

Health and Nutrition FAQ

1. What is a “Healthy Diet”?

A healthy diet, as outlined by the Eatwell Guide, focuses on balance and variety. It recommends eating at least five portions of fruits and vegetables daily and prioritizing wholegrain or higher-fibre carbohydrates. These should be the foundation of your diet, while limiting foods high in salt, sugar, and added fats. Including protein sources like pulses, eggs, and oily fish is important, while processed meats should be consumed sparingly. Additionally, it's advised to choose lower-fat dairy products or alternatives and use only small amounts of unsaturated oils and spreads.

The Mediterranean diet is often referred to as the model of healthy eating. This diet is rich in fruits, vegetables, legumes, olive oil, and whole grains, with moderate consumption of fish (both oily and non-oily) and limited intake of red and processed meats. This approach aligns well with the principles of a balanced, nutritious diet.

2. What is the best way to lose weight?

Creating an energy deficit through a combination of calorie restriction and regular exercise is a common and effective approach to gradual weight loss. However, this method may not be suitable for everyone. It's important to consult with a nutritionist or dietitian to ensure a safe and personalised weight loss plan.

High-protein diets, where protein makes up about 20-30% of total caloric intake, can be particularly effective for weight loss due to their ability to increase feelings of fullness. This can help reduce overall calorie consumption. Foods rich in protein, such as legumes, beef, chicken, eggs, and fish, can be valuable additions to your diet when aiming for weight loss.

3. What are macronutrients and micronutrients?

Macronutrients are the nutrients that the body requires in large amounts for energy and growth. They fall into three main categories:

- **Carbohydrates:** Found in foods like potatoes, rice, bread, and vegetables, carbohydrates are the body's primary source of energy.
- **Proteins:** Present in legumes, fish, meat, poultry, and dairy products, proteins are essential for building and repairing tissues.
- **Fats:** Sources include avocados, olive oil, nuts, and seeds. Fats provide energy and are important for absorbing certain vitamins.

Micronutrients are vitamins and minerals that the body needs in smaller amounts but are crucial for various physiological functions, such as immune response, bone health, and energy production.

4. Do I just need to count my calories to lose weight?

While the basic principle of weight loss involves consuming fewer calories than you burn, there are effective strategies that do not focus only on calorie counting. These include:

- **Understanding Appetite:** Learning to eat only when you're hungry and stopping when you're full can help regulate calorie intake naturally.
- **Incorporating Fiber:** Adding more fiber-rich foods to your diet, such as whole grains, fruits, and vegetables, can promote feelings of fullness and reduce overeating.
- **Portion Control:** Being mindful of portion sizes can prevent overeating and help maintain a balanced diet.
- **Including Quality Protein:** Incorporating high-quality proteins, such as lean meats, oily fish, and combinations like legumes with rice, supports muscle health and increases satiety, which can aid in weight management.

These approaches can help support weight loss without solely focusing on calorie counting.

5. How do I put on muscle?

To effectively build muscle, it's important to combine a high-protein diet with the right training regimen. Here's how:

1. **Training:** Engage in strength or resistance training to provide the necessary stimulus for muscle growth. Consistent and progressive training is key to triggering muscle development.
2. **Protein Intake:** Aim to consume 1.2 to 1.6 grams of protein per kilogram of your body weight daily. This amount supports muscle repair and growth.
3. **Balanced Nutrition:** Include high-quality, lean protein sources alongside fruits and vegetables rich in vitamins and minerals. This combination helps maintain overall health, including bone health and mineral balance.

As the saying goes, "Training is the king, protein is the queen," emphasizing the importance of both exercise and nutrition in achieving your fitness goals.

6. How much protein should I be eating every week?

According to UK guidelines, the general recommendation is to consume 0.75 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight per day (COMA 1991). However, this amount can vary based on factors such as age, weight, and physical activity levels.

For athletes and individuals with an active lifestyle, a higher protein intake is often necessary to meet the demands of regular exercise and support training adaptations. In these cases, an intake of 1.2 to 2 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight per day is recommended. This range helps with muscle repair, recovery, and overall performance.

7. What's the difference between saturated fats and unsaturated fats?

Saturated fats are typically solid at room temperature and are primarily found in animal products such as meat, hard cheese, and biscuits. These fats can increase levels of LDL, or "bad" cholesterol, which is linked to an increased risk of heart disease. Current guidelines recommend that no more than 10% of your total energy intake should come from saturated fats.

On the other hand, unsaturated fats are usually liquid at room temperature and are derived from plant sources like avocados, nuts, seeds, oily fish, and vegetable oils. These fats are considered beneficial for heart health.

Omega-6 and omega-3 fatty acids are essential types of unsaturated fats found in foods like oily fish and vegetable oils. Since our bodies cannot produce these fatty acids, they must be obtained through the diet. They play crucial roles in various bodily functions, including inflammation regulation and brain health.

8. Do I really need to take vitamins/mineral supplements?

In general, a well-balanced diet provides most of the vitamins and minerals your body needs. However, in the United Kingdom, vitamin D synthesis from sunlight is insufficient between October and March due to limited sunlight exposure (Spiro and Buttriss, 2014). During these months, it is recommended to take a vitamin D supplement of 10 µg (micrograms) daily.

Individual nutritional needs can vary, and some people may require specific supplements. For example, vegans are advised to take a vitamin B12 supplement of at least 6 µg daily to meet their nutritional needs, as this vitamin is primarily found in animal products (Fuhrman and Ferreri, 2010). It's important to assess personal requirements, ideally with the guidance of a healthcare professional, to ensure adequate nutrient intake.

9. Is late night eating bad? (Even if it is something healthy)

Generally, meal timing does not have a significant impact on overall health or weight management, and many common beliefs about meal timing—such as the idea that eating carbohydrates after 6 p.m. is harmful—are myths. There's little evidence to suggest that the timing of meals throughout the day has a notable effect on health for most people.

However, certain medical conditions may require attention to meal timing. For example, people with acid reflux may experience discomfort if they eat large meals too close to bedtime, as lying down soon after eating can exacerbate symptoms. In these cases, it is recommended to avoid late, heavy meals. Eating a light snack that doesn't disrupt sleep is generally fine.

10. Where can I find more information?

- General health advice: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/>
<https://www.nutrition.org.uk/creating-a-healthy-diet/a-healthy-balanced-diet/>
- Vitamin D: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vitamins-and-minerals/vitamin-d/>
- Losing weight: <https://www.nhs.uk/better-health/lose-weight/>
- The EATWELL diet: <https://www.nutrition.org.uk/media/ayth4ma4/eatwel-1.pdf>

Need something more personalized to you? We offer Advanced Nutritional support and meal planning from as little as £30! Visit SportBU online, over the phone, or in person for more information.

We also have a Gym and Fitness FAQ, please feel free to grab one at SportBU Reception!

We hope you found this useful, please feel free to ask more questions.