



# Healthy Eating Guidelines



The following recommendations are general and the information is applicable to most people. However, if you feel you need an individualised approach to address a particular health condition, please seek the advice of a BANT-registered nutritional therapist ([www.bant.org.uk](http://www.bant.org.uk)).

### **Whole-foods**

I recommend you consume natural foods in their 'whole' form, i.e. minimally processed. Many of our foods come in packages and it is fine to use some of these, however, choose foods that have as little added as possible and ideally avoid ready meals and pre-prepared foods. I suggest you avoid most tinned foods, apart, perhaps, from beans and chickpeas, fish, tomatoes. If possible, choose tins without a plastic lining, as these contain endocrine-disrupting chemicals, such as Bisphenol A, or buy food in jars instead. Frozen vegetables are a good back-up when fresh vegetables are unavailable but fresh is always preferable. Whole foods are recommended as they are nutrient-rich and low/free from added chemicals.

### **Organic foods**

Organic foods tend to contain higher amounts of nutrients and lower levels of potentially toxic chemicals. I therefore recommend you choose organic foods whenever possible. To ensure the organic food you choose meets stringent quality standards look for the Soil Association logo. Organic box delivery schemes are a convenient way of buying good quality organic food at competitive prices. There are many good local schemes around the country as well as national schemes run by companies such as Abel and Cole, Riverford Organics and Farm Drop.

### **Fresh, local and in season**

Ideally food should be as fresh as possible to ensure maximum nutrient content. Foods produced locally and in season will generally be most fresh. Look out for local farms producing organic food and consider buying direct.

### **Variety**

It is important to include as many different healthy foods in your diet as possible to help ensure you obtain the correct balance of nutrients you require. One way to do this is to choose your vegetables and fruit in a rainbow of colours.

### **Plant-based diet**

The diet I recommend (see healthy eating plate below) consists largely of plant foods. Plant foods are rich in powerful nutrients such as vitamins, minerals, fibre and phytonutrients with a range of health-giving actions. For example, many of them have antioxidant, anti-inflammatory and immune-supportive properties. Plant foods to consume in greatest abundance are vegetables, fruit, herbs and spices. Other recommended plant foods are pulses, nuts and seeds, whole grains. I recommend eating whole grains in moderate amounts to help stabilise blood glucose and insulin levels.

**A note about soya** – while soya products can be a healthy addition to a balanced diet, I do not recommend consuming large amounts. To convert the humble soya bean to the myriad of products available in our supermarkets a lot of processing takes place. Soya is relatively difficult to digest but the traditional Asian soya foods such as miso, tempeh and tofu are much easier on digestion and are a better choice than Westernised soya foods.

### **Low starch diet**

Diets containing low-moderate amounts of starchy carbohydrate appear to best support health and reduce chronic disease risk by regulating blood glucose levels and, as a result, moderating insulin release – excess blood glucose and insulin lead to systemic inflammation. I recommend reducing your starchy carbohydrate (grains and potatoes) to 1-2 portions per day. One portion is roughly the amount that would fit in your cupped hand. If you include grains as part of your starchy carbohydrate quota, they should be unrefined and ideally gluten-free (see below).

### **Whole grains and gluten-free**

Try to ensure any grains you eat are in their whole form, for example wholemeal bread and brown rice, as refined grains have the fibre and a large proportion of the vitamin and mineral content removed. Removal of these nutrients leads to a greater rise in blood glucose and insulin levels. Some people find grains difficult to digest and feel healthier without them, if this is the case for you, it might be best to avoid them completely. For everyone I recommend reducing gluten (found primarily in wheat, barley and rye) as much as possible or avoiding completely. Gluten is a protein that acts as an irritant to the gastrointestinal tract and can create inflammation and undermine immune function. Some people have strong negative reactions to gluten whereas others have no outward symptoms (although their body may still be reacting).

### **Sugar-free**

The fast supply of glucose that comes from consuming sugar (including honey and syrups) and refined carbohydrates, such as white bread and white rice, will lead to excess levels of insulin. Regular spikes in blood glucose and insulin encourage weight gain and lead to metabolic disturbances including inflammation. They also promote imbalances in the gut microflora and compromise immune function. For these reasons it is best to avoid refined carbohydrates and sugar apart from occasional treats. To enjoy sweetness in your diet use fruit, which can be eaten raw or cooked and used to sweeten puddings and cakes.

### **Animal products**

I generally recommend including moderate amounts of animal products in the diet, although this will depend on individual circumstances. Animal products are a rich source of a range of nutrients including amino acids and protein (essential building blocks of life), vitamins, minerals, nucleic acids and healthy fats. Usually people require only small-

moderate amounts of animal product as an excess can provide too much protein which may lower tissue pH to below optimum. Therefore, my general advice is to include 1 portion (1 cupped handful) of protein in each meal but to make sure the protein food is often plant-source (pulses or nuts and seeds) rather than animal-source.

