

Healthy eating questionnaire

We all know that eating a healthy, balanced diet is essential in optimising good overall health but do you know what this really means? Take our simple healthy eating questionnaire to see if you're eating healthily or if there is some room for improvement. There are ten multiple-choice questions with advice and top tips along the way to help you boost your eating patterns for life. Good luck!

1. How many portions of fruit and vegetables do you eat in a typical day?

- a) 5 or more.
- b) Between 2 and 4.
- c) Less than 2.

What counts as a portion?

- Fresh, frozen, dried and canned fruit and vegetables all count. A portion is equivalent to around 80 grams.
- Potatoes, yam, plantain, and cassava don't count towards your 5-a-day because they are starchy foods.
- Beans and pulses can only count towards one of your daily portions, no matter how many portions you have.
- A glass (150ml) of 100% fruit or vegetable juice counts as one portion, this is because the juicing process removes most of the fibre from the fruit.

Answers

a) Only 15% of women and 13% of men in the UK are actually meeting the 5-a-day target, so you can congratulate yourself on achieving the recommended five portions of fruit and vegetables every day. Don't forget that it is not only the number of portions that count; variety is equally important. So try to eat one portion from each colour group (red, green, yellow, white, purple and orange varieties of fruit and vegetables) to get the best mix of vitamins and minerals.

b & c) Everyone should try to eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables (at least 400g in total) a day for overall health. There is evidence to show that for every portion of fruit and vegetables eaten there is even greater protection against heart disease and strokes and some cancers. Here are a few tips to help you get your 5-a-day the easy way:

- Tasty examples include a medium pear or banana, one heaped tablespoon of raisins or apricots, a dessert bowl of salad, a handful of grapes or cherries or three heaped tablespoons of vegetables.
- When you feel like a snack, go for fresh or dried fruit instead of reaching for the chocolate biscuits. Or try vegetable crudité's with low fat dips.
- Liven up the food you already eat with colour and texture – put tomatoes, lettuce and cucumber in sandwiches, sprinkle berries and sliced banana over your breakfast cereal, or add lots of vegetables to your pasta and stir-fries or beans and pulses to your soups and casseroles.

2. How often do you enjoy oily fish in the week?

- a) I often eat fish during the week and at least one portion is an oily fish.
- b) I'm lucky if I manage even one portion of fish a week.
- c) No chance. I never eat fish or oily fish.

Answers:

a) Good on you. White fish and especially oily fish are a great addition to your weekly diet and you will be reaping all of the health benefits of omega 3 fats in your diet.

Please take note that women of childbearing age should not eat more than two portions of oily fish a week because they can contain certain pollutants that may effect development.

b & c) If possible, try to eat at least two servings of fish a week, one of which should be oil rich, such as sardines, salmon, trout, pilchards, herring and mackerel. Tinned tuna is sadly not a good source, although fresh tuna does provide moderate amounts.

Oily fish is a valuable source of protein, vitamins and minerals in your diet and contains essential omega 3 fats, which are best known for helping to keeping our heart and circulation healthy. If you

hate the thought of eating fish why not include other foods in your diet that are also good sources of omega 3s. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- Use rapeseed or linseed oil when cooking or as a salad dressing.
- Go nuts! Walnuts, brazil nuts, hazelnuts and pecans are delicious and nutritious on their own, but they are also wonderful crunchy additions to salads, yoghurts or stir-fry – but have just a few at a time because they're not light on calories.
- Sprinkle linseeds (flaxseeds) over your morning breakfast cereal.
- Boost your omega 3 levels with omega 3 enriched eggs. They are similar in look, taste, storage qualities and cooking versatility as normal eggs but are a valuable source of omega 3s.
- If none of the above seems appealing take a daily fish oil supplement (containing long chain omega 3 fatty acids EPA and DHA, 500mg–1g per day).

3. How would you best describe your salt intake?

- a) I don't add salt to my food.
- b) I regularly add salt to my cooking and then often season my food again at the table.
- c) I lead a hectic lifestyle and don't have time to cook. I rely heavily on pre-prepared and convenience foods.

