

JOGGING



255 calories

SWIMMING



218 calories

GARDENING



138 calories

WALKING



127 calories

* Based on the average UK adult woman, weighing 72.8kg (11 stone 4lbs).

To check out how many calories your favourite exercise burns, visit:

wcrf-uk.org/exercise-calculator



Remember not to see the number of calories burnt as a reason to eat more after you exercise. Exercise and calories should be balanced across the week.

Eating well

For a healthy, balanced meal, at least three-quarters of your plate should be made up of vegetables, fruit, beans and wholegrains. Basing your diet on these types of food is a great first step to eating well and helps to protect you against cancer.

What should make up most of your plate?

- ▶ **Vegetables** (excluding potatoes) and **fruit** – fresh, frozen, dried and canned in water or natural juices all count towards your 5 A DAY
- ▶ **Pulses** – eg. lentils, peas and beans, these also count towards your 5 A DAY
- ▶ **Wholegrains** – brown rice, wholemeal pasta, wholemeal bread, oats and breakfast cereals such as Weetabix – these are also all high in fibre
- ▶ **Starchy vegetables** – eg. sweet potatoes and butternut squash

3/4 (or more) **wholegrains, vegetables, fruit and pulses**



1/4 (or less) **lean meat and poultry, fish** (white and oily), and **plant-based protein sources** such as Quorn and tofu

The role of wholegrains, veg, fruit and pulses in reducing the risk of cancer

- ▶ Diets high in fibre (eg. wholegrains, vegetables, fruit and pulses) can help to decrease the risk of bowel cancer. This may be because fibre helps to move food more quickly through the bowel.
- ▶ There is strong evidence that eating a fibre-rich diet, high in wholegrains, can help protect against weight gain, overweight and obesity.
- ▶ There is evidence that vegetables and fruit can help to protect against cancers of the mouth, throat and digestive tract.

- ▶ Vegetables and fruit provide vitamins, minerals and other substances known as phytochemicals (compounds found naturally in fruit and vegetables), which might help protect cells in the body from damage that may lead to cancer. Different types of vegetables and fruit contain different phytochemicals, so it is best to eat a variety every day.

Why 5 A DAY?

An important first step when reshaping your plate is to aim for at least five portions of vegetables, fruit and pulses a day. As well as containing nutrients that are essential for our health, most of these foods are fairly low in calories but high in fibre, making them great for helping to keep your weight in check without you feeling as hungry.

5 A DAY – what counts?

A portion weighs 80g (30g dried fruit, 150ml juiced fruit (and veg))



Vegetables eg. carrots, spinach, broccoli, butternut squash



Fruit eg. bananas, apples and berries



Pulses eg. beans, peas and lentils – only counts as one portion a day no matter how much you have



Unsweetened fruit or vegetable juice – a portion is 150ml, only counts as one portion a day no matter how much you have

Practical tips for getting your 5 A DAY

Eating five portions of vegetables and fruit a day may seem like a challenge. Here are some tips to help you.

- ▶ **Breakfast boost.** Add chopped banana or berries to your cereal or porridge; or try grilled mushrooms, tomatoes and spinach as part of a healthier cooked breakfast.
- ▶ **Sunday roast.** Instead of potatoes, try roasting sweet potatoes, squash or parsnips in a little oil brushed or sprayed on. Unlike potatoes, they count towards your 5 A DAY.
- ▶ **Stir in spinach.** Add a large handful of spinach to a hot bowl of soup or stew – no need to cook first as the heat of the soup or stew will wilt it.
- ▶ **Bulk up your meal with veg.** If you're cooking soups, sauces, chilli, curries or stews from scratch, try blending or adding in more vegetables. You could also add beans or lentils.



Portion size

As well as getting the balance of food right, it is important to eat a healthy portion size. This has become more difficult as the serving size of many foods, especially convenience food, have become larger.



What is a healthy portion size?

Having a healthy and balanced diet is about getting the right types of food and drink in the right amounts. Eating more than a healthy portion of higher-calorie food and drink can contribute to weight gain.

