



a guide to eating well

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Diet is the single most important behavioural risk factor that you can utilise to improve your health. Research shows that a healthful diet can prevent more than one-third of all premature deaths from chronic diseases. Unfortunately, most popular diets simply provide a plan for rapid weight loss. They fail when it comes to sustainable, long-term advice that will also keep you healthy and free of disease.

Every 10 years the Australian government calls for a review of the scientific literature and the creation of evidence-based judgements on diet from an independent panel of health experts. The result is practical advice in the form of dietary guidelines that can help you to both lose weight and benefit your overall health.

Following is some of the more important advice from the 2013 Australian Dietary Guidelines* that can help you to develop and maintain optimal health.

BODY WEIGHT

Being overweight is one of the most serious health risks in today's Western society. One scale that health professionals use to determine whether a person is overweight or obese is the Body Mass Index (BMI). Briefly, BMI is the ratio of your weight to your height. A

high BMI is recognised as an indicator of a significantly reduced life expectancy. Following are the normal and abnormal BMI indicators:

Less than 18.5	Underweight
18.5–24.9	Normal
25–29.9	Overweight
30 and over	Obese
40 and over	Grossly obese

A BMI of 30–35 reduces life expectancy by some 2–4 years and a BMI of 40–45 reduces life expectancy by 8–10 years. Being overweight or obese is a set-up for most other chronic diseases, such as type 2 diabetes and heart disease.

International data show that it is the increased use of energy foods that will gradually cause excessive weight gain. This is especially true of snack foods, sweet drinks and fast foods. Even a small, persistent energy imbalance is enough to cause excessive weight gain. This is true whether you are a child or an adult and over time it progressively increases your BMI.

preventing weight gain

Indulging in just two rich biscuits at morning tea break once a week at work could tip the scales! Often, the weight gain may not be obvious for a decade, which is why people find it difficult to put their finger on what

behaviours are making them fatter.

Prevention is important because weight loss is difficult to achieve and even more difficult to maintain.

exercise to lose weight

If you are already overweight, a sustainable and beneficial goal is to lose 1–4 kilograms per month, reaching a 10 per cent loss of your initial weight in the short term and up to 20 per cent loss over 1–5 years. What is considered to be realistic and achievable for sustained weight loss isn't what the rapid-weight-loss diets promise, where most people will regain their lost weight and then some.

Newer research suggests 45–60 minutes of exercise a day is required to keep you from gaining back the weight you lost and people who've been obese need 60–90 minutes of moderately intense activity. Those who include even some discretionary foods such as biscuits, lollies and chips need even more physical activity in order to keep the weight off.

weight problems in children

Weight problems in children are increasing in Western culture. And overweight children grow up to be overweight adults. Studies have shown that children and adults who eat just one or more fast food meals per week have an increased risk of gaining weight

and of becoming overweight or obese.

A VARIETY OF NUTRITIOUS FOODS

While the recommendation is to consume a wide variety of nutritious foods from the five food groups, the emphasis is on *plenty* for the consumption of vegetables, fruits and legumes. The reason why plant foods are important is that they contain many phytonutrients such as flavonoids, carotenoids and resveratrol, which are health enhancing chemicals found in plant foods.

Choose different types of fruits, vegetables and legumes, including a variety of colours. It's best to consume them whole, and fruits should be mainly fresh and raw. Whole foods are more effective in reducing the risk of cancer than specific vitamin and mineral supplements.

Vegetables, fruits and legumes are particularly beneficial for the prevention of coronary heart disease and stroke. Most nutritionists and dietitians acknowledge that all types of vegetarian diets, including vegan diets, are healthy and nutritionally adequate for all stages of life, provided they are appropriately planned.

refined foods

Research shows that by avoiding refined foods such as white rice, pizza and burger buns and adding whole grains such as barley, traditional oats and quinoa into your meals, you can significantly lower your risk of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and excess weight gain. And the good news is that you can easily incorporate these into delicious snacks and meals.

Not all carbohydrates are bad. The problems are associated with the highly refined ones, including many modern products made from white flour that come in packets rather than directly from a tree or plant.

Soft drinks, butter, cream, ice-cream, fast foods and biscuits should be consumed in limited amounts if at all. Eggs, legumes, nuts and seeds are nutritious substitutes for red meat, a key risk factor for colo-rectal cancer.