Answers:

a) Well done. You have taken the first step to cutting down on your salt intake, which is important for maintaining good blood pressure. It's recommended that we have less than 6g of salt per day (around a teaspoon) but don't forget that pre-packaged and convenience foods also contain a lot of salt, so another simple way to reduce your salt intake is to include more fresh food and home cooking in your diet.

b) Be careful as adding too much salt to your diet can raise your blood pressure and increase your risk of heart disease and stroke. Try to recondition your salty taste buds and get out of the habit of adding salt to your food at the table and use as little as you can during cooking. Instead of adding

salt, experiment with herbs, spices, lemon juice, chilli, garlic, black pepper or seasoned olive oils to flavour meals.

c) You may be surprised to hear that the majority of the salt you eat is not what you add to your food, but is actually hidden in prepared foods like breakfast cereals, bread, some meats, meat dishes and ready meals, so you could be easily eating too much salt without realising it. Many foods have now also introduced food labelling in the form of either traffic lights or Guideline Daily Amounts (GDA). These labels will provide you with a quick and easy guide to the amount of salt in your food.

4. Do you consider yourself to have a sweet tooth?

a) I don't add sugar to my food and only add it to cooking where necessary.

b) I have stopped adding sugar to my drinks and food, but still crave that sweetness with food.

c) I have a very sweet tooth and eat lots of sugary foods. I always have one or more teaspoons of sugar in my tea and coffee.

Answers:

a) Well done. By limiting the amount of added sugar and sugary foods in your diet you are not only helping protect your teeth from tooth decay, you are saving yourself from lots of unwanted calories, which can cause weight gain if the energy is not burnt off during exercise.

b) Congratulations on cutting down on the added sugar in your diet, but are you aware of the hidden sugar found in many of your everyday foods? From tomato sauces and pickles to breakfast cereals, sugar can be found in all types of savoury foods. Check food labels to see how much sugar is in your food. More than 15g of sugar per 100g means the food is high in sugar, while those that contain 5g or less per 100g are said to be low in sugar. For more sugar saving ideas visit (<http://www.nhs.uk/livewell/goodfood/Pages/Goodfoodhome.aspx>)

c) Try to cut back on sugar! Sugar adds flavour and sweetness to foods but it has no nutritional value and is high in calories (around 20 calories in a teaspoon), so cutting down could help you to look after your waistline. Sugar can also cause tooth decay, especially if it is eaten between meals. Try to cut down on fizzy drinks, cakes, biscuits and pastries, which contain added sugars. This is the kind of sugar we should try to cut down on, rather than sugars that are found naturally in foods such as fruit (fructose) and milk (lactose). Why not try artificial sweeteners in your tea and coffee

such as Splenda, Canderel and Hermesetas? These are virtually free of calories and do not cause tooth decay. For more sugar saving ideas visit (Web link – NHS Choices – <http://www.nhs.uk/livewell/goodfood/Pages/Goodfoodhome.aspx>)

5. How many calories do you think you are consuming in a typical day?

Female

- a) My daily consumption is around 2,000 kcals or less.
- b) I consume more than 2,000 kcals but not daily.
- c) I consume more than 2,000 kcals, often daily.

Male

- a) My daily consumption is 2,500 kcals or less.
- b) I consume more than 2,500 kcals but not daily.
- c) I consume more than 2,500 kcals, often daily.

Answers:

a) Good for you. You are eating the recommended amount of calories that an average adult should eat each day. Although our requirements can vary with our age, weight and lifestyle, if you keep up the good work, you should be able to maintain your body weight throughout your lifespan.

b) If you are not burning off the excess calories at the same time, even small amounts of extra calories each day can lead to steady long-term weight gain. Therefore, if you don't want to cut down on your food, you will need to get more active to burn off those excess calories.

c) It is a fact that excess weight happens when you take in more calories than your body needs. If you want to lose weight forget faddy diets or crash dieting, and instead gradually reduce the number of calories that you eat every day while getting more active to burn off calories at the same time. The only way to keep the weight off is to change your diet and lifestyle for good. For more information on healthy weight loss, visit www.bdaweightwise.com

6. How often do you eat foods rich in saturated* fats?

- a) Not very often.
- b) Occasionally.
- c) Frequently.

*Saturated fat is found in fatty cuts of meats, full fat dairy products (butter, whole milk, cheese, cream), tropical oils (coconut and palm oil) and is also hidden in cakes, chocolate, biscuits, pies and pastries.

