



Talking about weight

A guide to developing healthier habits



National Clinical Programme for Obesity

“

We often hear that managing weight is a simple case of eating less and moving more. In reality, it is more complicated than that.

Regardless of your weight, following a healthier eating plan and living an active life will have a positive impact on your health. ”



Contents

Section 1	About this guide	2
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Section 2	Key steps to healthier habits	4
	▶ Step 1: Understanding health habits	5
	Mental wellbeing	5
	Sleep	7
	Eating well	8
	Being active	12
	Sitting time	15
	▶ Step 2: Exploring your health habits	16
	▶ Step 3: Setting goals and making your plan	27
	▶ Step 4: Keeping track of your progress	35
	▶ Step 5: Managing your challenges and setbacks	36



Section 3	Let's refresh	38
-----------	---------------	----



Section 4	Extra information	39
	Physical activity and health conditions	40

Section 1: About this guide

If you want help to look after your weight and health, then this guide is for you. The guide is not about quickly losing weight, miracle diets or becoming a fitness fanatic.

You can use the guide to:

- ▶ learn more about your daily eating and activity habits
- ▶ find useful information to help you on your journey to healthy lifestyle habits
- ▶ set your own goals and plan for challenges you might face
- ▶ find ways to keep track of how you are doing.

You can use this guide by yourself or with a healthcare professional. The aim of this guide is to help you develop healthier habits that support your health and wellbeing. Losing some body weight can lead to health benefits. Your best weight is the weight you achieve while living the healthiest and happiest life possible. If you are aged 65 years or older, weight loss may not be advised due to risk of frailty. If you have concerns about your weight and health, speak with your GP.

The Clinical Practice Guidelines for the Management of Obesity in Adults in Ireland outline good quality obesity care. You can access them at aso.info/guidelines. The Irish Coalition for People Living with Obesity offer peer-to-peer support. You can contact them at icpobesity@gmail.com, on Facebook www.facebook.com/ICPObesity or on Twitter [@icpobesity](https://twitter.com/icpobesity).



Best weight is the weight you achieve while living the healthiest and happiest life possible.

Body weight is complicated

Health is not determined by your body weight alone. Overweight is a term to describe excess body weight, when weight affects your health it is called obesity. Obesity is a chronic disease that requires lifelong management and treatment. A clinical assessment is needed to diagnose obesity and to decide what treatment plan is best for you. If you are unsure or concerned, talk to your GP or healthcare professional.

Carrying extra weight can increase your risk of:

- ▶ heart disease and stroke
- ▶ Type 2 diabetes
- ▶ some muscle and bone disorders (e.g. osteoarthritis)
- ▶ some cancers (e.g. breast, ovarian, prostate, liver, gallbladder, kidney and colon).

Lots of things influence our body weight



There are health benefits to losing 5 to 10% of your body weight. But losing weight is complicated, challenging and hard to maintain. Research has found over 100 things linked to body weight. Some are personal to us, while others are influenced by society, culture and our environment.

Section 2: Key steps to healthier habits

There are five key steps to manage your weight and look after your health.




 Step
1

Understanding health habits

In this step we look at areas of our lives that can support us to be as healthy as possible at any weight. In Step 2, you can think about your own habits. You can also decide if you would like to make some changes. But first it is useful to know about minding your mental wellbeing and stress levels, sleeping well, eating well, being physically active and not sitting for too long.

You might find it helpful to return to this step every now and again. It can help to refresh your knowledge. You might get something different from it with each new experience. The things you pick to work on will naturally change over time.

Mental wellbeing

Many things can affect our mental health and wellbeing in a positive or negative way. They include past experiences, relationships and our health in general. Many people today have busy lives full of daily challenges and obstacles. Stress is part of normal life.

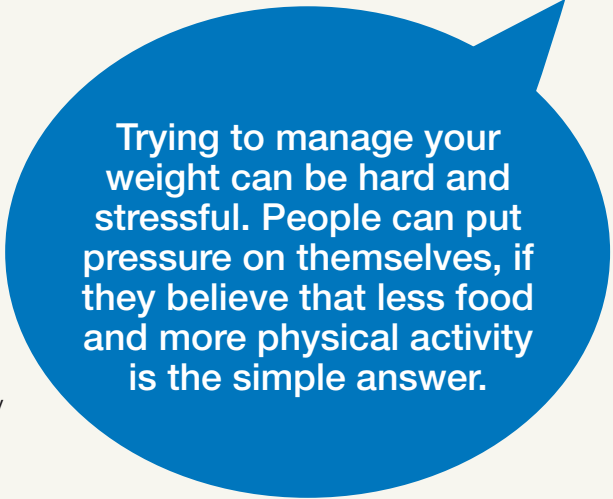
Trying to manage your weight can be hard and stressful. People can put pressure on themselves, if they believe that less food and more physical activity is the simple answer to their weight issue. Thinking in this way can lead to negative thoughts and feelings about yourself. You might not be realistic about what you must overcome or what you hope to achieve. Sadly, many people can also experience stigma or negative attitudes from others because of their weight.

In fact, stress and weight stigma make weight management harder. When feeling stressed and your mood is low, you are less likely to make healthier choices and less likely to look after yourself.

There is also a link between stress and emotional eating. Our hunger and the foods we desire change with stress. For example, we tend to want foods that are less healthy. When we are feeling stressed, changes in body hormones can lead to weight gain. A hormone called cortisol is involved in this process.

Stress can affect many parts of our lives, including our relationships, our work, our mood and our feelings. Sometimes we do not realise that we are stressed.

Some stress symptoms include feeling worried or anxious, not sleeping well, having muscle or joint pain, pain in your chest, an upset stomach, regular headaches and skin breakouts.



Trying to manage your weight can be hard and stressful. People can put pressure on themselves, if they believe that less food and more physical activity is the simple answer.

A word on weight stigma

Some people have negative attitudes and beliefs about people with larger bodies. People with larger bodies can sometimes even hold these negative thoughts of themselves. Weight stigma might cause you to be excluded, or experience shaming, blaming or discrimination in different areas of your life. Weight stigma is not acceptable, but it still happens. Accept yourself. Everyone is different and entitled to respect, regardless of their shape or size. Many different things make you who you are.



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Putting yourself first,
taking steps to mind your
mental wellbeing and
stress levels will benefit
your health.

Some small things can help you look after your own mental health.

- ▶ **Stay in touch:** catching up with friends and family is good for our mental health. Trusted friends and family are important, especially at hard times. You do not have to face things on your own.
- ▶ **Talk about it:** problems feel smaller when they are shared with others. They do not always have to be solved – just talking about them will do you good.
- ▶ **Do something you enjoy:** set aside some time to do something you enjoy, especially if you are not feeling great.
- ▶ **Keep active:** something as simple as a walk every day will have a positive effect on your mood.
- ▶ **Eat and sleep well:** having a healthy balanced diet and a good sleep pattern will help the way you feel and think.
- ▶ **Drink less alcohol:** for the average Irish drinker, reducing alcohol will help you cope with everyday problems and stresses.
- ▶ **Ask for help:** asking for help is not a weakness but a sign of personal strength. Everyone needs help from time to time and there is nothing wrong with asking for it. Consider talking to your GP or healthcare professional.

