Feel Great
Eat Well

• A Guide for Young People •
Have you ever asked yourself why eating healthily is necessary?

Healthy Eating is necessary for both short-term and long-term good health. Eating healthily can also make you look and feel better. This booklet gives information on the various food groups, their contribution to staying healthy and how you can eat healthily. It does not have to be difficult to eat well, small changes in our dietary patterns and increasingly trying to become more physically active can make a big difference.
Benefits of Healthy Eating

Adhering to a healthy diet has its benefits, some with immediate effect and others worth adopting for good health later in life.

Some immediate benefits that you can notice when you adopt healthy eating include:

- More energy to enjoy all kinds of daily activities including physical activity, for example: running, swimming, football and dancing
- Sufficient nutrients to support adequate growth and development so that full physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health potential can be reached
- Better body weight management - as healthy eating prevents underweight and/or overweight - both of which are to be avoided
- Better mood and wellbeing - A good balanced diet gives us all the essential nutrients needed for our brain to function well.

The other benefit is the reduced risk for developing chronic diseases. These include risk reduction of high blood pressure, high cholesterol, adult-onset diabetes, heart disease, osteoporosis, strokes, and some cancers.
What is healthy eating?

Healthy eating is about including a wide variety of foods in moderation and balance. It is about feeling great and having more energy whilst keeping as healthy as possible. It is not about strict dieting or being unrealistically thin.

One of the first things to learn about healthy eating is how to ‘eat smart’. Eating smart not only means ‘what’ but also about ‘how’ we eat.

To improve your eating habits you should try to follow the Food Pyramid. (Pg 5)

The Food Pyramid shows you that you have to eat mostly foods found at the bottom and eat less of the foods found at the tip of the pyramid. These foods provide lots of calories and very few nutrients for a healthy body.
Eat daily from the 4 main food groups:

**Group 1: Breads, Cereals, Rice, Pasta and Potatoes**

Found at the base of the pyramid, this group provides the carbohydrates for the energy needed for your everyday life. Nearly half the calories in our diet should come from these foods. We should eat at least 6 servings of these foods daily. [A serving is 1 slice of bread, sizeable cup (30g) of cereal, 3 medium-sized potatoes and 100g of cooked rice or pasta. These foods should preferably be included in every meal of the day.]

**Group 2: Fruits and Vegetables – the original fast, easy and delicious snack food!**

Fruits and vegetables are foods that are low in fat and salt and high in dietary fibre. They are also rich in antioxidant vitamins and minerals (protect the arteries and veins). Eating plenty of fruits and vegetables improves intake of vitamin C, carotenoids and other nutrients in our diet that are necessary to maintain good health and avoid ill health later in life. The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that each individual consumes at least 400g or more per day or 5 portions of vegetables and fruits everyday (each portion averages 80g). [A serving of fruit is one fresh fruit, or half a cup of chopped or cooked fruit, or a glass of fruit juice.] [A serving of vegetables is 1 cup of raw leafy vegetables or half cup of other cooked or raw vegetables.]

**Group 3: Milk, Yoghurt and Cheese**

Dairy products are an important source of proteins, vitamins and minerals - especially calcium. Calcium is a very important component for healthy bones and teeth. Young people require about 3 servings of dairy products daily. If weight is an issue, go for a glass of skimmed milk for breakfast or before you go to bed. Try different varieties of low-fat fruit yoghurts, as well as medium-fat cheese such as ricotta, and cheesellets or a ‘reduced-fat’ cheese spread. [One serving is the equivalent of one glass (250ml) of skimmed milk, one carton (175ml) of yoghurt or a 35-45 g portion of low-fat cheese.]

**Group 4: Meat, Fish, Legumes, Eggs and Nuts**

These foods provide animal and plant proteins which are the ‘building blocks’ of life. They are a good source of iron and zinc and consumed as part of a balanced diet, helps in fighting off infections. About two to three servings of these foods are recommended for a young person on a daily basis. It is fine to include small amounts of red meat (beef) in your diet since it is rich in iron and can help in cases where there is lack of adequate iron. Plant proteins such as legumes provide adequate protein yet are low in fat. It is important to also include fish in your weekly diet as it promotes adequate growth, development and good health. [A serving is about 70 to 80 grams of meat or fish or legumes (beans, peas and lentils), one egg or ½ cup nuts.]
Junk Food

Why is it called ‘junk food’?

Most studies have shown that bad eating patterns are linked to the development of health problems. Foods that are likely to lead to health problems are often referred to as ‘junk food’. Many snacks, such as crisps, fast-food cheeseburgers and chips, pastizzi and chocolate (found in the Group 5 of the Food Pyramid), have a high level of fat, saturated fat, sugar or salt - ingredients that are usually best limited to small amounts in individual diets.

Healthy eating does not mean total avoidance of ‘junk food’ that is so popular with young people, but it does mean that you have to be selective and specifically limit your intake of total fat, saturated fat, trans fat, sugar and salt.
‘Prevention is better than cure’

**Too much fat:**
Too much fat in the diet, especially saturated fat and trans fats increases the risk of heart disease. This occurs when fatty plaques start to develop in blood vessels; which in turn reduces blood circulation to the organs including the heart, or brain. Fatty plaques in blood vessels have been found in very young people, even though heart attacks and strokes do not usually happen to people until they get older.

