

Diet and nutrition

Food has nutrients that our bodies need. A healthy, balanced diet gives you all the nutrients you need to keep your body working well.

The main groups of nutrients are carbohydrates, proteins, vitamins and minerals, fats, fibre and fluids.

Many people find making the decision to follow a [healthy, balanced diet](#) helps give them back a sense of control. It can also help you feel that you are doing the best for your health. Eating well and being a healthy weight will help:

- you feel stronger
- increase your energy levels
- keep your immune system healthy
- improve your sense of well-being.

It can also help reduce the risk of new cancers, heart disease, diabetes and strokes.

After cancer treatment, some people have a higher risk of other health problems, including [diabetes](#), [heart disease](#) and [bone thinning](#) (osteoporosis). A healthy, balanced diet can help to reduce the risk of these.

Tips for healthy eating

It is not always easy to make healthy decisions when choosing food. It can be even more difficult if you are coping with cancer and cancer treatment. Before making changes to your diet, talk to a dietitian, your GP or a specialist nurse. They can help you make changes. They can also advise you about any dietary problems you might have due to cancer treatment.

- Make changes to your diet gradually, at a budget you can afford and when you feel ready.
- Write down what you usually eat for a few weeks. Compare this with information on healthy eating. Then set yourself some small, realistic goals and decide how you will achieve them.
- Try to eat at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables each day.
- Eat plenty of carbohydrates, such as wholemeal bread, rice, pasta and potatoes.
- Eat some protein-rich foods, such as lean meat, poultry, fish, nuts, eggs and pulses (beans and lentils).
- Include milk and dairy foods, such as cheese and yoghurt.
- Try to limit foods high in fat, salt and sugar.
- Try to eat less processed food, high-calorie food and red meat. Eat fewer takeaways. These contain a lot of salt.
- Choose foods that contain unsaturated fats, such as nuts and oily fish. Limit the amount of saturated fats you eat. Saturated fats are found in pies, cake, biscuits and cheese.
- For a snack, swap cakes or crisps for dried fruit and nuts.
- Many food manufacturers and supermarkets use a food traffic-light system on their labels. The colours show you whether the amounts of fats, sugars and salt are high (red), medium (amber) or low (green). Eat more foods with amber and green labels and fewer with red.
- It is best to drink water or unsweetened juice that contains no added sugar. If you drink tea and coffee, try not to add sugar. If you drink fizzy drinks or sugary squashes, try to reduce the amount you drink and have the diet or sugar-free versions. Try to limit the amount of fruit juice you drink as well.
- If you drink alcohol, try to follow the recommended drinking guidelines. Visit drinkaware.co.uk for more information.

Macmillan Cancer Support resources

We have more information on our [website](#), including audiobooks. Or you can order our free booklets and leaflets on be.macmillan.org.uk such as:

- [Heathy eating and cancer](#)
- [Managing weight gain after cancer treatment](#)
- [Stay healthy – eat a healthy diet – easy read](#)

We produce information in a [range of formats](#) and [languages](#). To order these, visit our website or call our support line.

Further Macmillan support

If you have more questions or would like to talk to someone, call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00**, 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm. Or visit macmillan.org.uk where you can [chat to us online](#).

Deaf or hard of hearing? Call using NGT (Text Relay) on **18001 0808 808 00 00**, or use the NGT Lite app. Speak another language? Telephone interpreters are available. Please tell us in English the language you would like to use.

Or if you want to share your experiences or ask questions, you can find others who understand on our [Online Community](#).

Our free [Macmillan Buddy service](#) can arrange weekly calls or visits with a friendly volunteer who understands what you're going through.

Other useful contact details

- British Dietetic Association (BDA) – visit www.bda.uk.com
- Diabetes UK – visit www.diabetes.org.uk or call **0345 123 2399**
- Guts UK – visit www.gutscharity.org.uk

Notes and questions