There is lots of information on
www.yourmentalhealth.ie

If you would like information on mental health services, call Your Mental Health Information Line on 1800 111 888.

yourmentalhealth.ie
 Information | Support | Services
1800 111 888



The Samaritans have a listening service for anyone who needs it. Freephone 116 123.

Sleep

A good night's sleep helps your overall health as well as your weight. Little sleep or poor-quality sleep can lead to weight gain. In particular, fat can build up around your tummy.

When we do not get enough sleep, it affects the hormones that make us feel full and that control our hunger. This can cause changes in our appetite. It can make us more likely to eat extra food and unhealthy snacks and drinks.

Below are some sleeping tips to think about.

- ▶ **Routine:** going to bed and getting up at the same time every day can help.
- ▶ **Daylight:** getting daylight helps keep your body clock in check and helps you sleep at night.
- ▶ **Screens:** not looking at screens for a few hours before going to bed. The light from television screens, mobile phones and tablets can negatively affect sleep hormones at night.
- ▶ **Food and exercise at night:** not eating or exercising late at night can help sleep.
- ▶ **Caffeine:** not having caffeine in the evening time can also help.
- ▶ **Reduce your alcohol consumption:** taking a break from or cutting down on alcohol can help improve your sleep quality.

Getting a good night's sleep can put you in a good mood the next day. It makes it easier to stick to your eating plans and gives you more energy to reach your activity goals.

Some people often find it hard to sleep. If sleeping is a problem for you, speak with your GP or healthcare professional.

Eating well

The foods you eat give you a range of nutrients. These include vitamins, minerals, water, fat, carbohydrates, fibre and protein. These nutrients are the fuel to keep your body working. They help you to grow and repair your body.

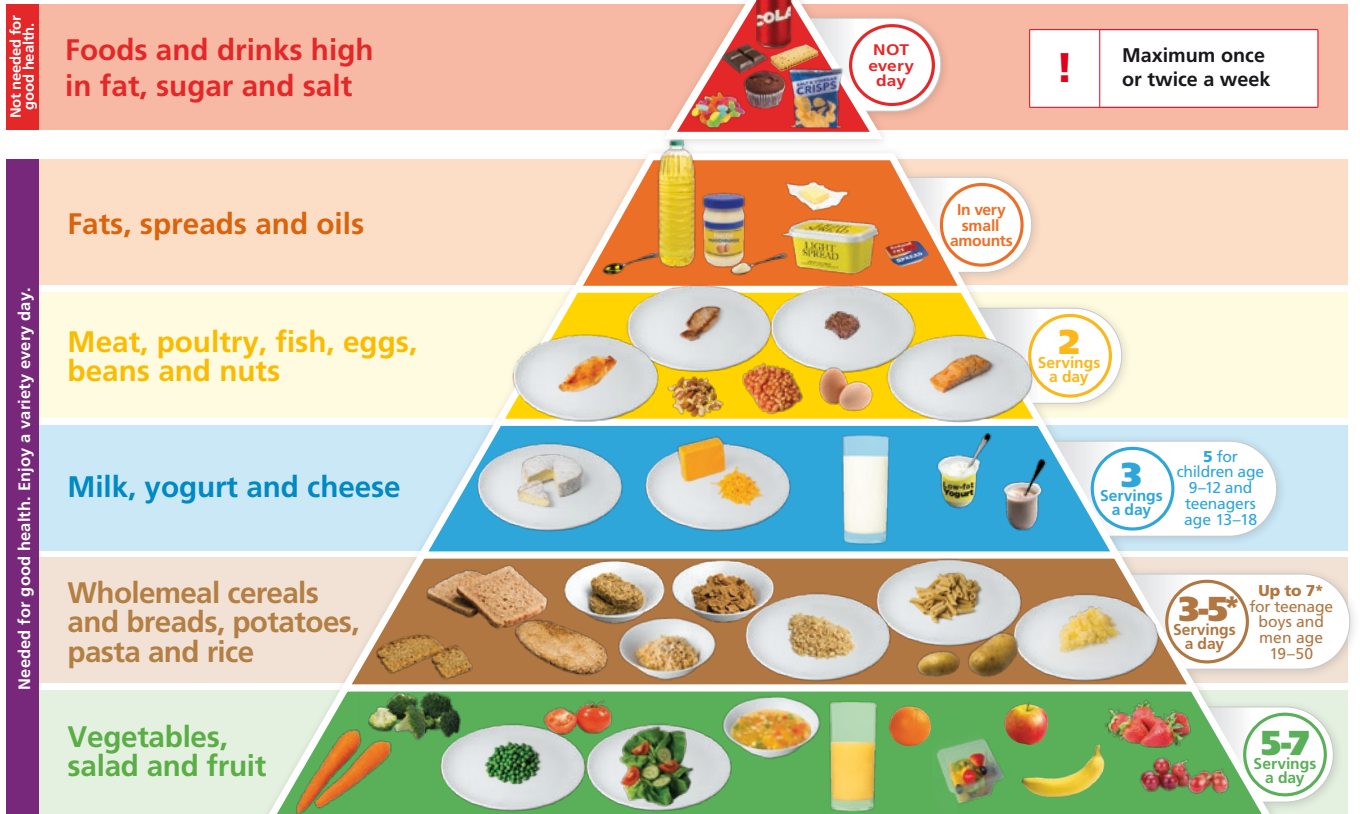


Sometimes it feels like the advice on healthy eating keeps changing. We get confused with the endless new fad diets and headlines about nutrition. In reality, the advice about healthy eating has not changed much over the years.

To get all the nutrients your body needs, eat a variety of foods from each of the different food groups every day. Eating the right types of food in the right amounts will help you stay well now and prevent health problems in the future.

The Food Pyramid

For adults, teenagers and children aged five and over



*Daily Servings Guide – wholemeal cereals and breads, potatoes, pasta and rice

Active	Child (5-12)	Teenager (13-18)	Adult (19-50)	Adult (51+)	Inactive	Teenager (13-18)	Adult (19-50)	Adult (51+)
♀	3-4	4	4-5	3-4	♀	3	3-4	3
♂	3-5	5-7	5-7	4-5	♂	4-5	4-6	4

There is no guideline for inactive children as it is essential that all children are active.

Average daily calorie needs for all foods and drinks for adults

♀ **Active** 2000kcal **Inactive** 1800kcal ♂ **Active** 2500kcal **Inactive** 2000kcal

Source: Department of Health. December 2016.

Serving size guide



Cereals, cooked rice and pasta, and vegetables, salad and fruit

Use a 200ml disposable plastic cup to guide serving size.



Cheese

Use two thumbs, width and depth to guide serving size.



Meat, poultry, fish

The palm of the hand, width and depth without fingers and thumbs, shows how much you need in a day.



Reduced-fat spread

Portion packs found in cafes can guide the amount you use. One pack should be enough for two slices of bread.



