

**Move in a healthy direction**

**Healthy Eating:**

**An Employer's Guide**

Logo, Medway Healthy Workplaces

 

# Healthy Eating in the Workplace

## **Introduction**

Nutrition can have a positive impact on your physical and mental health – from supporting your immune system and helping you to manage stress, to aiding sleep and concentration. Eating the right amount of a wide variety of foods will support us to maintain a healthy body weight. Maintaining a healthy weight and making the right choices in what we eat can reduce the risk of common diseases and disorders such as obesity, coronary heart disease, stroke, osteoporosis, diabetes, dental disease and certain types of cancer.

In England in 2018, 63% of adults were above a healthy weight and 28% of those adults were classified as obese; obese adults were also more likely to have obese children. In addition, only 28% of adults were eating the recommended five portions of fruit and vegetables a day, with an average intake of 3.7 portions a day.

With adults spending a third of their life at work where they may consume one or more meals and snacks, creating a healthier food environment for employees can make an important contribution to the health and wellbeing of employees and their families.

## **What is healthy eating?**

In the UK, the national model for healthy eating is the Eatwell Guide. It shows the proportions in which different types of foods are needed to achieve a healthy balanced diet. The proportions are representative of food consumption over a day or even a week, and not each mealtime. You may approach the food and drink provision in your workplace by using The Eatwell Guide.

The Eatwell Guide shows that to have a healthy, balanced diet, people should try to:

* eat at least 5 portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables every day
* base meals on higher fibre starchy foods like potatoes, bread, rice or pasta
* have some dairy or dairy alternatives (such as soya drinks)
* eat some beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other protein
* choose unsaturated oils and spreads, and eat them in small amounts
* drink plenty of fluids (at least 6 to 8 glasses a day)
* if you are having foods and drinks that are high in fat, salt and sugar, have these less often and in small amounts.
* try to choose a variety of different foods from the 5 main food groups to get a wide range of nutrients.

Most people in the UK eat and drink too many calories, too much saturated fat, sugar and salt, and not enough fruit, vegetables, oily fish or fibre.

### **Fruit and Vegetables**

Fruit and vegetables are a good source of vitamins and minerals and fibre and should make up just over a third of the food you eat each day. It's recommended that you eat at least 5 portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables every day. They can be fresh, frozen, canned, dried or juiced. There's evidence that people who eat at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day have a lower risk of heart disease, stroke and some cancers.

A portion is:

* 80g of fresh, canned or frozen fruit and vegetables
* 30g of dried fruit – which should be kept to mealtimes
* 150ml glass of fruit juice or smoothie – but do not have more than 1 portion a day as these drinks are sugary and can damage teeth
* Just 1 apple, banana, pear or similar-sized fruit is 1 portion each.
* A slice of pineapple or melon is also 1 portion, and 3 heaped tablespoons of vegetables is another portion.

### **Starchy foods in your diet**

Starchy foods such as potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and cereals, should make up just over a third of everything you eat. This means your meals should be based on these foods. Choose wholegrain or wholemeal varieties of starchy foods, such as brown rice, whole‑wheat pasta, and brown, wholemeal or higher fibre white bread. They contain more fibre, and usually more vitamins and minerals, than white varieties. Fibre can help keep your bowels healthy and can help you feel full, which means you are less likely to eat too much. Starchy foods are our main source of carbohydrate and are a good source of energy and the main source of a range of nutrients in our diet. As well as starch and fibre they contain calcium, iron and B vitamins.

### **Milk and dairy foods (and alternatives)**

Milk and dairy foods, such as cheese and yoghurt, are good sources of protein. They also contain calcium, which helps keep your bones healthy, as well as vitamin A and some B vitamins. Choose lower fat and lower sugar products where possible. Choose semi‑skimmed, 1% fat or skimmed milk, as well as lower fat hard cheeses or cottage cheese, and lower fat, lower sugar yoghurt. Dairy alternatives, such as soya drinks, are also included in this food group. When buying alternatives, choose unsweetened, calcium‑fortified versions.

Much of the fat in milk and dairy foods is saturated fat. For older children and adults, eating too much fat can contribute to excess energy intakes, leading to becoming overweight. A diet high in saturated fat can also lead to raised levels of cholesterol in the blood, and this can put you at increased risk of having a heart attack or stroke.