The list below shows some practical measures that you can use to measure a healthy portion size for an adult:

- ▶ **2 handfuls of dried pasta shapes or rice (75g)**
- ▶ **A bunch of dried spaghetti the size of a £1 coin (75g)**
- ▶ **A piece of grilled chicken breast about half the size of your hand (120g)**
- ▶ **A baked potato about the size of your fist (220g)**
- ▶ **About 3 handfuls of breakfast cereal (40g)**
- ▶ **A piece of cheddar cheese about the size of two thumbs together (30g)**

Top tips for keeping your portion sizes healthy

- ▶ **Use a smaller plate or bowl at mealtimes.** Alternatively, try filling most of your plate with salad, vegetables or pulses.
- ▶ **Weigh out a portion of the food you eat regularly,** like breakfast cereals, pasta and rice, to see what the suggested portion size actually looks like. You may be surprised!
- ▶ **Read labels of prepacked foods** to find out how many servings are included – it might be more than you think.
- ▶ Rather than automatically going back for seconds, **wait a few minutes before deciding if you are still hungry.** Leftovers don't need to go to waste – most food can be chilled and kept for the next day.



Small changes for a big difference

Plan in advance

Deciding upon what you're going to eat for the week ahead is a great way to avoid relying too much on ready meals and takeaways. It can also help to save you money.



Cut back on highly processed food

Highly processed food may be tempting, but eating too much of these high-calorie foods has been shown to be a cause of being overweight or obese. They also tend to be high in fat, starches or sugar, and low in fibre. Try to cut down on foods like these:

- ▶ **Pies and pastries**
- ▶ **Chocolate, cakes and biscuits**
- ▶ **Fast food** like fried chicken, burgers and chips, and pizzas



Trim the fat

While we need healthy fats in our diet, fat is also high in calories. To cut down, try to:

- ▶ **Choose reduced-fat versions of cheese, milk and yoghurt** – check the labels of yoghurts and opt for no added sugar versions
- ▶ **Choose unsaturated fats** such as rapeseed oil, and olive oil – when these replace saturated fats (eg. butter) in our diet they help to maintain a healthy heart
- ▶ **Swap butter** for reduced-fat spread or low-fat soft cheese
- ▶ **Avoid, or eat occasionally pastry products**, like pies
- ▶ **Measure out how much oil you use** with a teaspoon or use a spray oil
- ▶ **Opt for lower-fat** mayonnaise and salad dressings
- ▶ **Choose lean cuts of meat**, trim any visible fat
- ▶ **Use healthier cooking methods** that use little or no fat or oil, such as baking or grilling



A pinch less salt

The average woman in England consumes around 8g of salt a day – **that's above the recommended maximum of 6g a day.**

As well as not adding salt when you are cooking or at the table, it is a good idea to **check food labels** as foods like breakfast cereals, bread, bacon, sausages, pies and soups may contain more salt than you expect. In fact, up to 75 per cent of the salt we consume is from processed food.



Cut down on red meat

Meat, especially red meat, is often seen as the star of a meal but there are lots of good reasons for shifting the focus to vegetables, fruit, beans and wholegrains. There is strong evidence that eating processed meat or too much red meat can increase the risk of bowel cancer. Eating a lot of meat is also one characteristic of a 'Western-type' diet which our evidence shows increases the risk of weight gain, overweight and obesity.

Try to eat no more than about **three portions of red meat a week**, which is about **350–500g** cooked weight in total and **avoid processed meat** to help protect yourself against bowel cancer.

What is processed meat?

Processed meat has been smoked, cured or had salt or chemical preservatives added rather than simply cooked or reformed. This includes bacon, sausages salami, pastrami, corned beef, pepperoni, chorizo, hot dogs and all types of ham. We recommend avoiding processed meat because we have strong evidence that it increases the risk of bowel cancer. It also tends to be high in fat and salt.

The link between red and processed meat and cancer

- ▶ Haem, the compound that gives red meat its colour, can stimulate the formation of cancer-causing compounds in the body.
- ▶ When red meat is cooked at high temperatures, compounds are formed that are thought to cause cancer.
- ▶ As well as predominately being made from red meat, processed meat often contains added nitrites and nitrates which, when cooked with protein, can form compounds thought to cause cancer.

Why is some red meat OK?

Red meat (beef, pork, lamb and venison) can be a valuable source of nutrients, including protein, iron, zinc and vitamin B12, so it can form part of a healthy, balanced diet. But we don't need to eat it every day, as eating a varied diet can still provide all the nutrients you need.