Oils

Use one teaspoon of oil per person when cooking or in salads.



Drink at least 8 cups of fluid a day – water is best



Get Active!

To maintain a healthy weight adults need at least 30 minutes a day of moderate activity on 5 days a week (or 150 minutes a week); children need to be active at a moderate to vigorous level for at least 60 minutes every day.

How much?

It can be hard to estimate how much you need to eat. More so, if the foods you eat tend to change a lot, if you rely on many snacks, or if you do not prepare food for yourself. Even when you prepare your own food, deciding how much is right to eat is not always easy. Take a look at the sample food day for Michael, a 52-year-old office worker, on page 11.

More detailed information about the food we need is given on page 44.

Vegetables, salads and fruit



Most of us know that vegetables, salads and fruit are good for us.

They have nutrients that protect your body against heart disease and cancer. They also have fibre which helps your gut.

It is recommended that we eat 5-7 portions per day. If this seems a lot, don't worry. Even increasing the amount you eat by one or two portions a day can improve your health.

If you eat a variety of coloured fruit and vegetables, you will benefit from their different nutrients. But if you only like one or two types of fruit or vegetable, then it's okay to just increase the amount of the ones you like to reach your goal.

Wholemeal cereals and bread, potatoes, pasta and rice

These foods are the best fuel providers for your body. You may have heard that wholemeal bread and breakfast cereals have fibre to help your gut and protect against bowel problems. This is true. But the amount you need of these foods depends on how active you are. See page 44 for more on this.

Milk, yogurt and cheese

Milk, yogurt and cheese provide calcium for healthy bones and teeth. They also provide good-quality protein for your body to build and repair itself. You need some but not too much each day. Choose milks and yogurts over cheese. If you eat dairy alternatives, such as soya milk and yogurts, choose those with added calcium.

Meat, poultry, fish, eggs, beans and nuts

These foods provide protein for your body to build and repair itself. They are also the main source of iron for healthy blood. Beans, lentils and eggs are good sources of protein and are a good option for meat-free days. Because lean meat, poultry and fish are such good sources of protein, we only need a little of them to get the protein we need. It is best not to eat processed salty meats like sausages, bacon and ham every day.



Fats, oils and spreads

Fats, spreads and oils provide your body with essential fats but you only need them in very small amounts. It's best to cook with as little fat or oil as possible. Measuring it out instead of pouring it into the pan can help.

Foods and drinks high in fat, sugar and salt

This group of foods include chips, pizza, sausages, sausage rolls, takeaways, deli-counter food, biscuits, crisps, chocolate, sweets, ice-cream, cakes, muffins, croissants and pastries. It's no surprise that most of these foods lack the good nutrients found in foods like vegetables and fruits. Though they are widespread in our lives today, it is best not to eat them every day.

Alcohol

The link between drinking alcohol and body weight is complicated. If you drink a lot, it will affect your weight as well as your general health. It is recommended that women have no more than 11 standard drinks spread out over a week, with at least two to three alcohol-free days. For men, the recommendation is no more than 17 standard drinks per week. It is recommended to drink less than six standard drinks on a single occasion. The less you drink, the lower your risk of developing health issues from alcohol.

For more information on how alcohol affects your health visit www.askaboutalcohol.ie

What is a standard drink?

1 Standard Drink contains 10g of pure alcohol

1 Standard Drink

=



half a pint of
beer / stout / ale

=



single measure
of spirits

=



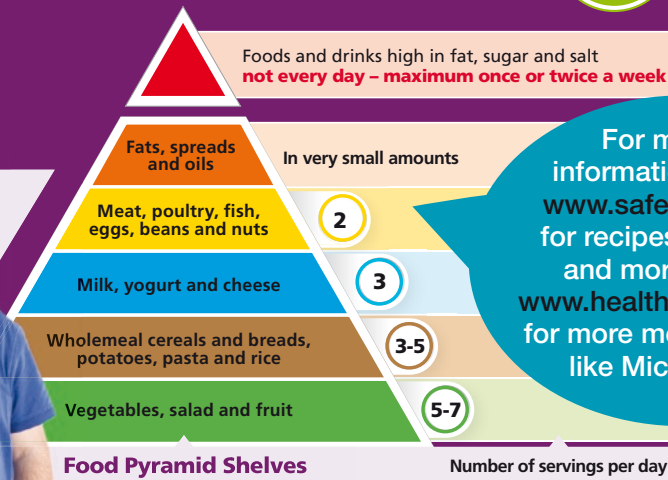
small glass
of wine

Healthy Food for Life



Food Pyramid to Daily Meal Plan

Michael is a 52 year old office worker who is overweight. He needs 4 servings from the *Wholemeal Cereals and Breads, Potatoes, Pasta and Rice shelf*. When he starts losing weight he could have 5 servings and should aim to lose 1–2lbs a week.



Foods and drinks high in fat, sugar and salt **not every day – maximum once or twice a week**

For more information, visit www.safefood.net for recipes, videos and more. Visit www.healthyireland.ie for more meals plans like Michael's.



Breakfast

- 1 200ml low-fat milk for cereal and drink
- 1 2 wholemeal breakfast biscuits
- 1 Apple



Lunch

- 1 2 eggs
- 1 Low-fat yogurt
- 1 2 thin slices wholemeal bread
- 1 Lettuce, cucumber, tomato
- 1 Mandarin oranges



Dinner

- 1 100g salmon
- 1 2 medium potatoes
- 1 Broccoli
- 1 Carrots



Mid-morning snack

- 1 200ml low-fat milk
- 1 Grapes



Afternoon snack

- 1 Kiwifruits



Evening snack

- 1 2 thin slices wholemeal toast
- 1 Banana

Health advice for everyday life

Drink at least 8 cups of fluid a day – water is best



Get Active!

To maintain a healthy weight adults need at least 30 minutes a day of moderate activity on 5 days a week or 150 minutes a week.

For more food facts and healthy eating tips visit www.healthyireland.ie

Source: Department of Health/Health Service Executive 2016.

Being active

Experts describe physical activity as a wonder drug because of its health benefits. Regular physical activity improves fitness and strength and lowers the risk of heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and some cancers. It lowers anxiety and stress and improves your mental health and mood. It works alongside following a healthier eating pattern, getting good sleep and managing stress.

Being active has benefits for your mental and physical health no matter what your body size is. Active people of all shapes and sizes are more likely to live longer than those who are not regularly physically active.



Physical activity intensity

Physical activity is any body movement and can be done at different levels of effort or intensity. Structured exercise is one form of physical activity. Physical activity also includes other movement such as household chores, gardening or playing with children. The effort needed for an activity can vary from person to person and can depend on your fitness level.

- ▶ **Light intensity:** this does not require a lot of energy. Activities include casual walking, moving around, getting up from the chair and pacing while on the phone.
- ▶ **Moderate intensity:** for this your heart rate goes up, you feel warmer and might sweat slightly. You breathe a little faster but you can still have a conversation. It is a comfortable pace. Activities include brisk walking, cycling at a slow pace, doing some housework and yoga.
- ▶ **Vigorous intensity:** for this your heart rate goes much faster, you are sweating and breathing heavily. You cannot keep a conversation going. Activities include running, swimming, heavy lifting, digging and playing sports like basketball and hurling.