### **Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins**

These foods are all good sources of protein, which is essential for the body to grow and repair itself. They are also good sources of a range of vitamins and minerals. Meat is a good source of protein, vitamins and minerals, including iron, zinc and B vitamins. It is also one of the main sources of vitamin B12. Choose lean cuts of meat and skinless poultry whenever possible to cut down on fat. Always cook meat thoroughly. Try to eat less red and processed meat like bacon, ham and sausages.

Eggs and fish are also good sources of protein and contain many vitamins and minerals. Oily fish is particularly rich in omega-3 fatty acids. Aim to eat at least 2 portions of fish a week, including 1 portion of oily fish. You can choose from fresh, frozen or canned, but remember that canned and smoked fish can often be high in salt.

Pulses, including beans, peas and lentils, are naturally very low in fat and high in fibre, protein, vitamins and minerals.

Nuts are high in fibre, and unsalted nuts make a good snack. But they do still contain high levels of fat, so eat them in moderation.

### **Oils and spreads**

Some fat in the diet is essential, but on average people in the UK eat too much saturated fat. It is important to get most of your fat from unsaturated oils and spreads. Swapping to unsaturated fats can help lower cholesterol. Remember that all types of fat are high in energy and should be eaten in small amounts.

### **Eat less saturated fat, sugar and salt**

Too much saturated fat can increase the amount of cholesterol in the blood, which increases your risk of developing heart disease. Regularly consuming foods and drinks high in sugar increases your risk of obesity and tooth decay. Eating too much salt can raise your blood pressure, which increases your risk of getting heart disease or having a stroke.

### **Fluids**

You need to drink plenty of fluids to stop you getting dehydrated. The government recommends drinking 6 to 8 glasses every day. This is in addition to the fluid you get from the food you eat.  All non-alcoholic drinks count, but water, lower fat milk and lower sugar drinks, including tea and coffee, are healthier choices. Try to avoid sugary soft and fizzy drinks, as they are high in calories. They are also bad for your teeth. Even unsweetened fruit juice and smoothies are high in free sugar. Remember to drink more fluids during hot weather.

### **Calories and healthy weight**

The amount of energy in an item of food or drink is measured in calories. When we eat and drink more calories than we use up, our bodies store the excess as body fat. If this continues, over time we may put on weight. As a guide, an average man needs around 2,500kcal (10,500kJ) a day to maintain a healthy body weight. For an average woman, that figure is around 2,000kcal (8,400kJ) a day. Our bodies need energy to keep us alive and our organs functioning normally. Our bodies use up that energy through everyday movement. To maintain a stable weight, the energy we put into our bodies must be the same as the energy we use through normal bodily functions and physical activity. An important part of a healthy diet is balancing the energy you put into your bodies with the energy you use.

## **Why does Healthy Eating matter to employers?**

We spend around 60% of our waking hours at work and during this time, we can consume at least a third of our daily calorie allowance during our working day. The workplace clearly has a role to play in ensuring the environment supports and encourages adults to make healthier choices and promote healthy eating.

## **Benefits of healthy eating in the workplace**

* Increased energy
* Increased productivity
* Decreased absenteeism
* Decreased medical claims, disability and insurance costs related to nutrition related chronic conditions
* Lower rates of chronic diseases and injuries

## **Links to Musculoskeletal health**

We have seen that healthy eating, combined with physical activity can help us to stay a healthy weight and improves our physical health and our mental health. It can also help us to have good musculoskeletal health (MSK) which is an important component of maintaining our functional ability as we age.

In 2018, MSK problems were the second most common cause of sickness absence, which accounted for 27.8 million days lost in work (19.7% of total sickness absence), surpassed only by absence due to minor illness such as cough and colds. MSK conditions affect the bones, joints, muscles and spine. These include inflammatory conditions, rheumatoid arthritis; MSK pain, osteoarthritis and back pain and osteoporosis and fragility fractures.

Each year 20% of people in the UK see a doctor about an MSK problem. Susceptibility to MSK problems are increased when people are physically inactive, overweight and obese with 7 out of 10 people with MSK above a healthy weight. You can find out more about Musculoskeletal Health in our employer’s guide. Please contact us for a copy or visit our [website.](https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200221/a_better_medway/1134/employers_guides)

## **Healthy Eating and Workplace Health and Safety Law**

[The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992](https://www.hse.gov.uk/pUbns/priced/l24.pdf) provide the regulations that employers should follow regarding eating, access to water and facilities for rest breaks. You can read the full regulations on the HSE [website.](https://www.hse.gov.uk/)

## **What employers can do to help**

The following points are designed to help you in considering what you can do as an organisation with regards to healthy eating for your staff.

