

Making Healthier Choices

Information for Patients and Carers

Is this information for me?

- If you have cancer surgery planned this advice may help you to improve your health for your cancer surgery
- If according to the body mass index (BMI) calculator your BMI is above the healthy range
- If you have gained weight as a result of cancer treatment, i.e. hormone therapy or steroids for breast cancer, you may wish to make healthier lifestyle choices to prevent further weight gain

You may notice that you gradually lose weight making healthier food and lifestyle choices. This is the safest way for you to lose weight. Adjusting the balance of your diet will also mean you are more likely to get the nutrients that your body needs.

Taking steps to actively try to lose weight when you have cancer and are going through cancer treatment is not encouraged. If after your cancer treatment you want to lose weight, speak to your healthcare professional who will be able to signpost you to someone who can help you.

How can I successfully make a change to my diet?

Making a lifestyle change can be a challenge particularly when you have a cancer diagnosis. Many aspects of your life may be changing out-with your control.

It is ok to have a long-term goal but to begin with, aim small. Start from where you are at and introduce changes gradually. Give yourself time to establish a routine with one change before adding in another. Most importantly make sure your goals are achievable and individual to you.



What is a healthy balanced diet?

You may be familiar with the 'Eatwell Guide'. This diagram shows the proportion of each food group needed to get all the nutrients our body's need.

There are five food groups.

These include:

- Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates
- Fruit and Vegetables
- Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins
- Dairy and alternatives
- Oils and spreads

Visit <https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/food-and-nutrition/eating-well/eatwell-guide-how-to-eat-a-healthy-balanced-diet> to find out more about the individual food groups including portions sizes and examples of foods from each group.

For information on vegetarian and vegan diets, Vegetarian Society and The Vegan Society have resources online.

Here are some ideas to get you started on making healthier choices.

Establish a regular meal pattern

Aim to have 3 meals per day. Start by having something soon after waking. If you do not usually take a breakfast, try a plain biscuit, a slice of toast or a milky drink.

Consider your portion size

Try using a smaller dinner plate, refrain from taking a second portion or try bulking up your plate with vegetables which will offer less calories and more fibre, keeping you fuller for longer.

Portion out your food

If the portion is designed for sharing, plate out the portion you intend on eating to avoid eating a bigger portion.

Plan your meals ahead

Cook meals in batch so that you have a supply of balanced meals. If you don't have to think about preparing meals every day you will be less likely to choose a high fat, convenience option.

Eat slowly and chew your food well

Respond to your body's signals that you are feeling full by stopping eating.

Are you drinking enough fluid?

Aim for 6-8 glasses per day of fluid. Sometimes thirst can present as hunger.

Choose healthier cooking methods

Grill, steam or oven bake foods rather than frying. Avoiding the use of oil will reduce the calorie and fat content.

Limit alcohol

Many products containing alcohol are high in calories. Reducing your alcohol intake will reduce the amount of calories you take in. Try fruit cordial with soda water as an alternative for flavour.

Choose lower calorie snacks or puddings

If you are having three balanced meals you shouldn't need to snack between your meals however if you do choose to have a snack choose one that is lower in calories. If you are going out and you know you will find it more difficult to access a healthier option, take a healthy snack with you.

Consider healthy snack swaps

It can be easy to continue old habits because it is part of your usual routine. Are there any changes from the table below that you could try?