TALK TEST

As a rule of thumb:

- ▶ if you are doing moderate intensity activity, you can talk but not sing
- ▶ if you are doing vigorous intensity activity, you will need to pause and take a breath every few words.

Types of activity

There are different types of physical activity, such as aerobic, muscle-strengthening, flexibility and balance. They have a positive effect on the body in different ways. Doing a mixture of activity types has the best effect. Some exercises belong to more than one group. For example, yoga can be a moderate-intensity aerobic activity. It also improves flexibility, while some movements in yoga can help with balance.



Aerobic activity: this is sometimes called 'cardio'. It involves moving large muscle groups in the body and gives the heart and lungs a workout.



Muscle-strengthening: this is also known as strength training and resistance training. Activities include doing exercises with weights, using your own body weight or elastic resistance bands.



Flexibility: this improves the range of movement in your joints. Yoga and stretching exercises make it easier to do activities throughout your life that need more flexibility.



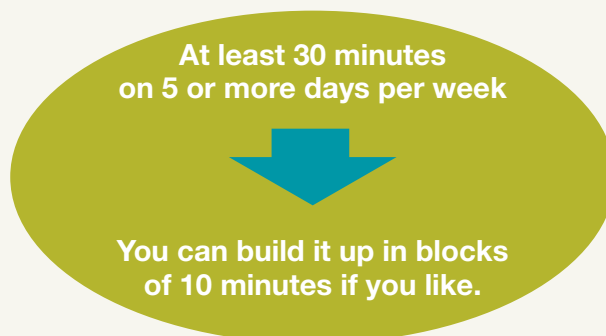
Balance: this helps with how you walk and prevents falls when staying still or moving. Activities to improve balance are varied and can include exercise that test your balance such as standing on one leg or doing activities that strengthen muscles in your core and legs such as yoga and tai chi.

How much physical activity should I do?

The answer to this question is different for every person. It depends on your activity levels, your health and what is possible for you. It is about fitting physical activity into your day as much as possible.

Any amount of physical activity will give you some health benefits – some is better than none, more is even better. You can build up your physical activity in different ways. It can be planned, for example an exercise class or unplanned, for example a walk that you decide to go on last minute.

There are **national guidelines for physical activity**. These are:



All adults

At least 30 minutes a day of moderate-intensity activity on 5 days a week (or 150 minutes a week). Include muscle-strengthening activities on at least 2 days a week.

Older adults (aged over 65 years)

Focus on aerobic activity, muscle-strengthening and balance.

Adults with disabilities

Be as active as your ability allows. Aim to meet the adult guidelines of 30 minutes of moderate-intensity activity on 5 days a week.

Physical activity and weight

The guidelines for weight loss are 60-75 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity on at least 5 days a week. Activities include brisk walking, cycling at a slow pace, doing some housework and yoga.

You may have heard that high-intensity interval training, also known as HIIT, is good for losing weight. Research has looked at the benefits of HIIT and of moderate-intensity exercise. It found they have similar results for weight loss and benefits for heart health. This means you should pick the type of activity that you like. The best activity is the one you enjoy doing.



Important

If you have any worries about being active, your GP, practice nurse or physiotherapist can give you advice.

Being active safely

There are some things you might want to consider to ensure you are being active safely. No matter what activity you are doing, wearing comfortable clothing and footwear are key. When starting a new physical activity habit or increasing what you are already doing, start slowly and build up as you feel able. To stay free from injuries make sure you are moving at a comfortable pace, stop when you feel you've done enough and always stay in the zone where you are enjoying the experience of movement.

Key stages in every exercise session**1. Warm Up**

Start with a light activity to warm up your muscles

2. Main Phase

Slowly increase the intensity of the activity

3. Cool Down

Gradually make the activity easier to cool down



If you have a health condition, there may be extra things to keep in mind when you are physically active. More information on being active with arthritis, asthma, diabetes and heart disease is included in Section 4.

If you get the following symptoms when active, stop and talk to your GP or general practice nurse.

- ▶ Chest pain (angina).
- ▶ Pain in arm, neck or jaw.
- ▶ Irregular heartbeats.
- ▶ Feeling lightheaded.
- ▶ Nausea.
- ▶ Feeling extremely tired.
- ▶ Finding it hard to catch your breath or wheezing.

Seek advice from a healthcare professional if you are worried about joint pain, worried about your risk of falls or have any other concerns about increasing physical activity.

Sitting time

Spend as little time as possible sitting

Break up long periods of sitting as often as you can

We spend a lot of time sitting when watching TV, working at a desk, driving, playing video games or musical instruments and looking at our phones. This takes from our time being physically active. Break up long periods of sitting with active breaks.

Sitting for long periods of time each day increases our risk of developing heart disease and type 2 diabetes. This is true even if you get healthy amounts of activity at other times in the day.

Sitting a lot can also lead to poor posture and pain in your neck, back and hips. It also slows down our metabolism, so we use less fuel to run our bodies when we are resting. When this happens, it can lead to weight gain for some people.

Step 2

Exploring your health habits

Our habits and environment is unique to each of us. Discover more about yours.

In the following steps we focus on eating well and being more active. You can use similar steps for minding your wellbeing and sleep or for reducing your sitting time.

Reflecting on our food and activity habits can help us decide on changes and how they might look. By standing back from ourselves, we can see ourselves and our behaviour more clearly. It works best when we are honest with ourselves.

The questions on the following pages will help you to reflect. It can be hard to think or write about ourselves without judgement and in a fair way. It might help to use words like 'he' or 'she' instead of 'I'. In other words, act like an outsider looking at your activities and behaviours.

You might be unable to answer all the questions and some may not be relevant to you. But it will still paint a picture of the reasons behind your habits. Use this information in Step 3 to set your own personal goals and make your own plan.

The things that affect what we eat and how we move change throughout our lives and even from week to week. Do return to these questions from time to time.

You can jot down any thoughts or anything important in the notes at the back of this guide.

Food and me

The questions on these pages will help you reflect on how food fits into your life.



My friend was on a health buzz and started to keep a food diary. She wanted me to keep one too. It sounded like an enormous hassle, especially since I'm a fairly healthy eater. But after a week of recording my food intake, I learned so much about my eating habits!

Angela

Keeping a food diary

As well as answering the questions, keep a record of all the food and drinks (including alcohol) you take for one week. Many people discover a lot about themselves by doing this. Use the guide on page 21 to help you keep a food diary. Try to complete the diary without judging yourself. Think of yourself as a fly on the wall, observing what's happening.

Buying food and planning my meals

Where we buy our food and how we plan or don't plan our meals can have a big effect on the foods we eat. Think about the following:

1. Do you have routine times for eating, or does it vary from day to day? Do you eat three square meals per day or mostly snacks?

