

Meal planning – breakfast, lunch and snacks

Planning meals ahead is the best way to ensure we can enjoy a healthy, balanced diet during our week.

People may plan their evening meals, but when it comes to the working or school day it's common to skip this and either 'grab food on the go' or buy whatever is available from the shop, canteen or vending machine.

Making simple changes to the foods you eat each day can add up to a much healthier you.

Try some of the ideas below to make some healthy swaps

Common Choices	Alternative Healthy Choices
Breakfast	
Low-fibre cereal with added sugar Croissant Coffee-shop latte made with whole milk	High-fibre cereal with no added sugar with fresh or dried fruit Wholegrain toast with mashed banana Coffee-shop cappuccino made with skimmed or semi-skimmed milk
Snacks	
Cheese and biscuits Slice of cake or 2 biscuits	Reduced-fat cheese and cucumber with crispbread Handful of nuts and raisins
Restaurant or canteen lunch	
Ceasar salad Spaghetti carbonara Garlic bread Fizzy soft drink Chicken breast baked with the skin, served with creamy sauce White rice Potatoes with butter	Tuna Nicoise salad with dressing on the side Spaghetti with tomato and roasted vegetable sauce Mixed salad with dressing on the side Sparkling water with a slice of lemon or lime Chicken breast baked without the skin, served with tomato-based sauce Wholegrain brown rice Boiled potatoes and green beans drizzled with lemon juice
Shop-bought or packed lunch	
Sandwich on white bread with turkey, cheese and full-fat mayonnaise Crisps Carton of fruit squash	Sandwich on wholemeal bread with turkey, sliced tomatoes and salad Grapes and strawberries Bottle of water
Afternoon snack	
Chocolate bar Tea or coffee with sugar	Pear or apple slices and small pot of low-fat yoghurt Water, herbal tea or unsweetened tea or coffee

Try these healthy swaps

When planning meals or choosing what to eat, a simple tip is to think of plant foods first. Once these are chosen, we can then decide which source of protein to add, such as poultry, fish or pulses.

Fitting more plant foods into the diet is easy when we know how.

Making simple changes to the foods we eat each day can lead to large improvements in our overall health.

Breakfast

People who don't have breakfast often blame it on a lack of time. Some of the choices below can be ready in minutes and can be eaten straight away or brought into work or school in a plastic container to have there.

Food	Notes	Examples
Wholegrain cereals	<p>Look out for varieties with no added sugar and salt</p> <p>Home-made varieties are a great way to include our favourite ingredients without the hidden sugar and salt in many shop-bought cereals</p> <p>Serve with skimmed or semi-skimmed milk and fresh fruit, like sliced banana or strawberries</p>	<p>Home-made muesli with oats, an assortment of chopped nuts like almonds and brazil nuts, seeds like sunflower and pumpkin and dried fruits like chopped apricots and raisins</p> <p>Watch out for your portion sizes – although nuts, seeds and dried fruits are nutritious, they contain a lot of calories</p>
Porridge	<p>Porridge oats are not only a cheap breakfast choice but also healthy – a whole grain and rich source of soluble fibre, helping to keep us fuller for longer</p> <p>Prepare with water, skimmed or semi-skimmed milk</p>	<p>Naturally sweeten with fresh fruits, like banana or peach, or frozen fruits, like mixed frozen berries – they defrost quickly in steaming porridge</p> <p>Buying frozen fruit can be cheaper than buying fresh, it reduces wastage and means they are always to hand in the morning</p>
Fruit salad	<p>A quick-to-make mixture of fruits is a great way to start the day, especially if you are watching your weight</p> <p>Varying the choice of fruit throughout the week can help you to consume a greater number of portions overall.</p>	<p>The greater the variety of fruits the better. Grapefruit, orange, kiwi fruit, melon, peach, banana, plum, strawberries or any seasonal fruit can be mixed and matched as you wish</p> <p>Serve with low-fat yoghurt or low-fat fromage frais, or add some wholegrain cereal or chopped nuts to provide a bit more energy</p>
Wholegrain toast	<p>Always choose wholegrain varieties</p> <p>Try different types of wholegrain breads to add variety</p>	<p>Having a portion of fruit with your toast will help to fill you up, as well as count towards your 5 A DAY</p> <p>For toppings you could choose from reduced-fat peanut butter, low-fat margarine and a thin layer of jam, mashed banana or even poached, scrambled or boiled egg, if time allows</p>

Lunch

What to have for lunch outside the home can sometimes be a problem and people end up having the same thing every day, finishing up feeling unsatisfied and so more likely to snack on more tempting, but less healthy options throughout the afternoon. By applying a little thought and following some simple tips outlined below, whether preparing food at home, at work, or buying from the staff canteen, we can incorporate more variety into our lunches to keep us satisfied and on better form for the afternoon.

