

# Food first advice for improving nutrition

**Food first is an approach to treating poor dietary intake and unintentional weight loss through the use of every day nourishing foods and nourishing snacks.**

## Advice for improving nutrition

Everybody needs a balanced diet to keep fit and healthy.

At times some people need extra nourishment. This can be achieved by adding more fat and sugar into your diet than would normally be advised, as well as eating enough protein within a good variety of foods. This can help you put on weight, feel stronger, fight infection, improve wound healing or cope better with any treatment.

You should aim to return to a healthy balanced diet if you have managed to put on weight, or you have regained your appetite and are feeling better.

## Some ideas to help improve your appetite

- Have small, frequent meals.
- Eat a wide variety of foods to help you get all the nutrition that your body needs.
- Include nourishing drinks or nourishing snacks between meals.
- Avoid drinking before meals as this can make you feel full, try taking drinks with or after meals.
- If you find preparing meals tiring, make use of frozen or ready-made meals and snacks.
- Try to get outside for some fresh air before meal times.

## Make the most of your food and fluid

- Small frequent meals and snacks are a good way to increase your calorie intake, aim to eat every 2-3 hours.

- Eat what you like and when you want to eat.
- Fortifying your diet will help to make a small amount of food or drink more nourishing.
- Aim to drink 6-8 cups/glasses of fluid a day and make these as nourishing as possible.

### Vitamins and Minerals


It is a good idea to take a 'one a day' multivitamin and mineral tablet whilst you have a poor appetite as you may be deficient in some nutrients. This can be purchased in a Supermarket, high street retailer or a pharmacy and should not be expensive. Please consult your GP if you are unsure if vitamins or minerals have already been prescribed. It is important not to double up on vitamin and mineral tablets.






### Additional help: Ready-made meals

- If you are having difficulty preparing meals consider ready-made meals, either from the supermarket or a frozen meal delivery service (Wiltshire Farm Foods, Oak House Foods). Often special dietary requirements can be met e.g. diabetic, vegetarian, gluten free, soft and puree. Avoid low calorie or diet versions.
- **Wiltshire Farm Foods** Freephone 0800 773773 [www.wiltshirefarmfoods.com](http://www.wiltshirefarmfoods.com) or email [info@wiltshirefarmfoods.com](mailto:info@wiltshirefarmfoods.com)
- **Oakhouse Foods** Freephone 0845 6432009 [www.oakfoods.co.uk](http://www.oakfoods.co.uk)
- If you already have ready prepared meals, consider adding some frozen vegetables and a slice of bread and butter to help increase the nutritional value.

### Food Fortification

Try simple ways to increase the energy and protein content of meals. Initially aim to fortify one dish per meal.

<p><b>Oil, butter and margarine</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Add butter or full fat spread to potatoes and vegetables.</li><li>• Drizzle olive oil on pasta.</li><li>• Oven roast potatoes and vegetables in oil.</li><li>• Thickly spread butter or full fat spread on bread and toast.</li></ul>
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<p><b>Cheese</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grate cheese and sprinkle on top of meals, e.g. beans on toast, spaghetti bolognese, soup, casseroles.</li> <li>• Include in sandwiches, e.g. ham and cheese, cheese salad, cheese and tuna mayonnaise.</li> <li>• Add to mashed potatoes.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Mayonnaise, salad cream and dressings</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include in sandwiches, e.g. tuna mayonnaise or chicken mayonnaise.</li> <li>• Add to salads.</li> <li>• Put on chips or baked potatoes.</li> <li>• Have coleslaw, or other mayonnaise dressed salads as a portion of vegetables.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Milk, Cream and Ice cream</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Add to soups.</li> <li>• Make custard and milk based pudding with <math>\frac{1}{3}</math> cream and <math>\frac{2}{3}</math> milk.</li> <li>• Mash milk or cream into potatoes.</li> <li>• Make cream based sauces for pasta.</li> <li>• Drizzle cream on top of desserts or add to yogurts</li> <li>• Serve evaporated or condensed milk with fruit or jelly</li> <li>• Add to hot drinks, e.g. coffee, hot chocolate</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sauces, lentils, pearl barley and mini pasta shapes</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Add to lentils, pearl barley or mini pasta shapes to soup, casseroles or stews</li> <li>• Sauces are useful to make meals more palatable and nourishing. Try making milky or creamy sauces with fortified milk and flavour with cheese, mushrooms or herbs and serve with pasta, potato, vegetables, meat and fish.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sugar, Honey, Syrup</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use in hot drinks.</li> <li>• Add to porridge and breakfast cereals.</li> <li>• Add to hot puddings, e.g. pie, crumble or milk based puddings.</li> <li>• Drink fizzy drinks and cordials that contain sugar. (use sparingly, if at all, if you have Diabetes)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Chocolate, nuts, dried fruit and marshmallows</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Add grated chocolate, chopped nuts or dried fruit to hot puddings, cold desserts, cereals or porridge</li> <li>• Sprinkle chocolate or marshmallows on hot drinks.</li> </ul>