2. Do you plan your meals or snacks? Do you know what you're having for dinner tomorrow or the next day?

3. Who makes the decisions on what foods come into your home?

4. Who buys the food you eat?

5. How often do you buy food? Do you do a 'big shop' or make several trips to the shops each week? Do you use a shopping list?

6. Where do you mainly buy your food? Is it in a supermarket, local shop, garage, canteen, takeaway or restaurant?

7. Do you prioritise your food choices or look after the needs of others first?

Preparing and eating your meals and snacks

How we or others prepare our food and where we eat can have a big effect on the foods we eat. Think about the following:

1. Do you rely on someone else to prepare food for you or do you prepare most of your food yourself?

2. Do you enjoy cooking food?

3. Are you good at cooking? Can you confidently prepare and cook raw meat or poultry, peel and chop vegetables, follow a recipe?

4. Do you ever cook from scratch using basic ingredients?

5. Do you eat most of your food at home or mostly in places other than your home?

6. How often is your main meal eaten outside of your home?

7. If you work or study outside your home: Do you eat at work or college? Do you have enough time and a place to eat there? Do you bring food with you to work or college, or do you eat in a canteen or buy from a shop?

The types and amount of foods you eat

Completing the food diary on page 21 will help you learn more about this.

1. Does the food you eat depend on other people's choices or habits? In what way?

2. Do you eat vegetables, salads or fruit? If so, how much do you eat?

3. Think about the following list of foods: biscuits, crisps, chocolate, sweets, ice-cream, cakes, muffins, croissants and pastries, alcoholic drinks. Do they feature in your life every day, weekly, or less often? Sometimes this can be hard to estimate.

4. How often do you eat in restaurants, cafés or from takeaways or deli counters? Does it happen daily? Every few days?

Times when you eat different to usual

There may be situations in your day-to-day life where you eat differently. Think about the following:

1. Do you eat while cooking or preparing food?

2. Do you eat when socialising or celebrating or at work functions, or when you're with family or friends?

3. Do you eat when anxious, tired, bored, stressed, angry, upset, depressed?

4. Do you snack between meals or after dinner?

5. Do you eat because you crave certain foods, you respond to the sight or smell of certain foods, or because of the great taste of certain foods?

What have you discovered about your eating habits?

Let's take a deeper look at your eating habits. Read back over your answers above, your food diary and the information on pages 8-11. Then think about the following questions.

1. What am I doing well?
2. What is not going so well for me?
3. What have I learned?
4. What might I do differently in the future?

Physical activity and me

The questions on the following page will help you think about your physical activity levels. Look at your current activity and things that influence it, such as your thoughts and beliefs about your own activity and social support.

Remember physical activity is more than just sports. When answering the questions, think about things like walking or cycling, gardening, housework, jogging and dancing.

My physical activity

1. The FITTE principles can be used to think about our physical activity. The letters in FITTE stand for frequency, intensity, time, type and enjoyment. You can list a few activities under each heading if you do multiple activities.

▶ **Frequency:** How often do I do an activity?

▶ **Intensity:** How hard do I exercise? Is it light, moderate or vigorous?

▶ **Time:** How much time do I spend doing the activity? When do I do my activity – in the morning, at lunchtime, in the evening, at weekends?

▶ **Type and enjoyment:** What activities do I do and enjoy?

We can use FITTE when making our plan too!

2. In the past week, on how many days have I done a total of 30 minutes or more of physical activity enough to raise my breathing rate?

If your answer is 5 days or more, you are reaching the national physical activity guidelines.

My thoughts and beliefs about my activity

Our thoughts and beliefs about our activity play a big part in whether we do an activity or not.

1. Do I do regular physical activity?

2. How confident am I that I could increase my physical activity if I decided to do so?

3. Do I feel ready to make changes to my physical activity?

4. What physical activities do I like to do?

5. When am I most likely to fit physical activity into my day?

6. Where do I like to do physical activity – the gym, park, beach, my neighbourhood?

7. Are there physical activities that I am willing to try?

8. How do I feel after being active?

My social support for activity

Having good social support can help us keep active in the long run.

1. Do I do physical activity with my friends or family?

2. Is there someone who encourages me or helps with some of my responsibilities so I can get regular physical activity?

My challenges to being active

1. When I find it hard to be active, what are the things that make it hard? List a few things here.

2. Do I feel confident that I can do physical activity when I am tired, busy, stressed or in a bad mood?

3. Do I put my activity first or look after the needs of others first?

We all face challenges when it comes to being active. Being aware of yours can help you make plans to overcome them.

Things I do to help me be active

1. Do I keep track of how much physical activity I do?

2. Do I find ways to get around things that get in the way of being physically active?

3. What could I do to make it easier to be active?

4. Do I make back-up plans to be sure I do my physical activity?

5. Do I put reminders around my home to be physically active?

6. Do I do things to make physical activity more enjoyable?

What have you discovered about your activity habits?

Let's take a deeper look at your physical activity. Read back over your answers and the information on pages 12-15. Then think about the following questions.

1. What works well for me?
2. What doesn't go so well for me?
3. What have I learned?
4. What might I do differently in the future?

For tips and support to be more active visit



www.getirelandactive.ie



www.getirelandwalking.ie



www.hse.ie



Read Mary's story

Chatting with my friend Lizzie always puts me in a good mood. We both wanted to keep fit and decided to take our friendship on the road, or should I say path. I used to hate exercising in public. I felt so self-conscious.

Now I never skip a walk. I enjoy our catch-ups too much. If I tried to skip it, Lizzie would call me up and give me a pep talk. She's great for keeping me motivated.

Step 3

Setting goals and making your plan

In order to plan, we need to know where we are starting from. By completing the questions and food diary in Step 2, you will be aware of your current food and activity habits.

Having reflected on these habits, you may decide to make some changes. When changing any part of our lives, it is best to set out simple goals. Setting goals can be a powerful way to motivate ourselves.

Your goals might be about improving your health and wellbeing or managing your weight.




Sometimes when we set out to lose weight, we can set unrealistic goals for ourselves. This can make us feel bad when they are not achieved. Rather than focusing on a target weight to achieve, it is best to set goals for things you will do. This could be having a piece of fruit at breakfast every day or walking to the shops instead of driving.

Be specific about the goals you make for yourself. Include details like your start date and when you hope to complete your goals. When your goals are clear, you can say if you have achieved them or not. No matter what your goals are, it is important they are realistic for you.

Check with your GP if you have any worries.

Focus on health gain rather than weight loss

The table below shows some examples of good goals versus not-so-good ones.

Okay 	Better 	Best 
I'm going to walk lots more.	Starting next week, I'm going to walk to work.	Starting next week, I'm going to walk to work on Wednesday and Friday. I'll record the days I walk in my work diary. After 10 weeks, I'll see how I'm doing.
I'm going to eat more vegetables.	I'm going to eat more vegetables with my dinner.	I will buy frozen peas and sweetcorn and have them with my dinner on Tuesdays and Thursdays at least. I'll tick the days I have them on the calendar in the kitchen. After 10 weeks, I'll see how I'm doing.