Red meat – how much a week?

Here's an example of how you could have three meals a week containing red meat and still stick to less than 350g cooked meat:

- ▶ **Spaghetti Bolognese with minced beef = 140g** (about 210g raw weight)
- ▶ **Pork or lamb chop = 75g** (about 110g raw weight)
- ▶ **Roast beef, pork or lamb = 90g** (about 130g raw weight)

What can you eat instead?

- ▶ **Poultry** – eg. skinless chicken and turkey
- ▶ **Non-oily fish** – eg. cod and canned tuna (in spring water)
- ▶ **Oily fish** – eg. salmon, trout, sardines and mackerel
- ▶ **Meat-substitutes** – eg. tofu and Quorn

Practical tips to cut down

- ▶ **Smaller portions** (about half the size of your hand) means you can have red meat more often and stick to less than 350g.
- ▶ **Make red meat go further** by adding some beans, chickpeas or mushrooms to bulk up stews, chillies, and pasta sauces. They have a meaty texture and are just as filling.
- ▶ If having a full English breakfast, **cut back on the bacon** but add more grilled mushrooms, tomatoes and even a serving of spinach.
- ▶ **Rather than ham in your sandwiches, try hard-boiled eggs, canned tuna** (in spring water) or **low-fat soft cheese**. Add rocket or spring onion to lift the flavour.
- ▶ **Substitute beef mince for turkey or Quorn mince**, even if you do half and half, you will cut calories and fat and they're just as filling. Boost the flavour with onion, garlic, herbs and spices.
- ▶ **Try meat-free days.** Try to have more meat-free days if you can.



Think about what you drink

Whether it's a glass of wine with a meal, or a gin and tonic at the end of a busy day, for many of us, drinking alcohol can become a normal part of day-to-day life. While the immediate effects of drinking alcohol are obvious, it can have a longer-term impact on our health.

There is strong scientific evidence that all alcoholic drinks can increase the risk of mouth and throat, oesophageal, breast, bowel, stomach and liver cancer. Alcohol is particularly harmful when combined with smoking for some cancer types.

To reduce your cancer risk as much as possible, we **recommend not drinking alcohol at all**. If you do choose to drink alcohol, the UK guideline is to drink no more than 14 units a week, spread over at least three days.

Alcohol and weight gain

Alcohol can be surprisingly high in calories. **A large (250ml) glass of wine contains about 190 calories – similar to seven chocolate-coated biscuit fingers.**

To find out how many calories are in alcoholic drinks, visit: wcrf-uk.org/alcohol-calculator

What is a unit?

One unit contains 10ml or 8g of pure alcohol.

One small (125ml) glass of wine is 1.5 units



One 25ml measure of spirits such as vodka or whisky is 1 unit



Half a pint of normal strength beer, lager or cider is 1 unit



How can I drink less alcohol?

- ▶ **Have a drink of water first** to reduce your thirst.
- ▶ **Finish your drink** before topping up your glass.
- ▶ **Alternate alcoholic drinks** with water or non alcoholic drinks.
- ▶ **Dilute your drinks** – for example, opt for a small wine spritzer with soda water rather than a large glass of wine.
- ▶ Keep a few **alcohol-free days** each week.
- ▶ Try to **avoid drinking too quickly**.
- ▶ **Avoid eating salty snacks** – they can make you thirsty and encourage you to drink more.
- ▶ **Order small measures** – double measures may seem good value but can result in you drinking more.



Swap soft drinks

Evidence has shown that sugary drinks – such as cola, lemonade, flavoured milks (with added sugar) and juices – can contribute to weight gain if consumed regularly or in large amounts. It's also easy to drink a lot, as they don't fill you up as much as food.

Natural fruit juice (ie. with no added sugar) is a good source of some vitamins, for example, vitamin C, but it also contains a lot of naturally-occurring sugar and has lost most of the fibre you would get by eating the whole fruit, so it is best not to drink more than one small glass (150ml) a day.

Swapping sugary drinks for water or lower-calorie alternatives like low-calorie soft drinks, or unsweetened tea and coffee with a small amount of milk can help you keep a healthy weight.

Did you know? A 500ml bottle of cola contains **over 13 teaspoons of sugar**.
Imagine putting that in your cup of tea.



