

# Eat well, keep well

and reduce your risk of cancer





# Your food - your best protection



**What we eat and other lifestyle choices affect our health. With just a few small changes to what we eat every day, we can help to protect against major illnesses, including some cancers.**

**These changes can also give our health a boost.**

**Cancer is a big issue in Northern Ireland. It is:**

- the leading cause of death;
- responsible for almost 4,000 deaths each year;
- estimated that over 1,000 of these cancer deaths are linked to diet.



**Research\* has shown that there are ten key things we can do to help reduce our risk of developing cancer:**

1. Be a healthy weight and avoiding being underweight or overweight.
2. Be physically active for at least 30 minutes every day.
3. Avoid sugary drinks and limit the amount of energy-dense foods we eat, particularly processed foods that are high in added sugar, high in fat or low in fibre, eg cakes, desserts, savoury and sweet pastry products and crisps.
4. Eat more of a variety of vegetables, fruits, wholegrains and pulses such as beans, peas and lentils.
5. Limit the amount of red meat we eat if we usually have a high intake and avoid processed meats.
6. Limit the amount of salty foods we eat and foods processed with salt.
7. Don't use vitamin or mineral supplements to protect against cancer.
8. If we consume alcoholic drinks, keep within the recommended limits ie 2–3 units/day for women and 3–4 units/day for men with at least 1–2 alcohol-free days each week.
9. It is best for mothers to breastfeed their babies exclusively up to 6 months and then introduce solid foods following current guidelines.
10. Don't smoke or chew tobacco.

**For more information on weight, physical activity and healthy eating, go to [www.choosetolivebetter.com](http://www.choosetolivebetter.com)**

\* World Cancer Research Fund Expert Report. Food, nutrition, physical activity and the prevention of cancer. London: WCRF, 2007.

# Portions of fruit and veg

Experts recommend that we eat a total of at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables every day. In Northern Ireland we eat on average 3 portions of fruit and veg each day – so most of us need to eat more! Remember that frozen, canned and dried fruit and veg count as well as fresh.

## As a guide, 1 portion is:

- 1 piece of medium sized fruit, eg a pear or a banana



- 2 small fruits, eg kiwis, mandarins or plums



- 1 cup of very small fruit, eg grapes



or strawberries



- 1 slice of large fruit, eg melon



We usually think of potatoes as vegetables, but they are starchy foods, like rice and bread. They're not counted in our 5 portions, but we should still eat them for the fibre they contain (see *Why fibre is fabulous* on back cover).



- 1 glass (150ml) of unsweetened 100% fruit or vegetable juice – **try to limit these juices to 150ml a day**



- salad vegetables,  
eg one dessert bowl of salad



or 7 cherry tomatoes



- 3 heaped tablespoons of vegetables,  
eg peas and sweetcorn



or broccoli



For more information on  
portion sizes, go to  
[www.nhs.uk/livewell/5aday](http://www.nhs.uk/livewell/5aday)

# Red meat



Red meat such as beef, pork, lamb and game is an important part of a healthy diet as it is a good source of nutrients, eg protein, iron and zinc.

## How much should we eat?

**Research has shown that eating a lot of red meat (more than 90g a day) may increase the risk of developing bowel cancer.**

Red meat is an important part of a healthy, well-balanced diet and there is no need to avoid it. However, those people who eat a lot are advised to reduce their intake, for example 70g per day or 4–5 portions over a whole week. Here are some simple ideas to reduce your red meat intake:

- Have a smaller portion of red meat:
  - try having two slices of roast beef/pork/lamb/game instead of three or more (which would reduce your amount of red meat from 90g or more to 60g);
  - use less meat in stews and casseroles, and add other nutritious foods such as peas, beans, lentils and other vegetables;
- Try to include a variety of different protein sources, such as:
  - poultry, eg chicken or turkey;
  - fish, eg fresh or tinned white (cod, pollock, haddock) or oily fish (salmon, mackerel, sardines);
  - pulses such as peas, beans and lentils;
  - eggs.

When reducing the amount of red meat, it is important to include other sources of iron such as green leafy vegetables (eg spinach, Savoy cabbage), peas, beans, wholemeal bread, fortified breakfast cereals, nuts, dried fruit and eggs. Iron from these foods is not absorbed as easily, so try to include some foods rich in vitamin C (eg tomatoes, peppers, oranges or berries) at the same meal, which will help.



# Processed meat

Processed meat is meat that has been preserved by smoking, curing, salting or by adding other chemical preservatives. It includes all types of bacon, ham, sausages, salami, corned beef, pepperoni and pâté. **Research has shown that eating these foods may increase our risk of some types of cancer.**

Processed meat products are often high in salt and fat and are lower in iron, so try to reduce your intake or avoid them completely. Here are some tasty ideas to help reduce our intake of processed meats:

<b>Breakfast</b>	Swap bacon and sausages for poached or scrambled eggs with wholemeal toast and grilled tomatoes, or mushrooms or even try wholegrain cereal with milk.
<b>Lunch</b>	Swap a ham sandwich for egg, fresh turkey or chicken, tinned fish or a small portion of cheese. Remember to add plenty of salad. Or try a vegetable wrap with hummus, or a baked potato with baked beans.
<b>Dinner</b>	Check the labels on products like sausages, chicken nuggets and burgers and choose those with higher meat and lower fat and salt content. If you're having pizza, swap salami or pepperoni for spicy chicken, olives and plenty of roasted vegetables, herbs, spices or peppers.

## Salt and salty foods

**Studies show that too much salt in our diets may increase our risk of stomach cancer and high blood pressure.**

Try to limit the amount of high salt foods that you eat, eg crisps, ready meals, some bread products and condiments (like ketchup and other sauces). Check food labels and choose the lower salt options. Where possible, swap salty foods for healthier alternatives such as vegetables, fruits and wholegrains and flavour with herbs and spices.



# Why fibre is fabulous

Fibre is also important in helping to protect against cancers. It is easy to find fibre in foods – it is found in wholemeal bread, potatoes with their skins on, brown rice and pasta and wholegrain breakfast cereals as well as in fruit and veg.

Below are some ideas on how to eat more:

- choose porridge or wholegrain cereals like Weetabix, Shredded Wheat or Bran Flakes;
- use more wholemeal, wheaten or multi-grain breads instead of white or brown;
- eat at least 5 portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables every day;
- for even more fibre from fruit, vegetables and potatoes, try to eat the skin when possible, but always wash thoroughly;
- cook brown rice and pasta instead of white or use a mixture of both.

## Drink up!

When we eat more fibre, we need to drink more – about 6-8 cups or glasses of plain fluid every day. All non-alcoholic drinks count, including hot drinks such as tea and coffee. Water, milk and unsweetened 100% fruit juices are good options. But try to limit fruit juices to 150ml a day and avoid sugary fizzy drinks and squashes.



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