



Wellbeing for Life

Eating and Drinking



Learning Outcomes

- Understanding what a healthy diet is.
- To understand the changes a person may experience as they grow older.
- How to support a person to eat a healthy diet.



Diet and Ageing

- For most people eating and drinking is as much a pleasurable experience as it is a necessity for sustaining life.
- There is a lot of information available to help everyone to make healthy choices about a balanced diet – please see the resources section of this module.
- Staff should be aware that as a person gets older their tastes can change, as can their ability to eat certain foods and to maintain a balanced diet.
- A person can also develop problems with their weight (either putting on weight or losing weight) or difficulties ensuring an adequate intake of essential vitamins and minerals. Side-effects from increasing numbers of medications that can affect their appetite.
- Developing dementia, and other health conditions like diabetes, can also impact upon a person's eating and drinking.

The Eatwell Guide

To help support the aspiration of a healthy diet for everyone, the UK government has devised the 'Eatwell Guide' <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Goodfood/Pages/the-eatwell-guide.aspx>



Using The Eatwell Guide

The Eatwell Guide encourages everyone to think about how to maintain a balanced diet of fruits and vegetables, starchy carbohydrates, dairy, meat, fish and other proteins. The government advice is:

“Try to choose a variety of different foods from each of the groups to help you get the wide range of nutrients your body needs to stay healthy.”



Fruits and Vegetables - '5-a-day' / '10-a-day'

Fruits and vegetables should make up over a third of the food we eat each day.

A minimum recommendation is for 5 portions of fruits and vegetables – fresh, frozen, tinned, dried or juiced all count (sometimes you might now even see 10 a day!)

Remember that fruit juice and/or smoothies should be limited to a combined total of 150ml per day.

Fruit and vegetables are an important source of vitamins, minerals and fibre.





Fuelling the body

- Starchy foods, including potatoes, bread, rice and pasta are a great source of energy and contain important nutrients.
- Encourage the people you support to choose higher-fibre, wholegrain varieties, such as whole-wheat pasta and brown rice, and leave skins on potatoes.
- If a person you support will only eat white bread and pasta, look for the higher-fibre versions that contain more nutrients.

Enjoying dairy products

- Milk, cheese, yoghurt and fromage frais are good sources of protein and some vitamins.
- Dairy products are also an important source of calcium, which helps to keep bones strong. This is particularly important as a person ages as they may be more at risk of osteoporosis (a condition that weakens bones).
- If a person dislikes, or is intolerant to, cow's milk, consider other choices such as goat's milk, almond milk, coconut milk or soya milk.



The Protein on the Plate

- Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other protein are good sources of vitamins and minerals.
- Choose lean cuts of meat and mince and eat less red and processed meat like bacon, ham and sausages.
- Aim for at least two portions of fish every week – one of which should be oily, such as salmon or mackerel.
- Pulses such as beans, peas and lentils are good alternatives to meat – they are lower in fat and higher in fibre and protein. Add them to homemade soups, stews or sauces if you are finding it difficult to incorporate them into the diet of the people you support.



Foods and Drinks to Avoid

- An important part of the Eatwell Guide is the information about foods that are high in fat, sugar and salt.
- These foods include chocolate, cakes, biscuits, sugary soft drinks and ice cream.
- Also be mindful that many snack foods, takeaways and processed meals can be high in fat, sugar and salt.
- The government advice is that foods high in fat, sugar and salt should be eaten less often and in smaller amounts.



Keeping Hydrated

The government recommends 6-8 cups/glasses of fluids a day.

- Water, milk and tea and coffee all count.
- Fruit juice and smoothies are included, but remember the earlier information about 5-a-day – that a person should only have 150ml of fruit juice or smoothie per day.
- Be aware of the additives in many soft drinks (e.g. squash) – although they are often marketed as being low-sugar or sugar-free, they may contain other harmful ingredients like artificial sweeteners, colourings or preservatives.