Okay 	Better 	Best 
I'll start to bring my own lunch into work instead of using the canteen.	From next week, I'll start bringing my own lunch in, just 2 days at first, building up to 5 days a week by the end of the year.	From next week, I'll start bringing my own lunch in, just 2 days at first, building up to 5 days a week by the end of the year. I'll take soup and bread or make a toasted sandwich. I'm going to bring a yogurt and a piece of fruit too. I'll keep a record in my work diary for 10 weeks and see how I'm doing.
I'll start running next month.	I'll start running next month, and build up to jog 5 km by the end of the year.	I'll start running next month, and build up to jog 5 km by the end of the year. I'll use an app on my phone to check on my progress.

Read John's story

I'm so lucky at work. We have a fantastic canteen with really nice food and loads of choice. At one point, I was eating my breakfast, lunch and evening meal there – it was so handy and cheap. But after a year I noticed I was putting on weight. Maybe the food was too nice. My dad has diabetes and the extra weight worried me.

I made a decision to eat breakfast at home, which was way smaller than the work one. Then I started bringing in my own lunch some days. I still have my evening meal there, but my weight has nearly gone back to what it was beforehand.

“After a year I noticed I was putting on weight.”



Setting goals and making your plan for food

Looking back on your food diary and the questions answered on pages 17-20 can help you focus on what you would like to change.

Buying food and planning my meals

How we plan (or don't plan) our meals and where we buy our food can hugely affect the foods we eat. When we plan, buy and prepare the food we eat ourselves, it tends to be healthier though not always. This can be a challenge if you lead a busy life, are not a confident cook, live on your own, or are on a tight budget.

“I decided enough was enough and set about finally learning how to cook.”



Read Anne's story

I never learned to cook at home or at school. It was such a pain figuring out what to make for dinner after a long day at work. It's hard when you're tired and everyone is asking what's for dinner. So we mostly ate ready-made or nearly ready-made meals

There was no point in denying it. We ate really badly as a family and we were all carrying more weight than we should. When the children started school, I decided enough was enough and set about finally learning how to cook.

I used YouTube videos to learn how to make a basic bolognese, curry and stew. It seemed more expensive at first, compared with the convenience stuff I used to buy. Once I managed the basics, I could tweak the recipes here and there to make them a bit different. We still don't have a home-made dinner from scratch every day, but it's better than it was.

Eating a planned breakfast each day and two other meals, like dinner and lunch/supper/tea, will make it easier to get all the nutrients we need each day. Look back on Michael's day on page 11.

If you answered the questions on page 17, you are aware of how your meals and snacks are planned and how you buy food. Are there things you would like to do differently? What would you do? Would this change the way you eat?

Preparing and eating your meals and snacks

How we prepare our meals and where we eat our food can also influence the foods we eat. If you answered the questions on page 18, you will know more about how your meals and snacks are cooked and where you eat your food. Reflecting on this, would you like to do things differently? What would you do? Would this change the way you eat?

The types and amount of foods you eat

Lots of things influence the foods we eat. For example, our likes and dislikes, the people we live with, how busy we are, how much we enjoy cooking, or how much money we have. If you kept a food diary you will know more about this now. Would you like to do things differently? What would you do? Would this change the way you eat?

Check out www.safefood.net/weightolive for a 12 week online programme that includes weekly meal plans, recipes and trackers to support you with healthier eating.



Read Luca's story

We were chatting one day in work about losing weight and someone told me to measure my breakfast cereal. I found I was eating three times the recommended portion. The bowl I was using was way too big. I switched to a smaller one and now I only have about half the amount.

Times when you eat different to usual

Looking back at the questions on pages 19-20, are there situations in your everyday life where you eat different to usual? Would you like this to change?

“I found that I reached for food whenever I was stressed or emotional.”



Read Mishka's story

I found that I reached for food whenever I was stressed or emotional. I wasn't even hungry most of the time. Then I started making myself wait just one minute before reaching for food at those times. I didn't tell myself that I couldn't give into the craving, I just had to wait. Eventually, I was putting it off for two minutes, then more. It took a while but now I have it mostly under control.

Read Marta's story

I decided to make exercise my priority. At first I couldn't see how it would work. I'm really busy with work and the kids. I guess making that decision forced me to rethink my day. I really wanted it to work.

I'll be honest. It took me a while to get my head around it. Going to the gym at 7 am was just never going to work with getting the kids ready for school. I don't even like the gym. What was I thinking?

Twice a week, I stick on an online exercise class, sometimes yoga, sometimes Zumba – whatever I'm in the mood for. I found 20-minute classes so I can squeeze them in when the dinner is cooking. At the weekend, my partner takes the kids to their matches and I head to my local parkrun. Having the support and the routine make such a difference.

“At first I couldn't see how it would work. I'm really busy.”



“Someone suggested just tasting tiny amounts of one vegetable and gradually building it up.”

**Read Ciaran's story**

I hated vegetables ever since I was a child and had gotten out of the habit of eating fruit over the years. When the nurse at my GP's surgery told me fruit and veg helped prevent cancer, I knew I had to try because my father had cancer at my age.

So I started having a banana every morning at breakfast. Sometimes I have an orange instead. I find it easier to remember to have it with a meal first thing in the day. To get used to the taste of vegetables, someone suggested just tasting tiny amounts of one vegetable and gradually building it up. It took a while but now I can eat frozen peas, carrots and broccoli. I'd even go as far as saying I enjoy them.

Read Muhammad's story

I got gym membership because I thought paying up front would encourage me to go. But I wasn't going often enough to make it worthwhile money-wise, so gave it up. I saw a poster for kickboxing pay-as-you-go classes and decided to give it a try. It's a hard workout but I'm absolutely buzzing after it and go more often each week than I ever did to the gym.



Setting goals and making your plan for physical activity

Use your answers from the **physical activity and me** section on pages 22-25 to help you set goals and make your plan.

Go at a pace that works for you. That way your goals will be realistic and achievable for you. To get off to a good start, plan things you know work well for you. Add things that you decided you could do differently in the future.

Your goals might include doing specific activities. Or your goals might just involve preparing for activity. For example, finding out information, like what time the activity happens and where. Including goals on what helps you be active will support you to stay active in the long run. You can use the templates on page 34 to set your goals.

My goals to help me be active (and stay active)

Often people focus their goals on physical activities but forget about other important goals that make the activity possible. These other goals can show our progress to becoming active.

Some things to think about are:

- ▶ **preparing for activity:** making goals about scheduling time for activity, getting equipment if needed, leaving a pair of runners under the desk to pop on for a lunchtime walk, etc
- ▶ **planning for challenges:** thinking about the things that prevent you being active and coming up with solutions
- ▶ **making back-up plans:** turning plan A into plan B and then plan C. By having back-up plans, you are more likely to keep active. Typical barriers to physical activity include the weather and time pressure
- ▶ **building our social support:** having good support from others can make a big difference. For example, someone giving you a lift to training, minding the kids while you're exercising, a friend giving you encouragement or being your exercise buddy and taking part with you. Think about ways you can improve your social support. Can you ask someone for help? Can you ask friends or family to take part in activities with you?

