

The Jean Hailes *Foundation* *for women's health*

Fact Sheet

Healthy Eating For You

Healthy eating means eating well for your body. It is about eating a variety of foods that give you the nutrients and energy you need to maintain your health and feel good.

Unhealthy eating

There are certain foods that can be eaten all the time that help maintain your health and energy and there are other certain foods that should be eaten in small amounts. Some of the health problems related to unhealthy eating can include:

- Type 2 diabetes
- Gall bladder disease
- High blood cholesterol
- High blood pressure
- Osteoarthritis
- Some cancers
- Impaired fertility
- Lower back pain
- Heart disease

Healthy eating tips

Foods to eat plenty of:

- **Eat plenty of vegetables and fruit** – two to three pieces of fresh fruit and five to seven serves of fresh vegetables each day. These will provide fibre, vitamins, minerals and important antioxidants.
- **Drink plenty of water** – six to eight glasses per day.
- **Eat plenty of fish** - one to three serves per week. These will provide the important omega-3 fatty acids, which are powerful protectors of the heart and blood vessels. Seek your health practitioner's advice regarding fish if you are pregnant.
- **Have plenty of calcium** - three serves of low-fat dairy foods or substitutes (e.g. calcium fortified soy milks, or if you are unable to consume these products talk to your doctor about bone strength).
- Include **wholegrain foods daily** such as wholemeal breads and oat cereals.

Foods to eat in small amounts or limit:

- **Limit butter, and animal fat** intake. Choose oils wisely e.g. include olive, canola, sunflower or safflower oils.
- **Small amounts of alcohol** (no more than one to two glasses per day).
- **Take away or pre-prepared convenience** foods such as frozen pies and desserts should be eaten only occasionally.
- **Limit snack foods** such as potato crisps, corn chips, biscuits, cakes. Make them occasional treats not everyday foods.
- **Eat less high kilojoule foods.** The total amount of energy-dense (high kilojoule) foods you eat may be as important as the total amount of fat in your diet.

How do I start a healthy eating plan?

1. Step one - planning

Ask yourself the following questions:

- What are the three most important changes I can make right now to the way I eat? Think about the things you do daily. Should you reduce your alcohol intake? Maybe eat more low-fat dairy foods, or eat more fruit and vegetables?
- Can I maintain these changes for a week, a month or a year? Whilst it is good to make changes even for a little while (e.g. a month with no take-away food), the changes you make for a year will be more important. Try some changes for a week or two then re-assess how you are going with them. Ask yourself if it is realistic for you to make these changes.

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- How will those changes affect the people around me? Sometimes you may have good intentions but the rest of the family don't share your enthusiasm for extensive changes to their usual meals. Introduce new foods, cooking styles or ideas gradually without too much fuss and you may be surprised how they all enjoy the variety.

2. Step two – getting started

- Try some new foods and recipes and set some small goals. Write out a plan, put it up on view, e.g. put a note on your fridge such as 'My goal for this week is to eat fresh fruit every day'.
- When starting your healthy eating plan, start small and cook what you know is healthy and that you will enjoy. There are so many healthy and delicious recipes out there to try, however start with what you know and build upon this week by week.
- Be prepared for some challenges when changing and maintaining a healthy diet. Consider how you can overcome these.

Tips for overcoming challenges might include:

- Making your lunch the night before work or using leftovers from dinner for lunch the next day,
- Planning your meals in advance. Maybe shop for the ingredients on a day you are not working and plan what you want to cook for the week so you don't have to think about it in the evening

3. Step three - reflect

It is important to be realistic about your action plan. If it doesn't go to plan don't give up. Look at what changes have been made, as small as they may be. Reflect upon the small things you have done rather than what you haven't.

Look at what you can do for the following day or week and set yourself a new plan.

Is there an important meal for the day?

Skipping meals is one of the biggest mistakes women make, particularly if you are trying to manage your weight. Regular meals will maintain your energy and provide the nutrients you need each day, so you will feel more like being active, and less likely to snack. Breakfast is important for improving mood and memory, boosting your metabolism and for weight control. A cereal containing oats, such as porridge, muesli or other wholegrain, high-fibre cereal is ideal with low-fat milk, fruit and wholegrain toast. These will provide a substantial amount of your requirements of calcium, fibre, B vitamins, zinc and many other nutrients. Those that are labelled low GI will give a slow release of energy and keep you satisfied longer. You may find you snack less which will help your weight.

Is following some of the current fad diets unhealthy?

It's tempting to look at some of the strict diets that promise quick weight loss. These fad diets are difficult to follow and provide short-term results. Frequent use of these diets, with weight gain between uses, can cause dehydration, lack of adequate vitamins and minerals, weakness, fatigue, nausea, headaches and constipation. Carbohydrate foods, particularly the carbohydrates from wholegrain wheat, oats, rye, rice, fruit and vegetables, provide important nutrients and fibre, are important to your health and energy and should not be eliminated from your diet. You may however reduce the carbohydrates from sugar, found in biscuits and confectionery without harm.

What about alcohol?

Alcohol consumption has many potential health risks and is also high in kilojoules. Try to avoid drinking more than two standard drinks per day and aim to have at least three alcohol free days a week. A standard drink is 100mL of wine, 30mL of spirits or 285mL of full-strength beer.

What else will keep my health on track?

If you are physically active, manage stress and avoid smoking and excess alcohol, you'll feel even better – a great recipe for getting the most out of life.

Where can I get more information?

www.jeanhailes.org.au

www.healthforwomen.org.au

www.nutritionaustralia.org – Nutrition Australia (contact your state office)

www.foodwatch.com.au

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This fact sheet is designed to be informative and educational. It is not intended to provide specific medical advice or replace advice from your health practitioner.

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health tips

Enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods, by eating plenty of vegetables, legumes, fruit and wholegrain cereals. Include lean meat, fish, poultry and/or alternatives.

Try to include fish 3–5 times a week (this can include canned fish, such as salmon, sardines and tuna).

Take time out just for you.

Make pelvic floor exercises a life-long habit — even if you have no symptoms.

Be active on most, or all, days of the week: you don't have to do a 30 minute walk, 3x10 minutes is just as good!

3 serves of dairy each day for good bone health.