

A difference between micro-nutrients and macro-nutrients is made between those that it needs in large quantities (macro-nutrients) in order to cover its energy requirements, and others which are just as essential but of which it only needs very little (micro-nutrients). The macro-nutrients include carbohydrates, proteins and fats. Micro-nutrients are vitamins, minerals and secondary plant compounds

A diet based on starchy foods such as potatoes, with plenty of fruit and vegetables; some protein-rich foods such as meat, fish and lentils; some milk and dairy foods; and not too much fat, salt or sugar, will give you all the nutrients you need.

When it comes to a healthy diet, balance is the key to getting it right. This means eating a wide variety of foods in the right proportions, and consuming the right amount of food and drink to achieve and maintain a healthy body weight. Most adults in Europe are either overweight. That means many of us are eating more than we need, and should eat less. And it's not just food: most drinks are also high in calories. Most adults need to eat and drink fewer calories in order to lose weight, even if they already eat a balanced diet.

All the food we eat can be divided into five groups. Try to choose a variety of different foods from the five groups.

The five groups are:

- Fruit and vegetables.
- Starchy food. (bread, rice, potatoes)
- Eggs, meat, fish (sources of protein)
- Milk and dairy foods. (calcium)
- Foods containing fat and sugar.

1. Fruit and vegetables

Eating more fruit and vegetable is essential both for good health and to help us lose weight. Most fruits and vegetables are low in calories and fat, and high in fibre – three essential ingredients for losing weight. Most also contain plenty of vitamins, minerals and antioxidants, all of which are important for helping us to look and feel our best and to protect us from disease.

2. Starchy foods

Starchy foods should make up around one third of everything we eat. This means we should base our meals on these foods. Potatoes are an excellent choice of starchy food and a good source of fibre. Leave the skins on where possible to keep in more of the fibre and vitamins. For example, when having boiled potatoes or have a jacket potato, eat the skin too.

Try to choose whole grain or whole-meal varieties of starchy foods, such as brown rice, whole-wheat pasta and brown whole-meal bread. They contain more fibre (often referred to as 'roughage'), and usually more vitamins and minerals than white varieties.

3. Meat, fish, eggs and beans

These foods are all good sources of protein, which is essential for growth and repair of the body. They are also good sources of a range of vitamins and minerals.

Meat is a good source of protein, vitamins and minerals such as iron, zinc and B vitamins. It is also one of the main sources of vitamin B12. Try to eat lean cuts of meat and skinless poultry whenever possible to cut down on fat.

Eggs and pulses (including beans, nuts and seeds) are also great sources of protein. Nuts are high in fibre and a good alternative to snacks high in saturated fat, but they do still contain high levels of fat, so eat them in moderation.

4. Milk and dairy foods

Milk and dairy foods such as cheese and yoghurt are good sources of protein. They also contain calcium, which helps to keep your bones healthy.

To enjoy the health benefits of dairy without eating too much fat, use semi-skimmed milk, skimmed milk or 1% fat milks, lower-fat hard cheeses or cottage cheese, and lower-fat yoghurt.

5. Fat and sugar

Most people in the UK eat too much fat and too much sugar.

Fats and sugar are both sources of energy for the body, but when we eat too much of them we consume more energy than we burn, and this can mean that we put on weight. This can lead to obesity, which increases our risk of type 2 diabetes, certain cancers, heart disease and stroke.

But there are different types of fat.

Saturated fat is found in foods such as cheese, sausages, butter, cakes, biscuits and pies. It can raise your blood cholesterol level and increase your risk of heart disease. Most people in the UK eat too much saturated fat, which puts us at risk of health problems.

Unsaturated fats, on the other hand, can help to lower cholesterol and provide us with the essential fatty acids needed to help us stay healthy. Oily fish, nuts and seeds, avocados, olive oils and vegetable oils are sources of unsaturated fat.

Sugar occurs naturally in foods such as fruit and milk, but we don't need to cut down on these types of sugar. Sugar is also added to lots of foods and drinks such as sugary fizzy drinks, cakes, biscuits, chocolate, pastries, ice cream and jam. It's also contained in some ready-made packed foods such as pasta sauces and baked beans.

Most of us need to cut down on foods with added sugar. Instead of a fizzy drink, for example, try sparkling water