Planning and setting my physical activity goals

When planning our activity, it's useful to look at the frequency, intensity, time and types of activities we plan to do (the "FITT principles").

But first, some things to think about.

- ▶ If you have not been active, start small and build up your activity slowly.
- ▶ Pick activities that you enjoy, such as playing active games with your children, cycling or walking to work, joining a club or gym or exercising alone for some 'me time'.
- ▶ Be kind to yourself and listen to your body. Sometimes you need a rest day when you had planned on doing some activity.
- ▶ Don't punish yourself if you miss some activity. You don't have to do double the next day. Take a look at your plan and see if you can swap an active day for a rest day. Or just start afresh the next day.
- ▶ If you are struggling with your plan, ask yourself are you trying to do too much too soon? Should you change your plan to make it more realistic for you? Or what small things can you do to make it easier? Check in with yourself to see how you are getting on.

My goals to help me be active are:

1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

My physical activity goals are:

Frequency How often?	Intensity How fast? How much effort?	Time When? For how long?	Type of activity Walking, cycling, sport, housework, gardening?

Step 4

Keeping track of your progress

When making changes in our lives, self monitoring is a good idea. It can help us see how things are going, and notice what is helping and what is getting in the way.

Keep track of your habits by using diaries, activity trackers or apps. It can be useful to help you understand yourself better. It's not about tracking success or failure, so try not judge yourself.

Keeping track can show you when it's a good time to switch things up and try something different.

Read Sean's story

I started making some changes last year. I was trying to lose a bit of weight after a chat with my GP. It was going okay for a while. I lost weight every week for about 8 weeks and then it just stopped. It started to creep up again. I got really disheartened and just gave up.

I decided to give it another go this year. I kept a little diary beside the bed. Every night I wrote down how much fruit I'd had or biscuits or crisps or stuff like that. I got a watch that told me how many steps I'd done each day. I found this really motivating. Like before, the weight loss slowed after a few weeks, but I found it didn't creep back up again. I still keep track of the food and the steps.

My doctor said I've lost enough weight to improve my health and the extra fruit and veg and steps are making a big difference too. We have a history of heart problems and stroke in the family so that's important to me. Happy days.

“I got a watch that told me how many steps I'd done each day. I found this really motivating.”



Many people measure their weight to track their health progress. But try to avoid weight being your entire focus when thinking about your health. Your health is much more than a number on the scale. Measuring changes that improve health like how much fruit and vegetables you have eaten in the past week, how much walking you've done, how much sleep you've had, or how much alcohol you've taken is just as important.

Some people find weighing themselves helpful to keep on track. This is probably because they notice changes early on. But if you think measuring your weight every week will make you feel bad, then it may not be right for you.

Step 5

Managing your challenges and setbacks

Rarely we make changes in our lives and stick to them without stopping and starting. Do not look at setbacks as 'failing'. It is normal to drift back to previous habits from time to time. Be prepared and confident to deal with challenges and setbacks. This is important if you want to keep up the positive changes you've made.

Some challenges are sudden, such as injury or a sudden change in your circumstances, but others are more predictable, like Christmas or changes in work patterns. When challenges are predictable, you can plan for them. When you think of your challenges, what can you do to make it easier for yourself?

When setbacks happen, do not blame yourself. Instead, think about why this has happened. Do not ignore it. Go back to the simple things that worked for you before.

Typical challenges and reasons for setbacks.

- ▶ Changing your routine, like going on holidays, changing job, having children.
- ▶ You or a family member being unwell or getting an injury.
- ▶ Being busy at work or managing shift work.
- ▶ Having money or other worries and stresses.
- ▶ Losing support from friends or family.
- ▶ Feeling guilty or disappointed due to regaining weight.
- ▶ Staying motivated.



“Instead of feeling guilty, I’d ask myself why it had gone wrong and how to make things better next time.”

Read Lianne’s story

I was always one for going on diets for weddings and holidays – then putting the weight back on again. A bit more seemed to go on every time. The last time I tried to lose weight was 2 years ago. This time instead of going crazy with it I just changed one thing at a time. Then I moved on to the next change and the next, and so on every few weeks.

The other thing different this time was my mindset. I sort of checked in on myself every week to see how it was going. I’d notice that something was slipping – like I hadn’t had breakfast that week or only gone for one walk. Instead of feeling guilty, I’d ask myself why it had gone wrong and how to make things better next time. It was often due to being extra busy at work or not getting enough sleep. I finally learned not to feel ashamed of my eating pattern, no matter what it was like.

Section 3: Let's refresh

You might be using this guide to develop healthier habits that help you improve health and wellbeing or manage your weight. Whatever the reason, let's remember the key points from this guide.

1

Body weight is complicated. There are so many things that influence it. Some we have control over but many we do not. No matter what our weight is, there are ways to look after our health.

2

The steps we can take to having healthier habits include:



3

Our lives and circumstances change constantly. Go back over the information and steps in this guide from time to time. That way, you'll get the most out of the guide and your efforts.

There will be times when things go to plan and other times when they will not. Be kind to yourself. This is normal. It's useful to have a plan to get back on track again.

Having healthier habits will have a positive impact on your health.

Section 4: Extra information

Body mass index

Body mass index or BMI is used to categorise body size. It does this by looking at height and weight. Our weight is made up of many things including muscle, fat and bone. If someone has a BMI in the “healthy” range, it refers to their body size only. It does not mean that they have good health. That said, BMI can give a good idea about a person’s body size and identify if there are potential health risks due to excess weight. The ranges of BMI are slightly different for different ethnic backgrounds. You can check your BMI at safefood.net/bmi-calculator.



Physical activity and health conditions

Physical activity and arthritis

Physical activity can help:

- ▶ reduce stiffness and pain
- ▶ increase your flexibility
- ▶ strengthen the muscles around your joints
- ▶ increase bone strength (reduce the risk of developing osteoporosis)
- ▶ improve your balance, posture and coordination.



Important

A flare-up of arthritis is where your symptoms become worse. If you have a flare-up, you can continue low impact activities such as walking but it is best to avoid vigorous activities at this time. As the flare-up eases, gradually build your physical activity up again.

Being active with arthritis

A combination of exercises for flexibility, muscle strength and aerobic fitness are best for people with arthritis.

- ▶ Yoga, tai chi or pilates are suitable activities to improve your flexibility.
- ▶ Activities like using weights and resistance bands, climbing stairs and carrying shopping will strengthen your muscles. You can include these in your activity plan two to three times a week.
- ▶ Aerobic activities that can be gentle on joints include walking, cycling, swimming, aqua aerobics.

Physical activity and asthma

Regular physical activity can help prevent your airways from tightening up.



Important

Remember, don't start an activity if you think you could get an asthma attack - wait until your day to day asthma is under control again.

You can control your asthma by:

- ▶ taking your medication as directed
- ▶ carrying your inhaler with you
- ▶ knowing and avoiding your asthma 'triggers'.

