

Be your best

A guide to eating well and feeling good for young people.

When I get out and get active I feel pumped and happy about myself
Frank, 17

Eating well and feeling good is about more than just putting “healthy” food into our mouths. It’s about balancing what we eat with what we do; making good food choices, responding to our body’s needs, and enjoying what we eat. This fact sheet gives tips for young people (aged 12-18) on how to eat well to help you look and feel good, and to perform at your best.

What is a balanced diet?

A balanced diet basically comes down to choosing food from all the food groups – breads and cereals, vegetables, fruit, dairy and meat/meat alternatives. It also means you can occasionally include some of those “extras” too – snack type foods that add a bit of fun and variety.

That’s where the balance comes in – choosing how often you have certain foods, how much of them you have, and balancing this with your body’s needs for nutrients and energy.

Get the balance right and you can have a generally healthy diet, with the odd treat here and there, and feel good about your body - having a healthy weight and the energy to do all the things you need to – school, work, sports, and just getting out being active and having fun. If the balance isn’t right that’s when you can run into problems like feeling flat and worn out, not having the energy to concentrate, weight loss or too much weight gain.

To get the balance right aim for:

- > Plenty of fruit and vegetables - Go for 2 & 5 – 2 fruit and 5 veggie serves each day, just like the TV ads say
- > Protein and nutrients like iron, calcium and zinc for growth, strength and repair - Choose a lean protein food like red meat, chicken, fish, eggs or lentils each day. Having at least 3 serves of dairy every day is essential for bone growth and strength too.
- > Carbs for energy – grainy is best. Choose foods like breakfast cereals, breads, crackers, rice, noodles and pasta to provide energy in your meals.
- > Activity! Get your body moving at least 60 minutes each day, and step away from the screen. Outside of the time you spend at the computer for school or work, limit your time in front of the screen (TV, computer, iPad, video games) to 2 hours each day.
- > Not too many “junk foods” or “extras” – Go easy on foods with a lot of fat, salt or sugar, that don’t have much of the good stuff like vitamins and fibre. They are okay to have occasionally or in small amounts. If you have too much you’re more likely to have a hard time managing your weight and energy levels, and can put yourself at risk of health problems. For tips on managing your weight, see

http://www.wch.sa.gov.au/services/az/other/nutrition/documents/Eat_well_be_active.pdf

What about drinks?

Fluids keep your body hydrated, so you feel good and your body systems work well. If you don’t drink enough you can feel flat, get headaches and have difficulty concentrating. How much you need depends on your body size, but on average aim to drink about one and a half litres of fluid or more each day. Active people need to drink even more.

Caffeine

Caffeine is a stimulant that occurs naturally in some food and drinks (like coffee beans, tea leaves, kola nuts that make cola drinks and cocoa in chocolate products) and is added to others, like energy drinks. Sometimes people drink caffeinated drinks for a 'pick me up' to help them feel more awake and alert, but too much caffeine can make you anxious, restless and make it difficult to focus.

It's best for young people to limit caffeinated drinks. As different drinks have varying amounts of caffeine, and people respond differently, it is difficult to say just how much is okay to have. Food Standards Australia New Zealand says you can get anxious after having 3 milligrams of caffeine per kilogram of body weight. So do the maths, and use this table as a guide to how much caffeine different drinks contain.

Eg if you weigh 40 kg: $40 \times 3 = 120\text{mg}$ of caffeine. That's like limiting to 2 cans of cola or 1 strong coffee a day.

Drink	Caffeine content
Percolated coffee	60-120 mg / 250ml cup
'Energy' drinks	80 mg / 250 ml can
Instant coffee (1 teaspoon/cup)	60-80 mg / 250 ml cup
Tea	10-50 mg / 250 ml cup
Coca Cola	48.75mg / 375ml can

Too much coffee made me wide awake and I could not focus; my body was tired but my mind very restless

Georgina, 16

Source: Food Standards Australia New Zealand 2010

For more information on caffeine see [cyh.com](http://www.cyh.com)

<http://www.cyh.com/HealthTopics/HealthTopicDetails.aspx?p=243&np=163&id=2155>

Alcohol

Alcohol is a chemical in some drinks like beer, wine and spirits, which affects the brain and nervous system, altering things like judgement, reflexes and behaviour. Drinking alcohol can cause harm for young people, especially under the age of 15. Large amounts of alcohol or binge drinking is even more dangerous, and even small amounts of alcohol contribute to problems like risky behaviours and excess weight.

The best choice for young people is not to drink alcohol. Young adults, over the age of 18 are legally allowed to drink alcohol, but safe drinking behaviours are still very important. For more information on alcohol and its effects visit the Drug and Alcohol Services South Australia website www.dassa.sa.gov.au

Eating well, and feeling good, for every body

Having a positive body image is extremely important

Alice, 16

How we look and how we feel are linked, and eating well helps you to look good and feel good. But it's important to remember that everybody is different, and everyone's body is different. If you are a healthy weight and eat pretty well most of the time, don't be too hard on yourself or think you need to look like elite sports stars or models in glossy magazines. Following the latest popular diet can mean you miss out on important nutrients, lower your energy levels and moods, and lead to long term poor eating habits. While eating well and being active is good for you, dieting or over exercising can put too much stress on your body and your emotional wellbeing.

If you are struggling with your weight, how you feel about your body, or your relationship with food it's okay to ask for help. Talk to an adult that you trust, or make an appointment with your local doctor. For more information on body image see:

http://www.headroom.net.au/library/body_image_0.pdf

How can you eat well on the run?

Eating and drinking away from home can be tricky. Many people feel that it's harder to find healthy food, or that it's more expensive. Sometimes this is true, but most of the time if you make good choices you can still eat well and look after your wallet when you are away from home.

