



Meal Planning Toolkit



Did you know that eating well and being a healthy weight are two of the most important ways of reducing your cancer risk?

If we were all a healthy weight, ate a healthy diet and were physically active, a third of common cancers could be prevented. Therefore it's worth taking some time to look at your eating habits and identify where you can make simple, healthy changes to your diet. Planning your meals in advance can make healthy eating easier as well as saving you time and money in the long run.

How to use this toolkit to makeover your meals:

1. Use the food diary to become more aware of your daily eating habits and where you could make healthier choices
2. Take a look at our healthy swaps and meal planning ideas for inspiration
3. Use the daily and weekly meal planners to plan varied, balanced and tasty meals to suit you and your family's lifestyle
4. Check that you are eating the right amounts of different foods, by looking at the healthy portion size guide

Food diary

A food diary is a useful way of keeping track of everything you eat and drink. Keeping a food diary for at least three days (including one weekend or non-work day) can help to make you more aware of your eating habits and show you where you might benefit from making changes to your diet.

Please circle: Mon Tues Wed Thurs Fri Sat Sun

	Time	Food or drink consumed	How much? (eg. tbsp, can, glass)	Where and who with?	Thoughts (did anything trigger you to eat/drink or how did you feel afterwards?)
Breakfast					
Morning snack					
Lunch					
Afternoon snack					
Dinner					

Total number of 5 A DAY portions*

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Making healthy swaps

Now that you have completed your food diary, look over it to see what changes could make your diet healthier and more balanced.

Making simple changes to what you eat and drink each day can lead to large improvements in your overall health. Here are some ideas for healthy swaps:

Common choices	Alternative healthier choices
Breakfast	
• Low-fibre cereal with added sugar and salt	• High-fibre cereal with no added sugar or salt, topped with fresh fruit (like berries or sliced banana) or dried fruit
• Croissant or other pastry	• Wholegrain toast with reduced-fat spread
• Coffee-shop latte made with whole milk	• Coffee-shop Americano with skimmed or semi-skimmed milk
• Large glass of orange juice	• An orange or small glass of orange juice (150ml)
Snacks	
• Cheese and biscuits	• Reduced-fat cream cheese and cucumber on wholegrain crispbread
• Slice of cake or biscuits	• Slice of fruity malt loaf or toasted currant teacake (with a scrape of reduced-fat spread)
• Jelly sweets	• Piece of fruit eg. an apple or banana
Restaurant or canteen lunch	
• Deep-fried calamari	• Grilled prawns
• Spaghetti carbonara	• Wholemeal spaghetti with tomato and roasted vegetable sauce
• Garlic bread	• Mixed salad with dressing on the side
• Fried chicken or chicken quarter with the skin	• Chicken breast baked without the skin
• White rice	• Wholegrain brown rice
• Potatoes with butter, roast potatoes or chips	• Boiled new potatoes and green beans drizzled with lemon juice
• Glass of wine	• Sparkling water with a slice of lemon or lime
Shop-bought or packed lunch	
• White bread sandwich with ham, cheese and full-fat mayonnaise	• Wholemeal bread sandwich with turkey, sliced tomatoes and salad
• Crisps	• Carrot and cucumber sticks
• Fizzy soft drink or carton of fruit squash	• Bottle of water or low-calorie soft drink
Afternoon snack	
• Chocolate bar	• Low-fat natural yoghurt with pear or apple slices, or a sprinkle of unsalted nuts and seeds
• Tea or coffee with sugar and whole milk	• Herbal tea or unsweetened tea or coffee with a splash of skimmed or semi-skimmed milk

Meal planning ideas – breakfast

Breakfast is a great opportunity to get some healthy wholegrains into your diet. Eating foods that are high in fibre can help to keep you feeling fuller for longer, meaning you're less likely to reach for that unhealthy mid-morning snack.

Here are some quick and simple choices. Most can be eaten straight away or taken into work in a sealed container.

