

Practical Guidance for Healthy Eating

Janice McConnell, PhD, MSc, BSc (Hons), RNutr (public health), CSci, FIFST, FRSH

Take a moment to consider **why** healthy eating is important to you. Knowing your 'why' will strengthen your willpower when life happens! Without a 'why', there will be little sustained progress on the what and how!

Step-by-Step Introductory Guide

Dietary Status

As a starting point for change, it is important to know what you are currently eating and how much, and to think about the reasons for your dietary habits as a way of identifying your potential barriers to change, for example, convenience, availability, emotions.

TIP: Keep a weekly *food diary* or download an app e.g. see How You Eat Food Diary. Note everything that you eat and drink, when, your circumstances at the time, and how you were feeling. Use this check-sheet on portion size to help you to document your fruit and vegetable intake <https://www.wcrf-uk.org/sites/default/files/5-A-DAY-Poster-A3-2019-WEB.pdf>

Dietary Guidelines and Paradigms

Understanding what healthy eating is or looks like, helps put your dietary habits in context, enabling you to identify what specific changes need to be made to improve your diet. It is important as you consider your dietary changes to keep a focus on what you *can* eat, *not* what you can't. Make sure to set SMART goals, *write* them down, and tell someone what you plan to do – this works!

TIP: Awareness and understanding of current government guidelines on healthy eating (*Eatwell Guide*) provides a starting point to assessing your dietary needs.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/742750/Eatwell_Guide_booklet_2018v4.pdf

Food environment

Remember that whatever foods you bring into your home will ultimately determine your food choices and dietary habits. Shape your home environment to work for you by only buying those foods that will help you reach your dietary goals, rather than those that consistently challenge your willpower.

TIP: Cue better food choices in your household by keeping only healthy foods on view or convenient e.g. whole fruit, chopped vegetables, homemade hummus, using smaller plates and bowls, and portioning food rather than eating directly from the pack.

Get creative

Eat for nutrition, basing your meals on your own combinations of nutritious ingredients to create a range of signature dishes. Make sure to include a variety of colourful vegetables and fruits for the full range of plant nutrients (*Eat a Rainbow*); plant proteins e.g. quinoa, lentils, chickpeas; oily fish e.g. sardines, mackerel, wild salmon; nuts and seeds; wholegrains; and tasty herbs and spices. Cooking simple one pot meals, and cooking extra for lunches, allows for safe experimentation and is super convenient - use your favourite wholefood ingredients, and slowly introduce some new ones.

TIP: Use apps such as Meal Planner, Mealtime Meal Plans, or Plan Meals- Meal Planner, to get you started. Select or adapt included meal options, then develop your own combinations, and add to the database. Grocery list generation is automatic in most menu planning apps.

Food waste

Look after the pennies, and protect the environment by only buying what you need - planning meals, and shopping lists helps with this. Use any leftovers or make extra for convenient lunches the next day, and get creative with what's left in your fridge!

TIP: Have a look at the following link for some guidance on storing food produce so it remains fresher for longer <https://lovefoodhatewaste.com/article/food-storage-a-z>

Food safety

Remember to keep safe in the kitchen by *following the 4 Cs* <https://www.safefood.eu/Food-Safety/The-4-Cs.aspx>

TIP Follow the latest *CIEH guidance* of additional measures to use when food shopping during the COVID-19 pandemic <https://www.cieh.org/media/4080/covid-19-safe-shopping-guidelines.pdf>

Thanks for reading and good health!

Please note that the websites recommended are the personal opinion of the tutor