People who are shorter, smaller or sedentary are at a disadvantage and have little or no scope within their usual dietary pattern for discretionary foods, since their kilojoule requirements are lower.

FOODS TO LIMIT

The guidelines also advise limiting foods and drinks that have been associated with an increased risk of obesity

and/or chronic disease, including cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers.

foods with saturated fat

Foods to limit or avoid altogether include biscuits, cakes, pastries, potato chips, savoury snacks and alcoholic beverages. It's important to choose low fat options when you eat food prepared outside the home, since saturated and trans fats often lurk in the background. In order to achieve and maintain a healthy weight, people who do consume these foods need to greatly increase their physical activity in order to burn up the additional kilojoules.

salty foods

Any reduction in dietary sodium will reduce blood pressure. A low-salt diet will also lower the risk of developing high blood pressure in those who don't already have it. Some new evidence also suggests that people who have high blood pressure can reduce the risk of dying from stroke and heart disease by simply lowering their blood pressure. And reducing sodium may also be important for people who are genetically salt sensitive, or for overweight people with certain medical conditions.

And, note, the ratio of sodium to potassium can also influence blood pressure more strongly than the amount of sodium alone.

added sugar

Sugary drinks are the most common source of sugar in the modern diet, with consumption being highest in children and adolescents. Sucrose is commonly used as a sweetener in Australia and will also cause problems if it is consumed in excessive amounts. High sugar foods will also usually lack useful nutrients. Research shows that at any given level of kilojoule intake, as the proportion of added sugars in the diet increases, the nutrient density will fall.

Restricting added sugars will also reduce the risk of developing cavities in the teeth and there is growing evidence showing a link between sugar-sweetened drinks and excess weight gain in both children and adults. Also, recent studies suggest that sugar-sweetened drinks may increase the risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

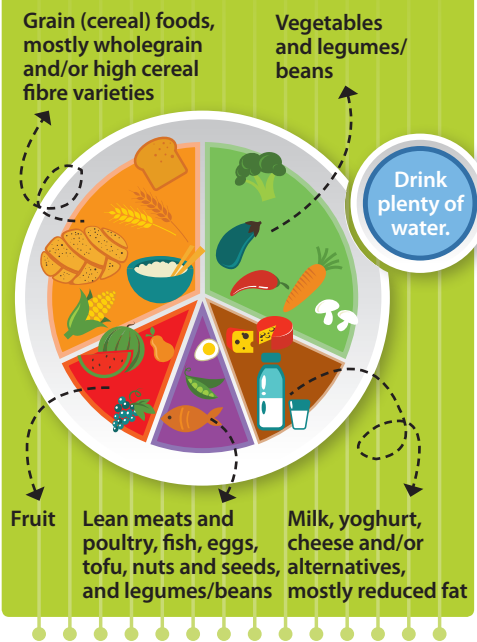
alcohol

The evidence suggests that a limited use of alcohol may be beneficial for reducing cardiovascular disease, but it also increases the cancer risk. For example, the consumption of even one to one-and-a-half standard drinks per

5 smart eating and lifestyle tips for a healthy weight

- ▶ Focus your meals on foundation foods from the five food groups: vegetables (including legumes), fruits, grains, nuts and dairy or their alternatives.
- ▶ Pay attention to your portion sizes.
- ▶ Avoid sugar-sweetened drinks.
- ▶ Drink plenty of water.
- ▶ Include some whole grains and nuts each day.
- ▶ Shun fast foods.


Enjoy a wide variety of **nutritious foods** from these five food groups every day.



day is associated with an increased risk of cancers of the breast, colon, rectum, liver, oral cavity, pharynx and larynx! Alcohol use by adolescents also has an especially harmful effect on their developing brains.

limitations of the guidelines

Finally, it's important to note that while dietary guidelines are helpful for most people in maintaining good health, they do not apply to those with medical conditions who require specialised dietary advice.

This advice can be provided by an accredited practising dietitian (registered dietitian in New Zealand), who will take into account your medical history, current blood test and the results of a genetic test. 

* The complete Australian Dietary Guidelines are available at www.eatforhealth.gov.au