I recommend that you buy the best quality animal products that you can afford, ideally free-range and organic. In my opinion, there is no detrimental effect of red meat in comparison to white meat, both are fine as long as the quality is good. Organ meats, such as liver, kidneys and heart are especially nutritious and are highly recommended (ensure they are organic). With regards to fish, please avoid farmed non-organic salmon, tuna, sword fish and shark (thought to be some of the most contaminated fish). Eat in moderation larger fish such as cod, seabass and halibut, and regularly choose smaller fish such as whiting, mackerel, dab, sprats, herring, sardines, anchovies. Shellfish are fine in moderate amounts.

**A note about dairy** – for some people animal milk products are not supportive to health as they cause digestive upsets and increased mucous production. I generally encourage people to minimise dairy intake and choose goat or sheep products rather than cow's, as these are often better tolerated. For those who feel no negative effects with dairy, I also recommend kefir which is rich in beneficial yeast and bacteria and has been shown to reduce inflammation and support the immune system.

### Healthy fats

A healthy balance of fats is vital for supporting good health and, in particular, regulating the inflammatory response. To ensure a balanced intake of fats, it is important to regularly consume foods rich in the essential fatty acids - fresh, unsalted nuts and seeds and small oily fish (mackerel, herring, sardines, anchovies). It is also important to moderate your intake of foods high in the saturated fats such as cream and butter. Finally, it is very important to eliminate the damaged fats – those found in processed foods such as mayonnaise, crisps, commercially produced cakes and biscuits, processed vegetable oils and margarine. These fats have no nutritional benefit and can inhibit the functions of the essential fats. To avoid damaged fats, it is recommended that you buy only cold pressed or extra virgin oils. Also, prevent fats being destroyed by heat by cooking either with small amounts of heat-stable animal fats (butter or ghee) or the more stable vegetable oils (coconut) You can also cook with olive oil but use only gentle heat.

Of all the macronutrients (carbohydrates, protein and fats), fats have the least impact on blood glucose levels, they also support hormone and neurotransmitter production, maintain cell membrane integrity and, as discussed, regulate inflammation and therefore the immune response. They are a vital addition to the diet and my general recommendation is to include 0.5-1 portion (about 2 tbsp) of healthy fats in each meal.

## **Adding flavour**

I recommend you avoid table salt and instead use rock or sea salt to add flavour to food when cooking. These natural salts contain a much healthier balance of minerals. Apart from salt, add extra flavour and richness to dishes using other natural flavouring agents such as herbs and spices, lemon or lime juice, onions and garlic, sun dried tomatoes and tomato puree, dried mushrooms and organic bouillon or stock cubes.

## **Raw and cooked foods**

It is a good idea to include a significant amount of raw whole fruit and vegetables in your diet on a daily basis if your digestion will allow. However cooked vegetables and fruit are also important as we absorb more of certain nutrients from cooked foods.

Ideally foods should be cooked in a way that retains as many nutrients as possible e.g. baking, stir-frying and steaming. To prepare a stir-fry without damaging your oil, place a little water in the heated pan with the vegetables (rather than oil) to steam the vegetables. Once the vegetables are cooked, stir through a good quality oil to taste. In a similar way rather than roasting vegetables in the oven, bake them in a covered dish and then add olive oil for the final minutes of cooking. Alternatively, you can roast in a little animal fat which is much more heat-stable. It is recommended that you avoid char-grilled foods and foods cooked in a microwave.

## **Hydration**

It is very important that you stay well hydrated to allow the body to function well and optimise healing capacity. The average person requires about 2L fluids per day and at least 1L of that should be pure water – use filtered or bottled water (from glass bottles only). Other fluids you can have in addition to water are freshly prepared vegetable juices and herbal teas such as tulsi, chamomile, peppermint, redbush, fennel, lemon and ginger and nettle. Sugary drinks, commercial fruit juices should ideally be avoided and alcohol enjoyed as a treat.

Caffeine is a nervous system stimulant and causes blood glucose levels to rise. For those prone to stress or with poor glucose control it is best kept to a minimum. Having said this, both coffee and tea are rich in antioxidants and have several benefits for the body and therefore for most people can be included in moderate amounts.

## **Fresh vegetable juice/smoothie**

Fresh vegetable juices or smoothies are an excellent way to boost intake of powerful antioxidant, anti-inflammatory compounds and you may wish to include them as part of your regular diet. Types of foods to include in these drinks are green salad leaves, spinach, celery, carrot, beetroot, cucumber, ginger, fresh turmeric, lemon juice, parsley, apple. It is best to have your smoothie or juice on an empty stomach (just before a meal is fine). If you are preparing several juices per day, I suggest you prepare all the juice at the beginning of the day and keep it in an airtight flask in the fridge for up to 12 hours.

## Healthy eating plate

Aim to fill your plate with the following proportion of healthy foods.



\*Percentages refer to amounts by weight of each food category.