

## PATIENT INFORMATION ON NUTRITION

### Section 1: Why Nutrition Matters

#### *Eating well doesn't have to be confusing*

Many people feel overwhelmed by food advice — too many opinions, not enough clarity. But most of the best evidence says something surprisingly simple:



- **Eat mostly whole, minimally processed foods.**
- **Keep your portions sensible.**
- **Include a variety of colourful plants, healthy fats, and quality protein.**
- **Cut back on ultra-processed snacks, sugar, and refined carbs.**
- **And move your body most days.**

It's not about being perfect — it's about eating well most of the time, in a way that feels realistic and sustainable for you.

#### *Why does it matter?*

The way we eat affects almost every aspect of our health — from how much energy we have each day, to our risk of heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and memory problems later in life.

People in the UK are living longer, but many spend the final decades in poor health. The good news? It's never too late to improve your diet — and even small changes can help you feel better now *and* protect your future health.

This leaflet focuses on what the best evidence shows is helpful for *most* people — not one-size-fits-all rules, but a realistic guide to eating well in everyday life.

## Section 2: What to Eat – The Best Evidence-Based Pattern

### A healthy diet isn't about cutting out food groups or following fads.

It's about building your meals around foods that nourish your body and support long-term health.

Decades of research consistently support a few simple principles:

#### **1. Eat more plants — especially vegetables, fruit, wholegrains, legumes, nuts, and seeds**

These foods are rich in fibre, antioxidants, and nutrients your body needs.

*Fibre helps support gut health, lower cholesterol, improve blood sugar control, and reduce the risk of bowel cancer, heart disease, stroke, and type 2 diabetes.*

Try to:

- Fill half your plate with vegetables or salad at most meals
- Choose wholegrain bread, pasta, rice, and cereals
- Include beans, lentils, or pulses a few times a week

#### **2. Choose healthy fats — especially from nuts, seeds, olive oil, and oily fish**

Not all fats are equal. Swapping saturated fats (like butter and processed meats) for unsaturated fats helps lower cholesterol and protect your heart.

Good sources include:

- Olive oil, rapeseed oil, avocados
- A small handful of nuts or seeds most days
- Oily fish (like salmon, sardines, or mackerel) once or twice a week

Portion sizes vary by age and activity level — use these as flexible starting points, not fixed rules.

#### **3. Include good-quality protein**

Protein is vital for strength, recovery, and maintaining muscle — especially as we age.

But most people don't need large amounts.

Try:

- Beans, lentils, tofu, and other plant proteins
- Eggs, white meat, fish
- Dairy or fortified alternatives (choose unsweetened versions)
- Red meat in moderation; limit processed meats like bacon and salami

#### **4. Drink mostly water**

Hydration supports energy, digestion, and metabolism.

- Aim for 6–8 glasses a day
- Tea and coffee are fine in moderation (watch out for added sugar or syrups)
- Limit sugary drinks, squash, and alcohol

Start small. Build habits.

Focus on progress,  
not perfection.

And remember:  
every healthy meal is  
a vote for your future self.



## 5. Cut back on ultra-processed foods (UPFs) and refined carbs

UPFs often contain additives, emulsifiers, and artificial flavourings. Think: crisps, biscuits, sugary cereals, ready meals, fizzy drinks.

Eating a lot of these is linked with weight gain, type 2 diabetes, and higher risk of long-term health problems — even when calorie intake is similar.

*Try to:*

- Cook more from scratch — even simple meals like soup, eggs, or pasta with veg
- Choose oats, wholegrain bread, or potatoes over white rice, pastries, and sweetened snacks

### Top 5 Food Swaps for Better Health

*Simple changes that make a big difference over time:*

- **Swap** white bread or pasta → **For** wholegrain versions  
*(More fibre, longer energy, better for your gut)*
- **Swap** sugary breakfast cereal → **For** plain oats or Weetabix  
*(Add fruit, cinnamon, or nuts for flavour)*
- **Swap** butter or lard in cooking → **For** olive or rapeseed oil  
*(Heart-healthy fats without losing taste)*
- **Swap** processed meat (sausages, ham, bacon) → **For** beans, fish, eggs, or lean poultry  
*(Better protein, less salt and saturated fat)*
- **Swap** fizzy drinks or squash → **For** water with lemon, herbal tea, or sparkling water  
*(Hydration without the sugar hit)*



## Section 3: Common Myths and Outdated Ideas

Even well-meaning advice about food can be confusing — and some of the most common beliefs we hear from patients are either outdated or just plain wrong. Here's what the best evidence actually shows:

### "Carbs are bad for you."

Not true. Carbohydrates are a key energy source — but *type* matters.