Top tips for healthier drinking:

- ▶ **Swap sugary soft drinks for low-calorie versions**, or better still, sparkling mineral water with a slice of lemon, lime or cucumber. Or, how about soda water and fresh mint?
- ▶ Instead of a large glass of fruit juice, pour a small portion and **dilute the juice** with sparkling mineral water.
- ▶ Rather than regular lattes, **opt for skinny versions** of less milky coffees like Americanos or cappuccinos (without chocolate) to cut the calories and sugar.
- ▶ **Try a herbal or fruit tea** – they come in a wide range of flavours, and being naturally sugar-free, they make a healthier alternative to sugary drinks.



Eating well in pregnancy

A healthy and varied diet is important at all times in life, particularly preconception and during pregnancy. What you eat can not only influence your own health, but it can also affect the short-and long-term health of your baby. It is important to eat a healthy, balanced and varied diet when you are pregnant, for example, choosing wholegrain varieties of food, eating plenty of fruit, vegetables and pulses, moderate amounts of meat, and limiting amounts of food and drink that are high in fat and sugar.

However, this is not a time to diet or lose weight. Gaining weight is of course normal during pregnancy, but keeping your weight gain to a healthy level will be good for you and your baby.

There are no UK guidelines on recommended weight gain ranges during pregnancy, however, women gain on average between 10kg and 12.5kg during pregnancy but this varies from person to person.

The idea of eating for two during pregnancy is a myth. It is only in the last 12 weeks of your pregnancy that you do need a little extra energy – about 200 calories per day. This is the equivalent of a small handful of unsalted mixed nuts, a medium-sized bowl of wholegrain cereal with semi-skimmed milk, or a low-fat yoghurt with a banana.

While we advise against the use of supplements for cancer prevention, during pregnancy is one time where certain supplements are advised for the health of you and your baby.



Folic acid

It is advised that you take a **400 µg folic acid supplement daily** prior to conception and up to the 12th week of your pregnancy to lower the risk of neural tube defects (NTDs).

Vitamin D

Important for the growth and development of your baby's bones and helps to maintain the health of your bones too. All pregnant and breastfeeding women are advised to take a **daily supplement containing 10 µg** of vitamin D.

Important nutrients to get from your diet



Iron

To ensure your baby has a sufficient blood supply and receives necessary oxygen and nutrients you should eat sufficient iron. Foods containing iron include **meat, pulses, dried fruit, wholegrains, nuts, green leafy veg** and **some breakfast cereals** (which have added iron).

If the iron levels in your blood are found to be too low, iron supplements may be recommended by your midwife or GP.

Speak to your GP if you are worried about your iron levels.

Calcium

Important for the growth and development of your baby's bones and helps to maintain your bones during pregnancy. Food rich in calcium include **milk, cheese and yoghurt**. Try to select low-fat products, such as semi-skimmed milk and reduced-fat cheese, where possible.

If you do not eat dairy food, calcium can also be found in calcium-fortified food (including **calcium set tofu** and **fortified soya/oat/almond milks**), some **dark green vegetables** (such as kale), and **nuts** (such as almonds and hazelnuts).

Too much of a good thing

- ▶ While it is important for the healthy development of your baby, large amounts of **vitamin A** can harm your unborn baby. As such, you should not take any supplements containing vitamin A. You should also avoid eating liver and liver products (such as pâté) because they are very high in vitamin A.
- ▶ The **omega-3 fats** found in fish, and in particular oily fish (such as salmon, sardines and mackerel), are important for the development of your baby's brain and eyes. However, pregnant women should **only eat a maximum of two portions (140g per portion) a week** as oily fish can contain low levels of pollutants that can build up in the body.

For more information on eating well in pregnancy, visit:

www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/healthy-pregnancy-diet

If you can, breastfeed your baby

Breastfeeding is a personal choice, but, if you are a new mum or have a baby in the future, choosing to breastfeed can have many benefits for you and your baby.

If you are able to, it is best to give your baby breast milk exclusively as their only milk for the first six months of their life. After that, your baby will benefit if you continue to breastfeed alongside introducing other food and water. Even if you can't do this, any breastfeeding is beneficial for you and your baby, and the longer you breastfeed for, the longer the protection and benefits last.