Answers:

a) Well done. Your cholesterol levels and heart health will benefit from your low intake of saturated fat. Don't forget that not all fat is bad for your health and unsaturated fat, sometimes called polyunsaturates and monounsaturates (found in olive oil, rapeseed oil, sunflower, soya, and sesame oils), are healthier alternatives and can help lower cholesterol levels. But remember they still provide lots of calories, so go easy on the amount you use.

b & c) Eating less saturated fat is important for keeping your heart healthy, as saturated fat is the kind of fat that raises cholesterol levels – Many of us eat too much saturated fat. As a rule of thumb, women should aim to keep below 20g of saturated fat per day and men below 30g per day. Look closer at food labels so that you can see exactly what you are eating and try to choose more foods low in saturated fat – 1.5g of saturates or less per 100g.

7. How do you start your day?

- a) Typically enjoy a large bowl of a wholegrain breakfast cereal, porridge oats or a couple of slices of wholemeal toast.
- b) Never have time for breakfast/don't feel hungry in the morning.
- c) Love to indulge in a croissant with jam and butter, or a full fried English breakfast before I head off to work.

Answers:

a) Keep up the good work – there is no better way to start the day than with a healthy balanced breakfast.

b) Breakfast really is the most important meal of the day, as it provides valuable vitamins, minerals and fibre, and gets both the body and brain active for the day. A good breakfast can also help you control your weight by staving off mid-morning hunger pangs! So go on, give it a try. For a really nutritious and tasty start to the day, opt for a high fibre breakfast, like a bowl of wholegrain cereal or porridge with semi-skimmed milk, some sliced banana or a sprinkling of raisins and a glass of fruit juice.

c) Although breakfast is the most important meal of the day, try not to have too many fried or continental breakfasts and leave them for a weekend treat, as they are often high in fat and calories. That said, if you love a cooked breakfast and don't want to miss out, it can still be healthy; if you grill your bacon and have a poached egg instead of a fried egg. Add some beans, a grilled tomato, mushrooms, and a glass of orange juice and you will be well on your way to your 5-a-day.

8. Do you think that you are getting enough fibre* in your diet?

a) Yes, I always try to eat wholegrain or wholemeal varieties of bread, rice and pasta every day.

b) Possibly not. I prefer to eat the white varieties of bread, rice and pasta.

c) Not really.

***Fibre – What is it?** Fibre is made up of the parts of plant foods that our bodies cannot digest but is an essential part of our daily diet. There are two types of fibre:

Insoluble fibre – (so called 'nature's broom' or roughage), is found mainly in wholegrain cereals, wholegrain bread, brown rice but also in fruit and vegetables, helps keep you regular and prevents constipation by absorbing water making the stools larger, softer and easier and quicker to pass.

Soluble fibre – found in oats, peas, beans and pulses, and fruit and vegetables can be beneficial in helping to lower your cholesterol levels and regulating your blood sugar levels by slowing down the digestion and absorption of carbohydrates.

Answers:

a) Great. You are probably one of the few people in the UK who actually meets the Guideline Daily Amount of 25g a day and is reaping all the benefits of a high fibre diet.

b & c) Don't be surprised to hear that you are not alone. Most people in the UK are still not eating enough fibre. It is recommended that adults should eat 25g of fibre per day. Here are some suggestions to boost your fibre intake:

- Try choosing high fibre, wholegrain cereals, or sprinkle a high fibre cereal on top of your favourite cereal.
- Check out food labels – a high fibre food has 6g or more per 100g serving and a 'source' of fibre is when a food contains 3g fibre or more per 100g.
- Choose wholemeal or wholegrain bread, rolls, tortillas, pittas and pasta instead of white varieties.
- Don't forget to eat the skins of fruit, as this is where most of the fibre is found.
- Add legumes, such as baked beans, lentils, peas, and chickpeas to your cooking, casseroles, soups and salads to get a fibre boost.
- Don't forget you will need to increase your fibre intake slowly and remember to drink enough water — ideally six to eight glasses per day.

9. Do you regularly enjoy eating out or ordering takeaways at home?

a) Hardly ever. I enjoy home cooking.

b) Occasionally as a treat.

c) Too many, too often.