- **Better choices:** oats, brown rice, lentils, potatoes with skins, wholegrain bread and pasta
- **Limit:** white bread, sugary cereal, pastries, sweets, fizzy drinks

Refined or ultra-processed carbs can spike blood sugar and leave you hungrier later.

Whole carbohydrates — especially those high in **fibre** — are linked with better weight, heart, and gut health.

### "Fat makes you fat."

It's not that simple. Some fats are protective — especially those from nuts, seeds, olive oil, and fish.

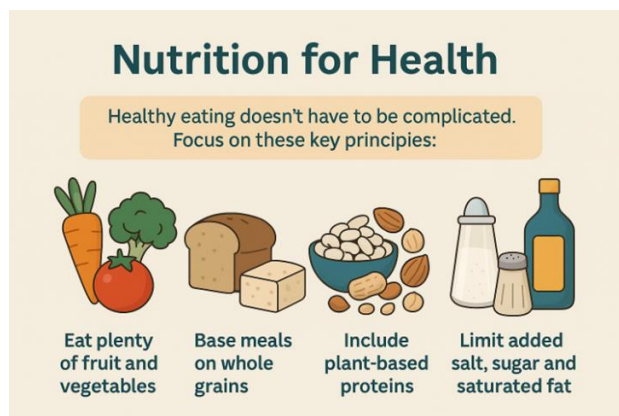
- Healthy fats support heart health and help control appetite
- The focus should be on reducing *processed* fats from fried and packaged foods

## "Protein is the most important nutrient."

Protein matters — but more isn't always better. Focus on quality, not just quantity.

- Most people get enough, but ***needs go up with age*** to help preserve strength and independence
- Choose good-quality sources like beans, fish, eggs, yoghurt, or lean meat
- Bars and shakes aren't needed for most people — real food works

*We want strong old people still loving life — not frailty we could've prevented.*



## "It's all about calories."

Not quite. Calories matter — but what you eat *matters more*.

A 500-calorie meal of lentils, vegetables, and olive oil supports energy, hormones, and fullness.

500 calories of crisps and cola? Less satisfying, more likely to spike blood sugar, and easier to overeat.

- *Highly processed foods* disrupt appetite and lead to passive overeating
- *Whole foods* help your body regulate itself — no counting required

## "Healthy eating is too expensive or complicated."


Not necessarily. Some of the most nutritious foods — like oats, lentils, tinned fish, and frozen veg — are also among the cheapest.

Simple meals like porridge, beans on toast, or stir-fry with frozen veg are nourishing, affordable, and quick.

### MYTH BUSTER BOX

**Let's set the record straight:**

- **"Carbs are bad."**  
→ *Wholegrains, veg, and pulses are some of the healthiest foods you can eat.*
- **"Fat makes you fat."**  
→ *Healthy fats protect your heart and help control appetite.*
- **"It's all about calories."**  
→ *Food quality matters more than just the numbers.*
- **"Protein fixes everything."**  
→ *More isn't always better - focus on variety and quality.*
- **"Healthy food costs too much."**  
→ *Frozen veg, oats, lentils, and tinned fish say otherwise.*
- **"A handful is a portion."**  
→ *Maybe — but it depends on your size, age, and activity level. Use it as a guide, not a rule!*



## Section 4: Practical Tips – Small Changes, Big Impact

*Eating well doesn't mean perfection — it means progress.*

These simple, evidence-backed strategies can help you make healthier choices most of the time, even with limited time, budget, or energy.



### Plan ahead (just a little)

Even a little bit of planning can make healthy eating feel easier — and save you time, money, and decision fatigue later in the week.

*Try:*

- Planning 2–3 dinners for the week — just jot them down or keep them in your head
- Picking a few “go-to” meals you enjoy and can make quickly (e.g. veg stir-fry, soup and toast, jacket potato with beans)
- Keeping some building blocks in the cupboard or freezer: tinned tomatoes, chickpeas, brown rice, oats, frozen veg

*Small habits like this reduce stress, cut food waste, and make it more likely you'll eat well even on busy days.*

### Shop smart

- *Plan your shop:* Start with whole foods — fruit, veg, oats, pulses, fish, eggs, plain yoghurt, wholegrains
- *Read the label:* Look for long ingredient lists, lots of E-numbers, added sugar, or things you don't recognise
- *Minimise packaged snacks and ready meals:* They often contain hidden salt, sugar, or additives — even when labelled as “healthy”
- *Frozen, tinned, and budget options* are great too — just check for added sugar or salt

*The fewer ingredients, the better. If it sounds more like a chemistry experiment than a recipe, it's probably ultra-processed.*

### Cook simply!

***You don't need fancy ingredients or complicated recipes.***

Some of the healthiest meals are simple, cheap, and quick to make.