**Too much salt:**
Too much salt in the diet increases the risk of several complications especially high blood pressure, which in turn affects other organs such as the brain, eyes and the heart.

**Too many calories:**
Too many calories from added fat and sugar provide the body with lots of extra/unused energy. An excessive intake of calories compared to the calories burnt through physical activity, leads a person to gain weight. If weight gain is not controlled, a person over time will become overweight and if this is further uncontrolled, can lead to the problem of obesity with its many complications later in life.
Eating Out

When eating out, both at fast-food restaurants or take-outs it is always wise to opt for dishes that are cooked with minimal amount of added fat, such as 'grilled' rather than 'fried' foods. Salad bars are nowadays more readily available, but it is wise to opt for salads containing least amounts of high fat/calorie salad dressings while still preserving taste and flavour with ingredients such as herbs, lemon juice, some olive oil and vinegar. In addition, it is also wise to go for low salt options.

Healthy Snacking

Modern life is fast! Who has the time to eat healthy? When you stop to eat between lessons, work, sports, and meeting friends it may be tempting to grab a burger and chips or crisps and chocolate. Attention has to be given in these situations and junk foods should be replaced by healthy snacking.
Ideas for healthy snacking include

- Low-fat fruit yoghurt.
- Fresh fruit or a handful of dried fruits.
- Vegetables e.g. raw carrots
- Maltese galletti (water biscuits) and small portions of low fat cheese.
- Slice of pizza with healthy toppings.
- Pitta bread filled with tuna and a variety of vegetables.

Alcohol

Contrary to what many people think, alcohol is a contributor to overweight and obesity. One gram of alcohol (found in beer, spirits, and wine) provides 7 calories but no other nutrients like vitamins and minerals. Alcohol also impairs one’s judgement. Drinking alcohol risks good health and can cause other serious problems. Drinking endangers one’s own life and that of others especially if you are ‘drinking and driving’.
Body Image

‘I am fat. I’d be happy if I were taller. I am too skinny. I wish I could have been a bit shorter. I do not like my nose.’

Do these statements sound familiar? Are you used to putting yourself down? If yes, you are not alone. As our bodies change, so does the image of oneself. Many people have trouble adjusting, and this can affect their self-esteem.

Body image is about how someone feels about his or her own physical appearance. For most youths, body image is closely linked to self-esteem as they care more about how others see them. A person who has high self-esteem will make friends easily, is more in control of his or her behaviour, and enjoys life more.

The way forward to create a more positive body image, is to change one’s thinking:

- First stop criticising yourself negatively.
- Avoid holding yourself to unrealistic ideals.
- Avoid comparing yourself to others.
- Know the difference between what you can or cannot change (i.e. your thinking; your behaviour) about yourself.
- Slowly learn to accept yourself (like being shorter or taller) - You are unique!
- Your worth should not be based solely on your looks but on your other good qualities such as your values, ethics, morals and other skills you have acquired over the years! – focus on your positive qualities! Remind yourself that the positive energy that you put out into the world is more important than your physical appearance.
- Fight back against cultural and socially defined ideals.
Weight-loss pills

There are a number of weight-loss pills that can be bought over the counter. These products have become abundant on the market, and claim to be essential for you to lose weight. There are various claims attached to these products. Yet, the advice to youngsters who wish to lose or maintain a good weight is to opt for a healthy diet and include physical activity in their daily lives. When considering taking weight-loss pills always consult your doctor or pharmacist before.

Vegetarian Diets

More and more young people nowadays are following a ‘vegetarian’ diet. Vegetarian diets can be healthy and nutritionally sound if they are carefully planned to include essential nutrients. Vegetarians do not eat meat, poultry or fish.

A young vegetarian (especially females) needs to pay more attention to eating adequate amounts of foods rich in iron (e.g. whole-grain cereals, dark green vegetables, dried fruits, legumes and nuts), folic acid and vitamin B12 (e.g. dried beans, nuts and wholegrain bread) because of the risk of such deficiencies.

When youngsters opt for a vegetarian diet it is a wise idea to talk to a doctor and/or to a nutritionist.
Tips for being healthy by choosing to change and make healthy choices

- Add fruit and vegetables to your meals/snacks everyday.
- Start drinking two more glasses of water a day.
- Try cutting down the amount of ‘junk food’ consumed and maybe have it only as a very occasional treat.
- Choose wholemeal or whole grain bread instead of white.
- Trim visible fat from raw meat, and ‘grill’ rather than ‘fry’.
- Always have something healthy for breakfast. Research shows that breakfast helps young people maintain a healthy weight and to stay active.
- Try cutting down on soft drinks and reduce the intake of alcohol.
- If you feel you are overeating, try to eat smaller portions! Eating more slowly can help your body to detect when ‘feeling full’.
- Exercise! Be physically active for at least 30 minutes or more on most days of the week.
- Have a go at preparing your own meal for family and/or friends. Try a new low fat recipe or snack food each week.
- Always remember that starving yourself will make you more likely to binge eat.
- Try to make one or two small changes toward healthy eating and then persevere. You will feel better!

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