Be prepared and pack some snacks. If you know you'll be away from home at a meal or snack time, take a few food choices along with you. Good ideas include food that won't get easily damaged in your bag, and that doesn't need to be in a fridge – fruit with hard skins that are easy to peel, like bananas or mandarins, packets of rice crackers or popcorn, frozen tetrapaks of juice or UHT flavoured milk, muesli bars, and a bottle of water.

If you are buying food while you are out, avoid the traps, and choose the best option available. The table below shows some good ways to swap your choices to be a little healthier when eating out:

Instead of...	Go for...
Large burger, fries and soft drink meal	Grilled chicken burger or wrap with extra salad and juice or water
Supreme deep pan pizza and soft drink	Vegetarian thin crust pizza and mineral water
Pie and thick shake	Hot dog and sauce/mustard, no butter and reduced fat flavoured milk
Schnitzel and chips	Grilled steak, baked potato and salad
Large latte or hot chocolate and chocolate mud cake	Small skim latte or hot chocolate and raisin toast

Cook up a storm

If you want to eat better, try brushing up on your cooking skills. Preparing food yourself means you know exactly what goes into it, and you can create dishes that suit your tastes and your budget. There are lots of good websites for recipes and cooking skills, try one like <http://www.healthyfoodguide.com.au/recipes> to get you started.

Unleash your energy

It's important for everybody to get out and get active. It can be fun and casual activities like walking, bike riding, skating, dancing and social team sports, or more organised activity like competitive sports. Fuelling your body with the right food and drink is especially important for young people involved in sport- for both training and competition. When you eat and drink well you can keep going for longer, recover more quickly and potentially perform better.

If you are exercising or training regularly it is important that you include enough carbohydrates, protein and fluid. Your everyday meals should be based on low fat, higher fibre carbohydrates such as bread, pasta, rice and starchy veggies. Including low fat protein like lean red meat, chicken, fish and eggs with meals is important for building and maintaining muscle. If your goal is to "bulk up" or increase muscle mass, remember that eating enough carbohydrate is just as important as getting enough protein. For more information on building muscle mass see:

<http://www.sportsdietitians.com.au/content/2567/IncreasingMuscleMass/>

What you eat and drink before and after training and competition will help fuel your body for the session, allowing you to train harder and for longer, as well as assist your body to recover after the session. Snacks should be low fat and low fibre foods you have had before (it's not a good idea to try a new food before a game in case it gives you an upset stomach while you're exercising). Try ideas like a jam or honey sandwich, pikelets with jam or a banana, or liquid snacks like a fruit smoothie with low fat milk or a fruit yogurt. Keeping snacks in the car, like a box of muesli or breakfast bars, means there is always something on hand to have on the way to or home from sport.

Drinking fluid during exercise is needed to replace fluids lost in sweat. If you don't drink enough fluid you can become dehydrated. Dehydration can have negative effects on your health and performance, and exercising will actually feel harder than when you are well hydrated.

When you don't drink enough water you feel a bit lethargic, but it's quickly fixed by having a drink.

Alistair, 18

Water is generally a good choice for most exercise, but if you are exercising for longer than 1 hour at a high intensity in warm conditions it may be worth combining sports drinks with water to replace the salts you lose in your sweat. For more information on what to eat for different sports check out: <http://www.sportsdietitians.com.au/foodforyoursport/>

Vegetarian eating

Young people might be vegetarian for lots of different reasons, and there are different types of vegetarian diets. Some cut out meat and seafood, some also cut out eggs, and some also cut out dairy foods. If are vegetarian, try to pay special attention to getting a balanced diet so you get enough of the vitamins and minerals that could be lacking.

- > Make sure you get a source of protein every day, such as eggs and dairy foods if you eat them, as well as nuts, peanut butter, and legumes like baked beans, chickpeas and lentils.
- > Choose foods high in iron, like fortified breakfast cereals, breads and some milks and juices. Choose vegetarian foods that are naturally higher in iron like nuts and seeds, lentils, tofu, green leafy vegetables, wholemeal or wholegrain breads and cereals.
- > If you avoid dairy foods, include calcium and B12 fortified substitutes, like soy milk and soy yoghurt. Having 3 serves each day is important for bone growth and strength.

For more information on healthy vegetarian eating, see

<http://www.cyh.com/HealthTopics/HealthTopicDetails.aspx?p=243&np=292&id=2994>

What goes in must come out...

You may not be all that comfortable talking about it, but young people often wonder if how often they go to the toilet, and what comes out when they do, is normal. You can always ask your doctor – particularly if you are concerned that your bowel actions or urine aren't normal – they are usually very comfortable talking about body parts and functions, that's part of their job! But if you want to look for information try: <http://www.bladderbowel.gov.au/all/>. For information on how eating and drinking well can help with constipation, see

<http://www.cyh.com/HealthTopics/HealthTopicDetails.aspx?p=243&np=292&id=2211>

More information

For further youth health and nutrition information contact your local doctor or a dietitian, or the following youth health services:

Youth Healthline

The Youth Healthline is a telephone service for young people aged 12 to 25 years in South Australia. It is available Monday to Friday, 9am - 5pm. Phone: **1300 13 17 19**.

The Second Story

The Second Story (TSS) is the youth section of Women's and Children's Health Network. TSS is a free, confidential health service for young people aged 12 to 25 years.

TSS Central	57 Hyde St, Adelaide, 5000.	Phone 8232 0233
TSS North	Gillingham St, Elizabeth, 5113	Phone 8255 3477
TSS South	50A Beach Rd, Christies Beach, 5165	Phone 8326 6053

Food product information and websites contained in this resource were up to date at the time of printing.

For more information

Women's and Children's Health Network
Nutrition Department
72 King William Road
North Adelaide SA 5006
Telephone: (08) 8161 7233