- Make fortified milk by adding 5 heaped tablespoons of milk powder to 1 pint of whole milk (full cream or full fat).
- Use fortified milk to make milkshakes, hot milky drinks, milk puddings, custard and packet desserts.
- This can add 200-300 extra calories per pint.

## Nourishing drinks

Milky drinks e.g. coffee, tea, cocoa sweetened with sugar, Horlicks, Ovaltine or hot chocolate drinks. Try the following recipes and ideas.

- **Hot Chocolate** 450 calories per serving (approximately)
  - 2 heaped teaspoons milk powder
  - 1 tablespoon hot chocolate powder
  - 2 tablespoons cream

- **Malted Drink** 450 calories per serving (approximately)
  - 150ml whole milk
  - 1 heaped tablespoon milk powder
  - 1 tablespoon malted drink powder
  - 2 tablespoons cream

- **Milkshake** 300 calories per serving (approximately)
  - 200ml whole milk
  - 2 heaped tablespoons milk powder
  - 1 tablespoon milkshake syrup or powder

- **Fruit Smoothie** 400 calories per serving (approximately)
  - Blended fruit (e.g. 1 banana and a handful of strawberries)
  - 200ml whole milk
  - 2 tablespoons milk powder
  - Scoop of ice cream or 2 tablespoons of yoghurt (not low fat)

- **Nourishing Cup-a-Soup** 300 calories per serving (approximately)
  - 200ml whole milk
  - 1 heaped tablespoon milk powder
  - 1 packet cup-a-soup (avoid low calorie or low fat versions)

## Nourishing Snacks

Try eating one nourishing snack between each meal (i.e. mid-morning, mid-afternoon, before bed)



### Sweet Options

- Milky puddings (rice pudding, tapioca, custard, mousse).
- Yoghurt (not low fat), individual trifle or mousse.
- Chocolate, biscuits, cakes, pastries.
- Breakfast cereal (with fortified milk) or cereal bars.
- Tea cake, tea bread, malt loaf with butter/spread and jam or scone with jam and cream.
- Croissants and waffles.
- Dried fruit or fruit and nut mix.

### Savoury Options

- Cheese, pate or hummus with crackers, bread sticks or biscuits.
- Crisps, nuts, Bombay mix.
- Pork pie, sausage roll, scotch eggs, cocktail sausages, slices of pizza or quiche.
- Pasties and samosas.
- Toast, crumpets or muffins with butter or spread.
- Peanut butter on toast, cheese on toast, beans on toast.
- Ham or cheese sandwiches,
- Cheese with pineapple or sliced apple.

## Meal ideas

### Breakfast

- Porridge with whole or fortified milk and cream.
- Swiss style, or crunchy muesli cereals with yoghurt (not low fat) and fresh fruit.
- Croissant, waffles, crumpet, bread or toast with butter or spread and jam, chocolate spread, marmalade, peanut butter or cheese spread.
- Cooked breakfast with egg (e.g. fried or scrambled with whole or fortified milk and butter), bacon or sausage (preferably fried) with buttered toast or fried bread.

### Light meals

- Nourishing soup, homemade "cream of" or "Big Soup" style. Add extra cream, cheese, meat or lentils. Serve with buttered bread or crumpet.

- Ham, salami, corned beef, cheese, cream cheese and pineapple, egg or tinned fish sandwiches. Use butter or full fat spread and add full fat mayonnaise or dressing. Try toasted sandwiches for an alternative.
- Fried beef burger, sausage or fish fingers in a buttered bread roll.
- Toast with baked beans and grated cheese, scrambled egg, pilchards, sardines, cheese and Marmite, banana or peanut butter.
- Jacket potatoes with tuna and mayonnaise; baked beans and cheese; chilli-con-carne; chopped bacon or ham with cheese.
- Omelette with coleslaw and French bread.
- Quiche made with cream, whole or fortified milk and served with potato salad.
- Cauliflower or macaroni cheese made with whole or fortified milk and served with pitta bread.
- Pizza topped with extra cheese or bacon.
- Scotch egg, pork pie or sausage roll with baked beans.