*Try:*

- Stir-fry with frozen veg, tofu or prawns, and brown rice
- Omelette with veg and a slice of wholegrain toast
- Lentil soup and oatcakes
- Baked potato with beans and salad
- Porridge with berries and nuts

**Cook simply!**



*These kinds of meals are filling, affordable, and give your body what it needs.*

## Snack better

Snacks can work *with* your health goals — or against them. Choose foods that satisfy, nourish, and help you feel fuller for longer.

*Try:*

- Fruit and nuts
- Oatcakes with hummus or peanut butter
- Plain yoghurt or a boiled egg
- Leftover veg with olive oil or lemon



These give you fibre, protein, and healthy fats — which help reduce later cravings.

*Watch out for:*

- Cereal bars, flavoured rice cakes, and “low fat” snacks — often just sugar in disguise
- Crisps, biscuits, and pastries — easy to overdo

**Tip:** If you're hungry again soon, try including more fibre or protein.

## Make it easier on yourself

Healthy eating isn't all-or-nothing — it's about *small, smart changes* that feel manageable for *you*.

- Use frozen, tinned, or pre-chopped veg to save time — just check for added salt or sugar
- Don't ban favourite foods completely — enjoy them occasionally, in smaller amounts
- Eat slowly, and without too many distractions — it helps your brain notice when you're full
- If you miss a day, just start again at the next meal — consistency matters more than perfection

*You don't have to do everything at once — just do what you can and build from there.*

### QUICK WINS BOX

#### 5 things you could do this week:

- Add one extra portion of veg to your lunch or dinner
- Switch to wholegrain bread, rice, or pasta
- Bring a healthy snack to work
- Cook one meal from scratch
- Add a fibre boost — like lentils, chickpeas, or oats — to a meal you already make



## Section 5: What About Specific Diets?

Lots of people ask about specific named diets — like Mediterranean, low-carb, or plant-based. No single diet suits everyone, but the best ones all have something in common.

Here's what the research says:

### **Mediterranean diet**

- Best evidence for long-term health and reduced disease risk
- Focuses on veg, fruit, olive oil, legumes, nuts, wholegrains, moderate fish, little red meat

### **DASH diet (for blood pressure)**

- Designed to lower blood pressure
- Similar to Mediterranean, but with more dairy and less salt

### **Plant-based or vegetarian**

- Health benefits when based on whole foods
- Watch for B12, iron, iodine, and omega-3 if vegan
- Processed meat substitutes aren't always healthier

### **Low-carb or reduced-carb**

- May help with blood sugar and weight in some people
- Still needs plenty of fibre, veg, and healthy fats
- Not always needed or sustainable long-term



### **Intermittent fasting (e.g. 16:8, 5:2)**

- Some evidence for insulin sensitivity and weight loss
- Doesn't suit everyone
- Still depends on what you eat when you're not fasting

### **What these diets have in common:**

- More whole foods, fewer ultra-processed ones
- More fibre, fewer refined sugars
- Mostly plants, healthy fats, quality protein
- Awareness, not mindless eating

The best "diet" is one you can stick with — that works for your health, lifestyle, and preferences.



## Section 6: Where to Go Next

You don't have to get it perfect — but eating well most of the time can make a real difference to your energy, health, and how you feel.

### Speak to your GP or a dietitian if:

- You have a condition that affects what you eat (e.g. diabetes, coeliac disease, IBS, kidney issues)
- You've lost weight without trying, or have persistent gut symptoms
- You're recovering from illness or poor appetite
- You're finding it hard to lose weight despite making changes

### Useful Resources:

#### British Dietetic Association Food Fact Sheets

Evidence-based leaflets on nutrients, special diets, and healthy eating  
[www.bda.uk.com/food-health/food-facts.html](http://www.bda.uk.com/food-health/food-facts.html)

#### NHS Eat Well Guide

Balanced plate model and practical tips  
[www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/](http://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/)

#### WCRF – Cancer Prevention Recommendations

Simple lifestyle tips based on global cancer prevention research  
[wcrf-uk.org](http://wcrf-uk.org)

### Apps and tools (check with your GP first):

- **Second Nature** – behavioural change & weight management
- **Oviva** – NHS digital dietitian programme
- **Change4Life** – family-friendly health tips and recipes

### Final thoughts



Eating well isn't about restriction — it's about giving your body what it needs to thrive.

*Start small.*

*Build habits.*

*Focus on progress, not perfection.*

*And remember: every healthy meal is a vote for your future self.*

### If you have further questions:

- The best way to contact us is **via the website**:
  - <https://cirencesterhealthgroup.co.uk/appointments/>
- Call the **practice** on 01285 653184 or 01285 653122
- If you require **urgent** medical advice, call 111 (24 Hrs)
- In an **emergency** call **999**