The Risks of Dehydration

- Good levels of hydration are important for everyone, but as a person ages they are at greater risk of dehydration, particularly if they are living with dementia and are finding it difficult to understand the importance of good hydration.
- If a person becomes dehydrated, they are a more at risk of Urinary Tract Infection (UTI) and may become confused and disorientated. In very serious cases, dehydration can kill.
- Guard against dehydration in hotter weather by offering a variety of drinks throughout the day, plus foods high in water content like watermelon, salads, sorbet and chilled soups.



How Staff can Support a Healthy Diet

- To help the people you support to eat a healthy diet, it is important that you read food packaging for guidance on the amount of fat, salt and sugar in the food you are buying and preparing.
- Adopting healthy cooking methods, like steaming, oven baking or stir frying in small quantities of oil are all preferable to deep fat frying.
- Be creative with how you prepare food – you could include extra vegetables in homemade pasta sauces, add berries to breakfast cereals, or make homemade smoothies (with fruits and vegetables) or fruit lollies in the hot weather to encourage a person to reach their 5-a-day.



Weight Management

- Many people with learning disabilities struggle with their weight and are often overweight.
- As a person ages, their weight may fluctuate, depending on their diet and health.
- Regular weighing is important so that staff can monitor changes.
- Be mindful of a person becoming more overweight, which would indicate a change in diet or medication may be needed.
- Equally, unexpected or dramatic weight loss can be very serious, and indicate an underlying health condition that may be undiagnosed.



Absorbing and Retaining Nutrients

As we age, our bodies find it more difficult to absorb and retain some nutrients;

For example:

- Many older people are at risk of Vitamin D deficiency, and may need to supplement with Vitamin D3 to ensure an adequate intake.
- Post-menopausal women are at greater risk of osteoporosis, and need to ensure an adequate intake of calcium, magnesium and other vitamins and minerals associated with good bone health. Be aware that men can also develop osteoporosis.
- If a person has coeliac disease (where they need to avoid the gluten found in wheat, barley and rye), they are at risk of not absorbing nutrients. For some people, coeliac disease is only diagnosed in later life and many people are never diagnosed.
- If a person being supported has a particularly poor diet, they may need food supplements to be prescribed by their GP.



Age-Related Dietary Changes

- It is not uncommon that as a person gets older, their dietary preferences may change, and they no longer like foods they previously enjoyed.
- Support a person through this change by offering them a variety of foods, eating together and trying new things.
- Taste buds can become less effective as a person ages – if you think a person you are supporting may be experiencing this, try some stronger flavours like sweet and sour, or spicy food (if appropriate).
- Do not overload the plate of a person who is finding eating more difficult – eating some food is better than nothing at all.
- Equally, do not be wedded to a set three meals a day. Be flexible with the availability of food, and if a person prefers to eat little and often or snack, encourage that by offering small portions of healthy choices throughout the day.



Eating, Drinking and Dementia

- A person with dementia may show a particularly marked change in their dietary preferences, for example, they may start to prefer sweet foods or finger foods.
- Use crockery that contrasts with the table – often brightly coloured plates are easier to identify. You may also need to invest in modified cutlery or drinking cups if a person is finding traditional items difficult to use.
- If a person is struggling to feed themselves, support them but do not take over – encourage them to do as much as possible.
- Be mindful of swallowing problems (dysphagia) as a person's dementia progresses. This will need careful management of everything they ingest orally. More information about dysphagia is available in the Swallowing Problems module.

Medication and Diet

- Side-effects from medications can affect a person's appetite.
- Be mindful that nausea, diarrhoea, constipation, indigestion and trapped wind could all make a person reluctant to eat or drink.
- If you think a person you are supporting is suffering from medication side-effects that are contributing to problems eating and drinking, or that are affecting the normal functioning of their digestive system, speak to their GP or pharmacist for advice. The person may need a medication review.