What are the benefits for your baby?

Breast milk is the best start in life for your baby as it contains all the nutrients your baby needs for healthy growth and development. It helps protect your baby from infection and disease, and can also help you and your baby to bond.

Breastfed babies are also less likely to become overweight or obese later in life compared to babies fed on infant formula. Helping your baby to be a healthy weight throughout their life reduces their risk of developing cancer in the future.

What are the benefits for you?

As well as being good for your baby, breastfeeding can also reduce your risk of breast cancer by:

- ▶ Lowering the levels of some cancer-related hormones in your body.
- ▶ Helping to remove any cells in your breasts that may have DNA damage.

For further information on breastfeeding and support, visit:

www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/breastfeeding-first-days

The menopause

The menopause is when a woman stops having periods and is no longer able to get pregnant naturally. It's a natural part of ageing that usually occurs between 45 and 55 years of age. In the UK, the average age for a woman to reach the menopause is 51.

The menopause is influenced by a change in hormone levels, and can cause a variety of symptoms.

Some of the symptoms of the menopause include joint stiffness, a loss of muscle, night sweats, hot flushes, low mood and difficulty sleeping. Symptoms caused by the menopause can also vary in duration, severity and the impact they have on women.

Managing the menopause

Menopausal symptoms may be improved by:

- ▶ **Eating a healthy, balanced diet**
- ▶ **Losing weight if you are overweight** – being a healthy weight helps to prevent post-menopausal breast cancer
- ▶ **Stopping smoking**
- ▶ **Not drinking alcohol** or cutting down
- ▶ **Keeping fit and strong** by staying active.

Going through the menopause can also increase the risk of osteoporosis (weak bones).

However, this risk can be reduced by:

- ▶ **Keeping physically active**, and in particular doing weight-bearing and resistance-based exercises
- ▶ **Eating a healthy, balanced diet** that includes vegetables, fruit, pulses, wholegrains and lean sources of protein
- ▶ **Choosing calcium-rich food** such as low-fat milk and yoghurt (choose no added sugar versions)
- ▶ **In the summer months** (only between the months of April to September) **getting some sunlight triggers the production of vitamin D**, it can also be obtained from food such as oily fish, egg yolks and some fortified food (such as some breakfast cereals)
- ▶ **Quitting smoking**
- ▶ **Limiting your alcohol intake**
- ▶ Your GP may also advise you take a calcium and/or vitamin D supplement.

For further advice and information on the menopause, visit:

www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause



Building healthy habits

Now you've read through this booklet, you can start to think about how your health could benefit by making changes to your diet and lifestyle.

However, changing a habit can be difficult, even if you know it is for the good of your health. By focusing on changing one thing at a time you will have a much greater chance of successfully sticking to your changes. Small changes lead to big changes in the long-term.

It is a good idea to set yourself goals, for example it may be to go for a walk every lunchtime – whatever they are, it is also a good idea to keep them realistic.

When building long-lasting healthy habits, it is good to have a reason why you want to make those changes in the first place. For example, it may be an emotive reason like wanting to be healthier for your family. Perhaps it is to reduce your risk of cancer or to have more energy and feel better within yourself? If you find your

motivation waning, just remind yourself why you are making those changes in the first place.

The first step to changing your habits is to create an awareness around what you do regularly. Maybe you eat too much while watching TV. You can develop ways to disrupt those patterns and create new ones. For instance, eating meals with the TV off.

We can also build new healthy habits by modifying our environment. Your environment may make your bad habits easier and your good habits harder. For example having a bowl of fruit in sight rather than stuck at the bottom of the fridge can lead to you eating more fruit.

While building healthy habits can take time and perseverance, they will ultimately become life-long healthy habits. One slip-up doesn't have to mean you go back to your old habits. It also doesn't mean you have failed. Just re-focus and remember the end goal.