### **Food provision**

Do people have access to a canteen at work, and if so what does it provider? Are healthy options on offer? Work with employees to identify what they need to help them to make healthier food choices. Making adjustments to portion sizes and providing information on the calorie content of food all can support employees to eat more healthily and make an informed choice. The NHS ‘One You’ campaign aims to support people to be more calorie aware when they are out and about suggests around a 400-600-600 kcal split over breakfast-lunch-dinner. Use this as a guide when planning food for staff restaurants or canteen.

People are more like to buy products in easy reach. Consider how to use product placement to encourage healthier behaviours such as making tap water highly visible and freely available and offering fruit at tills. Avoid placing foods and drinks that are high in fat, sugar or salt by the till or in other easy to grab areas.

Could healthier options be subsidised/promoted e.g. fruit and vegetables? Work with purchasing and/or catering managers to improve the offer of food and drink and look at the wording and requirements in your contracts (particularly when re-tendering). Use a pricing policy to support healthier choices.

### **Vending Machines**

Vending machines have been criticised for providing convenient access to high fat, sugar and salt (HFSS) food and drinks. There are a good number of healthier options available to stock vending machines and this need not mean having chilled vending machines filled with fruit. The British Dietetic Association offer guidance on ‘Healthier choices’ for vending machines which are based on UK Government Buying Standards for Food and Catering. These include offering confectionary in the smallest single serve portion available, savoury snacks of 30g or less and limits on sugar sweetened beverages. Experiment with encouraging healthier options in your vending machines, such as placing them at eye level. Research has shown that changes to vending machines can still be financially viable with these healthier options. The Medway Healthy Workplace Programme can provide further guidance on healthy vending. Please [contact us](mailto:workplacehealth@medway.gov.uk?subject=Healthy%20Vending%20Guidance) for more information.

### **Meetings and Training**

Provide healthier options at meetings and events and consider if meetings could take place standing or walking. During training days, provide healthy alternatives; unsalted nuts and seeds, plain popcorn and bunches of grapes are eaten just as easily as bowls of sweets or biscuits and will help attendees with their concentration and energy levels during the day.

### **Providing Facilities and food from home**

Employees may prefer to bring their own food to work, even when a staff restaurant/canteen or vending machines are available. Employers can create a positive environment for food with appropriate storage space, including refrigerators, and simple food preparation facilities such as a microwave oven. Employees will have greater control over what they eat and drink if they can bring and prepare their own meals.

Provide areas where people can come away from their desks and eat in a relaxed environment with colleagues. This break will increase their productivity and wellbeing and employees should be encouraged to take this time away from their workspace.

Could you encourage discussion about food brought in for special occasions and events like birthdays or anniversaries? What healthier alternatives are there for the usual celebratory cakes that could be provided instead or as well as? Could there be a shared day? What about the food stored in the desk drawer for snacking when energy levels are low or the team biscuit tin by the kettle? What healthier options could be available or provided? How could you support employees in making these choices? Could you encourage changing the team biscuit tin to a fruit bowl? Could you display a selection of healthier snacks for employees to try?

### **Providing information and opportunities**

Support employees with awareness and knowledge about healthy eating and how to make healthier choices. Offering or signposting to cooking or healthy eating courses can support employees to prepare quick healthy breakfasts or packed lunches. Provide workshops on label reading and create an area where information can be posted about healthy eating and nutrition. Use your communication channels to send out nutrition information via emails or newsletters.

### **Other local establishments**

What facilities are available within walking distance? Local shops, garages or cafés? If you are a major customer – what influence can you have on what the venues are stocking and selling?