## Main meals

- Spaghetti bolognaise - fry minced meat, toss spaghetti in butter and add grated parmesan cheese on top.
- Shepherd's Pie - add cream, whole or fortified milk, butter or cheese to the potato. Instant potato is a useful and quick alternative to fresh mash.
- Fisherman's Pie - add a creamy cheese sauce to the fish and fortify potato as for shepherd's pie.
- Roast Chicken with condensed mushroom soup sauce or white sauce served with rice.
- Tinned salmon with parsley sauce and mashed potato.
- Lasagne or pre-packed pasta dish, topped with grated cheese.
- Toad in the Hole.
- Meat or fish curry – add coconut milk or cream and serve with deep fried Puris or Paratha.

Serve these meals with vegetables or salad and, where appropriate, chips, potato, pasta, or rice (preferably fried).

## Desserts

- Yoghurt – Thick and Creamy or Greek (not low fat).
- Fromage frais.
- Ice cream with tinned fruit.

- Blancmange, Instant Whip or Angel Delight made with whole milk.
- Jelly made with condensed or evaporated milk.
- Tinned or homemade milk puddings (rice, sago, tapioca).
- Bananas and custard.
- Pies, tarts and crumbles served with custard or cream.
- Sponge puddings served with custard or cream.

Reduced sugar or sugar free alternatives may be used if you have diabetes.

Desserts should be made with whole or fortified milk. Tinned and bought varieties of desserts are useful when your appetite is poor and cooking or food preparation is difficult.

## Nutritional Supplement Drinks

If your appetite is very small, you could consider buying nutritional drinks such as Complan® or Meritene®. These can be made up with whole milk and are good for between meals as a nourishing drink. They are available to buy over the counter from most supermarkets and pharmacies.

## Food safety

Food safety is important to prevent infections from contaminated food and even more important when you are unwell.

- Always wash your hands before cooking or handling food. Dry them on a clean towel.
- Some foods can be cooked from frozen. Other foods, such as meat, must be thawed thoroughly before cooking. Thaw in a refrigerator and follow packet instructions.
- Keep meat, fish and poultry away from other foods to prevent contamination. Wash chopping boards and utensils carefully – especially after using them for raw foods.
- Wash fruit and vegetables thoroughly before use.
- Allow hot foods to cool before putting in fridge or freezer.
- Use plastic containers/tubs or cover food to store in the fridge. Do not leave food in cans.
- Only keep leftover food for 2 days in the fridge and not beyond the 'use-by date'.
- Do not let rubbish build up in the kitchen or kitchen bin.
- Keep pets away from food and work surfaces in the kitchen.

## Diabetes

If you have diabetes and you normally check the sugar (glucose) in your urine or blood, you should continue to do this regularly and contact your Practice Nurse or Diabetes Nurse if you have trouble keeping your results within normal limits.

## Healthy Heart

If you have a high cholesterol level you can still follow the advice in this booklet whilst needed to improve dietary intake or to gain weight. Vegetable fats/oils are healthier choices than animal fats, so use a full fat olive based spread instead of butter, and use vegetable oil (rapeseed or olive oil) for cooking. Choose less of the fatty meats and pastry items but have more dried fruit, nuts, flapjacks, fruit bread or teacakes with spread and jam for snacks. Nourishing drinks can be made with fortified whole milk but avoid adding cream.

## Vitamin D

Vitamin D is obtained from sunlight and is needed to help absorb and utilise calcium. Vitamin D can be found in some fortified dietary items such as eggs, fat spreads and cereals, however as it is only present in a small number of foods it can be difficult to obtain enough vitamin D. It is therefore recommended that everyone takes a 10µg supplement of vitamin D daily throughout the year. If you get good sun exposure between the end of March to end of September, you may not need to take the supplement during these months.

If your appetite does not improve or you have concerns about your weight, please contact your GP or district nurse.

Contact details: **Nutrition and Dietetic Services**  
Tel: (01225) 824398 (RUH) Tel: (01225) 833916 (St Martin's)

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Combe Park, Bath BA1 3NG 01225 428331 [www.ruh.nhs.uk](http://www.ruh.nhs.uk)

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