Food	Notes	Examples
Cereal grains and other starch foods	Choose wholegrain (wholemeal or brown) varieties where possible. This will increase your daily fibre intake, which supports your digestive health as well as help you to feel fuller for longer	Switch between bread, pasta, rice, cous cous and other grains, potatoes and yams to add variety to your lunches
Vegetables and fruits	Including vegetables and fruits in your lunch helps you towards your 5 A DAY target Mix and match with different varieties to add colour and flavour	Add salad leaves, tomatoes and grated carrot into your sandwiches or over salads, have sliced cucumber, carrot and peppers with your lunch Instead of a sweet dessert after your lunch, have a piece of fruit, like a peach or plum, or a small fruit salad with a small pot of natural yoghurt
Sources of protein Different sources of protein can be incorporated with a variety of lunch-types (e.g., as sandwich fillings, salads, rice or pasta dishes)	Poultry is a good choice and by opting for skinless meat, the fat content is lowered	Chicken and turkey
	Fish is a healthy choice and we should aim to eat it more frequently	Include one serving of omega-3-rich oily fish a week, such as sardines, mackerel and salmon
	Eggs can be an easy and cheap addition to our lunch	Hard or soft boiled, poached or scrambled
	Pulses count as one of your 5 A DAY. By alternating between different types of pulses, the textures and flavours will vary	Lentils, chickpeas and beans such as kidney beans, butter beans, aduki beans, haricot beans (which are used to make baked beans) and cannellini beans
	Red meat is popular in the UK, and is a valuable source of several nutrients but it need not be eaten every day. Always opt for the leanest meat available	WCRF UK's Recommendation for Cancer Prevention is to limit consumption of red meats such as beef, pork and lamb to no more than 500g (cooked weight) per week and to avoid processed meats such as ham, bacon, salami, hot dogs and some sausages
Dairy	Dairy foods are a source of protein and calcium. Opt for reduced-fat and reduced-sugar options	Reduced-fat cottage cheese and cheddar cheese, low-fat yoghurt and low-fat fromage frais

Snacks

Healthy snacks, although not an essential part, can make a positive contribution to a healthy diet. It's a great opportunity to include more vegetables, fruits and wholegrains in our diet. To avoid weight gain, aim for no more than one mid-morning and one mid-afternoon snack a day and keep portion sizes small.

Food	Notes	Examples
Wholegrains	Choose wholegrain snacks with limited salt, sugar and fat	Wholegrain bread, oatcakes, rice cakes and rye crackers Serve with a small amount of reduced-fat houmous, cottage cheese or soft cheese with a few slices of cucumber
Chopped vegetables	Pre-cut them in advance and store the vegetable sticks in a plastic container in the fridge	Carrots, cucumber, celery and peppers Serve with reduced-fat houmous, guacamole or salsa
Yoghurt and fromage frais	These are protein- and calcium-rich foods, which are perfect as healthy snack	A small pot of low-fat yoghurt with no added sugar (check the label) A cup of low-fat fromage frais or yoghurt with chopped fruits or berries. You could serve with a few nuts or dried fruits for a more filling snack
Chopped fruit	Fresh fruit can be prepared in advance and stored in a plastic container in the fridge	Chopped melon, apple, kiwi and pear are easy to eat at work and mess-free, but keep pieces large to avoid nutrient-loss. Smaller fruits like berries and grapes simply require washing
Dried fruits, nuts and seeds	These provide a variety of nutrients and can be a healthy and filling snack They are energy-dense though (high in calories for their weight), so limit consumption to a portion – a small handful	Dried fruits like raisins, sultanas and dried apricots, cranberries, dates and figs Nuts like brazil nuts, hazelnuts, walnuts, almonds, pecans and peanuts Seeds like sunflower, pumpkin, sesame, and linseeds You could serve with a few tablespoons of low-fat yoghurt