Answers:

a) Congratulate yourself. Cooking from scratch is always a great and often cheaper option, as you know exactly what has gone into your food. Nowadays with all of the wonderful foods, ingredients, herbs and spices on offer you don't have to deny yourself or friends to eat healthily.

b) You have got the right idea. There is no such thing as good or bad foods, only good or bad eating habits. All foods have a place in a balanced diet and restaurant food and takeaways are to be enjoyed as an occasional treat, just not as an everyday meal as they can be deceptively high in fat and salt. If buying convenience foods, get into the habit of checking the nutrition labels and choosing foods with the lowest combined amount of fat, saturated fat and salt. A little is less than 3g of fat, 1.5g of saturates, 0.1g of sodium or 0.3g of salt.

c) Be careful and do watch your intake of fried snack foods, deep-fried foods, takeaways and convenience foods that add extra fat and salt, without adding nutrients. Don't forget, eating is meant to be enjoyed and all foods have a place in a balanced diet, but try to have them as an occasional treat, not as an everyday meal.

10. On average, how many units* of alcohol do you consume in a day?

*What is a unit?

The number of units of alcohol in a drink depends on its strength and size. As a guide, the NHS suggests that a pint of (*ABV 4%) lager is 2.3 units, a 175ml glass of (ABV 13%) wine is 2.3 units and 25ml glass of (ABV 40%) single spirit and mixer is 1 unit.

*Percentages given in brackets refer to Alcohol by Volume (ABV) of a stated drink.

Female

- a) My daily consumption is between 1 to 2 units a day or less.
- b) I consume around 2 to 3 units of alcohol a day.
- c) I consume more than 2 to 3 units, often daily.

Male

- a) My daily consumption is between 2 to 3 units a day or less.
- b) I consume around 3 to 4 units of alcohol a day.
- c) I consume more than 3 to 4 units, often daily.

Answers:

- a) Well done for being a sensible drinker. By keeping to the recommended limits for alcohol, you may not only be saving yourself from the extra calories, but moderate drinking (that is 1 or 2 units a day) may offer you some heart health benefits.
- b) Healthy drinking guidelines recommend that men should not regularly drink more than 3–4 units a day and women should not regularly drink more than 2–3 units a day. But for good health, it's also a good idea to spread your drinking throughout the week, avoid binge drinking and have at least 2 alcohol free days a week.
- c) Regularly drinking above the recommended daily limits (that's 3–4 units a day for men and 2–3 units a day for women) can be damaging to your health. Not only is alcohol high in calories providing seven calories a gram which can easily make you put on weight, drinking too much can lead to a wide range of health problems, including cancer, liver disease, stroke and high blood pressure, as well as affect your mental health.

How did you score:

Mostly As

Congratulations. Scoring high on the As means that you already clearly know how to make the best nutritional choices and are doing all you can to eat a healthy balanced diet to help maintain your overall health and wellbeing. You've obviously remembered all of the key healthy eating messages that health experts have conveyed over recent years. However, if you want to learn some new ways to boost your eating habits even further, check out our eating for health guide, based on the principles of the Food Standards Agency eatwell plate.

Mostly Bs

If most of your answers were Bs, it means that there is room for improvement in your diet choices. Small changes to your diet that you can make now, can make a big difference to your health in the future. Start by taking note of the areas where you scored the worst and make these the focus of the changes you make. Even in today's economic climate where food budgets are tight and hectic lifestyles can make healthy eating a difficult goal to achieve, it is essential to make an effort to eat the healthiest food you can. Healthy eating does not have to be expensive and it does not mean you're going to miss out and have to put up with tasteless, boring food!

Mostly Cs

Scoring high on the Cs means that your diet may not be as healthy as it might be. You're probably the first to admit to yourself that you have let your healthy eating slip a little. However, the good news is that it's never too late to start eating and living well. Even small changes to your eating choices could significantly improve your health and wellbeing, as well as help reduce the risk of many long-term health problems such as obesity, diabetes and heart disease. Don't be tempted to change everything at once: aim for one change a week and stick to it. Talk with your GP, practice nurse or State Registered Dietitian for additional or more tailored advice.