**The following list provides examples of initiatives that will support and promote better health and wellbeing in general, with some specific for healthy eating. They are based on the latest Health and Wellbeing research and best practice.**

* Ensure senior management are on board with health and wellbeing initiatives.
* Mention your provision for health and wellbeing at on-boarding so staff are aware of the help available from day one. A good on-boarding programme can also help new team members to connect with colleagues, supporting health and wellbeing in the future.
* Investigate engaging an employee assistance provider (staff counselling). If this is not an option, promote local support services available. Set up a notice board either in a staff room or on the company shared drives to promote good health messages and signpost staff to sources of support.
* Look at absence management policies and be clear on time away from the workplace for medical appointments or for time allowed to attend weight loss support.
* Provide colleagues with someone to talk to other than their immediate line manager. You could offer them to talk to a member of the HR team if you have one, another manager or a colleague who is a health champion.
* Take part in various campaigns, which can improve health awareness such as Healthy Eating week, Diabetes awareness, World Cancer day, Nutrition and Hydration week, Oral Health week, National Cholesterol month. These activities can help to break down stigma and will improve knowledge in the workforce and increase understanding towards colleagues living with long-term health conditions. A third of people with long-term health conditions do not feel that their colleagues understand their health needs.
* Offer training for managers. This is available from various organisations, including ACAS and will help equip them to better support their teams.

## **Useful Resources – relevant useful links for further info**

* [A Better Medway](http://www.abettermedway.co.uk) - local health improvement advice and support for Medway
* Access to work programme for support and equipment at work when you have long term health condition or disability [https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work](http://www.gov.uk/access-to-work)
* [One You Kent:](https://www.kent.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/health/one-you-kent) local health improvement advice and information for Kent
* Access to work programme for support and equipment at work when you have long term health condition or disability [https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work](http://www.gov.uk/access-to-work)
* [Every Mind Matters](https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/) Mental Health information from the NHS and Public Health England
* [www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-eatwell-guide](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-eatwell-guide) Eatwell Guide
* [www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/the-eatwell-guide/](http://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/the-eatwell-guide/) Eatwell Guide
* [www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg43/chapter/Key-priorities-for-implementation](http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg43/chapter/Key-priorities-for-implementation) Obesity prevention guidance with workplaces being a key priority for implementation.
* [www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg43/chapter/1-Guidance#public-health-recommendations](http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg43/chapter/1-Guidance#public-health-recommendations) Obesity prevention with recommendations for workplaces.
* [assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\_data/file/595129/Healthier\_and\_more\_suistainable\_GBSF\_checklist.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/595129/Healthier_and_more_suistainable_GBSF_checklist.pdf) Government Buying Standards for Food and Catering Services (GBSF) Checklist
* [assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\_data/file/726721/Leeds\_Vending\_v3.4.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/726721/Leeds_Vending_v3.4.pdf) Hospital vending machines: helping people make healthier choices. Findings from research into how changes to vending machine product availability and positioning across Leeds Teaching Hospital altered purchasing choices.
* [www.bdaworkready.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Healthy-Vending-Report\_FINAL-OCTOBER-2018.pdf](http://www.bdaworkready.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Healthy-Vending-Report_FINAL-OCTOBER-2018.pdf) Healthier vending - Criteria for better choice and healthier choice products
* [nhsforthvalley.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Employers-Guide-Change-4-Life.pdf](https://nhsforthvalley.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Employers-Guide-Change-4-Life.pdf) How to use Change4life to create a healthier workforce
* <https://www.igd.com/charitable-impact/healthy-eating/workplace/research> Full report conducted with the Behaviour and Health Research Unit at the University of Cambridge to find the most effective ways to encourage people to make healthier choices at work.
* <https://www.bhf.org.uk/informationsupport/publications/health-at-work/health-at-work-top-tips-for-putting-healthy-eating-into-practice-in-the-workplace> Top tips for putting healthy eating into practice from British Heart Foundation.
* <https://www.bhf.org.uk/informationsupport/publications/health-at-work/health-at-work-healthy-eating-workshops> Healthy Eating Workshops from British Heart Foundation.

## **Contact**

For a no obligation meeting to get the Workplace Health programme started in your business, or for further information please contact:

By email [workplacehealth@medway.gov.uk](mailto:workplacehealth@medway.gov.uk?subject=Contact%20from%20Employer%20Guide%20downloaded%20from%20the%20website). By telephone 01634 334307 or visit the [website.](http://www.medway.gov.uk/healthyworkplace)

Thank you to all those who have contributed to this guide: Members of the Public Health Team,

The following sources of information were consulted in the production of this guide:

* Business in the Community Public Health England Toolkits:
* Government Buying Standards for Food and Catering: IGD
* Health and Safety Executive
* British Dietetic Association