

Irish Heart Foundation
Nutrition and Adults Fact Sheet

What is healthy eating?

- Healthy eating is essential for good health and what we eat can help protect us or increase our chances of developing conditions such as heart disease.
- A healthy diet contains a variety of foods and is high in fruit, vegetables and fibre and low in fat, salt and sugar.

Link to heart disease:

- It is estimated that poor diets are responsible for about one third of premature cardiovascular disease¹.
- A poor diet is linked to overweight and raised levels of cholesterol and blood pressure.

The Irish Population's Diet:

- The Irish diet has changed dramatically in the last number of decades in terms of the variety of food available, food preferences and food technology²
- Current average fat intakes are higher (37% of energy from food) than recommended (less than 35% of energy from food)³
- While saturated fat and monounsaturated fat show a general trend of decreasing intake with age, intakes of polyunsaturated fat tend to peak with men and women aged 35-54⁴
- Fruit and vegetable consumption has gradually increased, especially amongst men⁴.
- 24% of food and drink is consumed outside the home³
- Food portion size have been shown to have an influence on weight gain. For example consuming large fries as opposed to regular fries on a regular basis could give 5.7:1 odds of becoming obese³

Key healthy eating messages:

- Follow the Food Pyramid guidelines each day and choose a wide variety of foods from the four main food groups⁵.
- Watch portion sizes of food. Use the Food Pyramid as a guide.
- Eat more breads, cereals, potatoes, pasta and rice. These foods are high in energy, but low in fat. Eat these foods at each meal and choose wholegrain varieties regularly.
- Choose 5 servings of fruit and vegetables each day. Fruit and vegetables are packed with vitamins, minerals and fibre. Enjoy a variety of fresh, frozen, dried or tinned fruit as well as fresh fruit, fresh or frozen vegetables and salad. Choose green leafy vegetables and citrus fruits frequently.
- Choose 3 servings of milk, cheese and yogurt each day. They are good sources of calcium and vitamin D for strong bones and protein for growth and repair of the body. Choose low fat varieties of these foods especially if you have high cholesterol or are overweight.
- Choose 2 servings of meat, poultry, fish or alternatives daily. These foods are a good source of protein and iron. Choose lean cuts of meat and trim off any visible fat. Use low fat cooking methods such as oven-baking, grilling, poaching or stir-frying. Eat oil-rich fish once or twice a week.
- Use fats and oils sparingly. Choose fats high in monounsaturates or polyunsaturates. Limit fried food to once or twice a week. Only have small amounts of high fat/sugar snacks and drinks and not too often.
- Try to reduce salt intake by gradually reducing the amount you use at the table and during cooking and by cutting down on high-salt foods such as packet soups, sauces and salty savoury snacks.

References:

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3. Irish Universities Nutrition Alliance (2001) North/South Ireland Food Consumption Survey.
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5. Department of Health and Children. Food Pyramid.
www.healthpromotion.ie