Common 'triggers' include pollen, grass cutting, animal dander, chlorine (chemical used in swimming pools), viral infections like the flu and physical activity.

Before you start exercise:

- ▶ tell your coach, team or training partner that you have asthma
- ▶ tell them where you keep your inhaler
- ▶ warm up gently before you exercise and cool down afterwards.

Being active with asthma

The following activities can be good options for people with asthma.

- ▶ Swimming (if chlorine is not a trigger for you). The warm air in the swimming pool is less likely to trigger your asthma.
- ▶ Yoga, tai chi or pilates – involve relaxation and controlled breathing.

Physical activity and diabetes

Physical activity can help you:

- ▶ control your blood glucose (sugar) levels
- ▶ lower your blood pressure
- ▶ improve your circulation.



Important

If you have been advised by your doctor to routinely check your blood glucose, you should check it before and after exercise. If it is normal or low, you should eat some carbohydrates. Hypoglycaemia (low blood glucose) can develop several hours after a hard exercise session if you are taking some kinds of diabetes medicine.

Being active with diabetes

- ▶ Check to make sure that your doctor is happy for you to do whatever new activity you are planning and begin slowly.
- ▶ Drink more after a long exercise session, especially if you take diabetic medicines.
- ▶ Tell others you exercise with (your coach or team mates) that you have diabetes, what the symptoms are when you have low blood glucose and what they should do if you need their help.
- ▶ Wear proper footwear and check your feet for blisters or sores before and after physical activity.
- ▶ Stop exercising if you feel shaky, anxious or begin to sweat more than normal. This could mean that your blood glucose is too low (this is a condition called hypoglycaemia).

Physical activity and heart disease

Physical activity can help you:

- ▶ reduce high blood pressure
- ▶ improve levels of good cholesterol (HDL) and reduce levels of bad cholesterol (LDL)
- ▶ manage stress
- ▶ sleep better.



Stop and get medical help if you have the following symptoms.

- ▶ Pain or pressure in your chest area.
- ▶ Fluttering in your chest (palpitations).
- ▶ Dizziness, light headedness or feeling faint.
- ▶ Pain in your jaw, neck or arm.
- ▶ Difficulty breathing.
- ▶ Feeling sick or unduly tired.
- ▶ Sweating with cold clammy hands.
- ▶ Leg ache that slows down movement.
- ▶ Shakiness, hunger and weakness.

Had a heart attack?

If you have had a heart attack, being regularly physically active can help you recover faster and reduce your risk of having another heart attack.

- ▶ Make sure that you have fully recovered and have completed the cardiac rehabilitation programme.
- ▶ Continue to take medication as prescribed. If prescribed a spray, always carry it with you.
- ▶ Do a light warm up and cool down before and after an activity.
- ▶ Drink plenty of water, particularly on hot days.
- ▶ Try to walk on fairly flat ground. In hilly areas, walk slower so you don't put too much stress on your heart.
- ▶ Avoid heavy lifting or pushing heavy objects.
- ▶ If it is very hot or cold, avoid doing physical activity as this can affect your circulation and breathing and can cause chest pain.
- ▶ Ease back into your exercise programme if it has been interrupted for a few days.
- ▶ Don't begin an activity directly after a meal.






Serving Size information

Healthy Food for Life





www.healthylifeireland.ie



Serving guide

				
Cereals, cooked rice and pasta, and vegetables, salad and fruit Use a 200ml disposable plastic cup to guide serving size.	Cheese Use two thumbs, width and depth to guide serving size.	Meat, poultry, fish The palm of the hand, width and depth without fingers and thumbs, shows how much you need in a day.	Reduced-fat spread Portion packs found in cafes can guide the amount you use. One pack should be enough for two slices of bread.	Oils Use one teaspoon of oil per person when cooking or in salads.

*Daily Servings Guide for wholemeal cereals and breads, potatoes, pasta and rice shelf

Active	Child (5-12)	Teenager (13-18)	Adult (19-50)	Adult (51+)
	3-4	4	4-5	3-4
	3-5	5-7	5-7	4-5
Inactive	Teenager (13-18)	Adult (19-50)	Adult (51+)	
	3	3-4	3	
	4-5	4-6	4	

There is no guideline for inactive children as it is essential that all children are active.

Alcohol weekly lower risk limits

 **11 standard drinks**
(110g alcohol over a week)

 **17 standard drinks**
(170g alcohol over a week)

Standard drinks

One standard drink contains

Calories: 100-150

Pure Alcohol: 10g

Examples of one standard drink


½ pint beer or lager

Small glass wine

Single measure spirit

Average daily calorie needs for all foods and drinks for adults

 **Active** 2000kcal **Inactive** 1800kcal

 **Active** 2500kcal **Inactive** 2000kcal



Drink at least 8 cups of fluid a day – water is best

Get Active!

To maintain a healthy weight adults need at least 30 minutes a day of moderate activity on 5 days a week (or 150 minutes a week); children need to be active at a moderate to vigorous level for at least 60 minutes every day.



Foods and drinks high in fat, sugar and salt

Small or fun-size servings of chocolate, biscuits, cakes, sweets, crisps and other savoury snacks, ice cream and sugary – **not every day, maximum once or twice a week.**

1 serving is:

Fats, spreads and oils

1 portion pack reduced-fat or light spread for 2 slices of bread
1 teaspoon oil per person when cooking

Meat, poultry, fish, eggs, beans and nuts

50-75g cooked lean beef, lamb, pork, mince or poultry (half size of palm of hand)
100g cooked fish, soya or tofu
¾ cup beans or lentils
2 eggs
40g unsalted nuts or seeds

Milk, yogurt and cheese

1 glass (200ml) milk
1 carton (125g) yogurt
1 bottle (200ml) yogurt drink
2 thumbs (25g) hard or semi-hard cheese such as cheddar or edam
2 thumbs (25g) soft cheese such as brie or camembert

Wholemeal cereals and breads, potatoes, pasta and rice

2 thin slices wholemeal bread,
1½ slices wholemeal soda bread or
1 pitta pocket
½ cup dry porridge oats or ½ cup unsweetened muesli
1 cup flaked type breakfast cereal
1 cup cooked rice, pasta, noodles or cous cous
2 medium or 4 small potatoes,
1 cup yam or plantain

Vegetables, salad and fruit

1 medium sized fruit – apple, orange, pear or banana
2 small fruits – plums, kiwis or mandarin oranges
Small fruits – 6 strawberries, 10 grapes or 16 raspberries
½ cup cooked vegetables – fresh or frozen
1 bowl salad – lettuce, tomato, cucumber
1 bowl homemade vegetable soup
150ml unsweetened fruit juice

Notes

Notes

Acknowledgements

This booklet was developed for the Healthy Eating and Active Living Programme in the Health Service Executive (HSE) with input from Health Promotion and Improvement. We would like to acknowledge the contribution of the Irish Coalition for People Living with Obesity and the Expert Working Group of the Obesity National Clinical Programme to the development and review of this booklet.



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