Make a record of your goals and how and when you are going to achieve them by:

GOAL 1

GOAL 2

GOAL 3

Food diary

Use this planner to record your food intake for the week. Record your drinks as well – it's often easy to forget about the calories we drink.



| | BREAKFAST | LUNCH | DINNER | Additional snacks (if applicable) |
|-----------|-----------|-------|--------|--------------------------------------|
| MONDAY | | | | |
| TUESDAY | | | | |
| WEDNESDAY | | | | |
| THURSDAY | | | | |
| FRIDAY | | | | |
| SATURDAY | | | | |
| SUNDAY | | | | |

Physical activity diary

Use this diary to record any activity (eg. walking, jogging, vigorous housework) you did this week and for how many minutes.



| | ACTIVITY | DURATION |
|-----------|----------|----------|
| MONDAY | | |
| TUESDAY | | |
| WEDNESDAY | | |
| THURSDAY | | |
| FRIDAY | | |
| SATURDAY | | |
| SUNDAY | | |

Ready for change?

Now that you have read how making small changes to your diet and lifestyle can benefit your health and help protect yourself from cancer, we hope you feel inspired.

Why not visit our website for more tips and recipes to help you make your healthy changes stick?

Find out more

Try our Cancer Health Check

Visit wcrf-uk.org/cancerhealthcheck

And for more information and advice on healthy living for cancer prevention, visit wcrf-uk.org or call us on **020 7343 4205**

- ▶ For information on the **detection and treatment of cancer**, contact Macmillan Cancer Support. Visit their website www.macmillan.org.uk or call **0808 808 0000**.
- ▶ For **general healthy living information**, visit www.nhs.uk/livewell
- ▶ To find information on **NHS Cancer Screening Programmes**, visit www.gov.uk/topic/population-screening-programmes
- ▶ For any concerns about **alcohol and drinking or to get support**, visit www.nhs.uk/live-well/alcohol-support or call Drinkline (a free national helpline) on **0300 123 1110**.

World Cancer Research Fund's healthy eating and lifestyle information is aimed at the general adult population and is not intended to influence individuals who are following special diets (on medical advice) or who have special dietary or exercise needs. The information contained in our health information publications relate to the prevention of cancer. We are unable to give medical advice. For advice on specific cases, please consult your GP or a trained health professional.

Cancer Prevention Recommendations



Be a healthy weight

Keep your weight within the healthy range and avoid weight gain in adult life



Be physically active

Be physically active as part of everyday life – walk more and sit less



Eat a diet rich in wholegrains, vegetables, fruit and beans

Make wholegrains, vegetables, fruit, and pulses (legumes) such as beans and lentils a major part of your usual daily diet



Limit consumption of 'fast foods' and other processed foods high in fat, starches or sugars

Limiting these foods helps control calorie intake and maintain a healthy weight



Limit consumption of red and processed meat

Eat no more than moderate amounts of red meat, such as beef, pork and lamb. Eat little, if any, processed meat



Limit consumption of sugar-sweetened drinks

Drink mostly water and unsweetened drinks



Limit alcohol consumption

For cancer prevention, it's best not to drink alcohol



Do not use supplements for cancer prevention

Aim to meet nutritional needs through diet alone



For mothers: breastfeed your baby, if you can

Breastfeeding is good for both mother and baby



After a cancer diagnosis: follow our Recommendations, if you can

Check with your health professional what is right for you

Not smoking and avoiding other exposure to tobacco and excess sun are also important in reducing cancer risk.

Following these Recommendations is likely to reduce intakes of salt, saturated and trans fats, which together will help prevent other non-communicable diseases.

About World Cancer Research Fund

World Cancer Research Fund is the leading UK charity dedicated to the prevention of cancer. Our mission is to champion the latest and most authoritative scientific research from around the world on cancer prevention and survival through diet, weight and physical activity so that we can help people make informed lifestyle choices to protect themselves against cancer.

Currently, one in two people born in the UK after 1960 will develop cancer at some point in their lives, but around 40 per cent of cancer cases could be prevented. By following our Cancer Prevention Recommendations, choosing not to smoke (or giving up smoking) and being safe in the sun, you will have the best chance of living a life free from the disease.

The cornerstone of our research programme is our Continuous Update Project (CUP). It's the world's largest source of scientific research on cancer prevention and survival through diet, weight and physical activity. A panel of world-renowned independent experts review the scientific research to develop Cancer Prevention Recommendations based on the best evidence. Find out more: wcrf-uk.org/our-research

For the references used in this booklet or to request the information in large print, please contact us. If you have any comments or suggestions about any aspect of this booklet or our other health information, we would welcome your feedback.

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