A Holistic Viewpoint

- Staff should always be mindful of looking holistically at the diet of every person they support.
- It is important that staff educate themselves about the different health conditions a person has and how these can impact upon the person's diet. For some conditions, like diabetes, accurate dietary management is vital to maintain the person's health.
- Staff also need to consider undiagnosed conditions, including pain, which may make the person reluctant to eat or drink. Changes in a person's diet can help to form an important overview of what the person is experiencing so that health professionals can make an accurate diagnosis. For this reason, staff should keep a food diary/detailed record of changes in a person's eating and drinking if they suspect a person they support has an undiagnosed condition.
- Where staff have concerns, they should always seek the advice of a GP or a referral to a dietician.



References and Resources

- NHS - Eatwell Guide: <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Goodfood/Pages/the-eatwell-guide.aspx>
- NHS - Healthy recipes: <http://www.nhs.uk/livewell/healthy-recipes/pages/healthy-recipes.aspx>
- NHS - Food safety: <http://www.nhs.uk/LiveWell/Homehygiene/Pages/Homehygienehub.aspx>
- NHS - 5-a-day: <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/5ADAY/Pages/5ADAYhome.aspx>
- NHS - Change for life – Be food smart: <https://www.nhs.uk/change4life-beta/be-food-smart#KbPbjlZRzAhpGy5v.97>
(includes an App) - Please Note - this is quite child/family focused, although lots of important info)
- NICE – Diet, Nutrition and Obesity: <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/lifestyle-and-wellbeing/diet--nutrition-and-obesity>
- Age UK – Nutrition, malnutrition and hydration: <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/brandpartnerglobal/westcumbriavpp/documents/target%20wellbeing/nutrition,%20malnutrition%20and%20hydration%20induction.pdf>
- British Nutrition Foundation: <https://www.nutrition.org.uk/>
- The Guardian – Article on nutrition guidelines: <https://www.theguardian.com/social-care-network/2016/aug/05/care-home-residents-need-tailored-nutrition-guidelines>
- MUST – Malnutrition Universal Screening Tool: http://www.bapen.org.uk/pdfs/must/must_full.pdf
- Natural Hydration Council: <http://www.naturalhydrationcouncil.org.uk/>
- Hydrate for health – The importance of maintaining good hydration in older people: <http://www.hydrateforhealth.co.uk/importance-maintaining-good-hydration-older-people/>
- NHS – Dehydration: <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/dehydration/Pages/Introduction.aspx>
- NHS - Weight Loss Guide: <http://www.nhs.uk/LiveWell/weight-loss-guide/Pages/weight-loss-guide.aspx>
- NHS – Vitamin D: <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/vitamins-minerals/Pages/Vitamin-D.aspx>
- National Osteoporosis Society: <https://nos.org.uk/>
- Coeliac UK: <https://www.coeliac.org.uk/home/>
- NHS - Dysphagia: <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Dysphagia/Pages/definition.aspx>



References and Resources

Links Relating to Dementia:

- Dementia Mealtime Assessment Tool: <https://www.thedmat.com/>
- Alzheimer's Disease International – Nutrition and dementia: <https://www.alz.co.uk/nutrition-report>
- Bupa – Dementia and eating well: <https://www.bupa.co.uk/care-services/care-homes/types-of-care/dementia-care/dementia-healthy-eating>
- Sterling University - Eating, drinking and dementia – A pocket guide about nutrition: <http://www.dementiashop.co.uk/products/eating-drinking-and-dementia-pocket-guide-about-nutrition>
- Dementia UK - Tips for eating and drinking with dementia: <https://www.dementiauk.org/tips-for-eating-and-drinking-with-dementia/>
- Alzheimer's Society – Eating and drinking: https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/site/scripts/documents_info.php?documentID=149



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<https://www.bethbritton.com/>

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602 South Seventh Street
Central Milton Keynes
MK9 2JA
www.macintyrecharity.org