Food	Notes	Examples
Wholegrain cereals	<p>Opt for varieties with no added sugar or salt, or low-salt (0.3g or less per 100g) and low-sugar (5g or less per 100g).</p> <p>If you have time, home-made varieties are a great way to include your favourite ingredients whilst avoiding the hidden sugar and salt found in many shop-bought cereals.</p> <p>Serve with low-fat natural yoghurt, or skimmed or semi-skimmed milk, and fresh fruit, like sliced banana or strawberries.</p>	<p>Muesli (no added sugar or salt), shredded wholegrain pillows, or whole wheat cereal biscuits.</p> <p>Home-made muesli with oats, an assortment of chopped nuts like almonds and brazil nuts, seeds like sunflower and pumpkin seeds, and dried fruit like chopped apricots and raisins. Keep an eye on your portion sizes – although nuts, seeds and dried fruit are nutritious, they contain a lot of calories.</p>
Porridge	<p>Porridge oats are a cheap and healthy breakfast choice. They are a rich source of soluble fibre, so help keep you fuller for longer.</p> <p>Prepare with water, skimmed or semi-skimmed milk. You can leave the oats to soak overnight, so they're quicker to cook in the morning.</p>	<p>Sweeten porridge naturally with cinnamon, fresh soft fruit (like banana or plums) or frozen fruit (like frozen mixed berries) – they defrost quickly in steaming porridge.</p> <p>Frozen fruit can be cheaper than fresh, reduces wastage and are always at hand in the morning.</p>
Fruit salad	<p>A quick-to-make mixture of fruit is a great way to start the day, especially if you are watching your weight.</p> <p>Varying your choice of fruit throughout the week can help keep this interesting.</p>	<p>The greater the variety of fruit the better. Grapefruit, orange, kiwi fruit, melon, peach, banana, plum, strawberries or any seasonal fruit can be mixed and matched as you wish.</p> <p>Serve with low-fat natural yoghurt or low-fat fromage frais, or add some wholegrain cereal, chopped nuts or seeds to provide a crunchy texture and a bit more energy.</p>
Wholegrain toast	<p>Always choose wholegrain varieties.</p> <p>Having a portion of fruit with your toast will help to fill you up, as well as counting towards your 5 A DAY.</p>	<p>Try different types of wholegrain breads to add variety, such as seeded and granary options.</p> <p>For toppings you could choose from reduced-fat peanut butter, reduced-fat spread and a thin layer of jam (or better still, crushed berries), mashed banana or, if time allows, poached, scrambled or boiled egg, or grilled mushrooms or tomatoes.</p>

Meal planning ideas – lunch and dinner

Do you find yourself having the same meals most days? By planning ahead, you can easily incorporate more variety into your lunches and dinners.

Healthy and balanced meals can be quick and easy to make, and much cheaper than pre-made options. Try to fill at least two-thirds of your plate with wholegrains, vegetables, fruit and pulses (such as beans, peas and lentils), and the rest of your plate with lean meat, fish and other sources of protein. Here are some simple tips for meal ideas:

Food	Notes	Examples
Sources of protein (eg. meat, fish) Different sources of protein can be incorporated with a variety of meal types (eg. sandwich fillings, salads, rice or pasta dishes)	Poultry is highly versatile. Opting for skinless meat lowers the fat content.	Chicken and turkey. Healthier cooking options are to grill, roast, poach or stew.
	Fish is a healthy choice, and quick and easy to cook. Try to pick sustainable sources and aim to eat at least two portions a week, one of which should be omega-3-rich oily fish.	Healthier ways to cook fish are to grill (works well for fillets of oily fish), bake (wrapped in foil) or poach. Oily fish include sardines, mackerel and salmon. White fish, like cod and pollack, are low in fat.
	Eggs can be an easy and cheap addition to a main meal.	Hard or soft boiled, poached or scrambled (with a splash of milk).
	Meat substitutes come in lots of forms and can replace the meat in most traditional meals.	Tofu or Quorn can be used instead of meat and poultry. Remember to check the label of processed meat substitute products as they can be high in fat and salt.
	Pulses count towards one of your 5 A DAY (but only once a day). Alternate between different types of pulses, to vary the textures and flavours.	Lentils, chickpeas and beans such as kidney beans, butter beans, aduki beans, haricot beans (which are used to make baked beans) and cannellini beans. Add pulses to salads, soups or casseroles.
	Red meat is a good source of nutrients so can form part of a healthy balanced diet, but we don't need it every day. A portion of meat is 80g (cooked weight) or about the size of a deck of cards. Always opt for the leanest meat available.	Our Cancer Prevention Recommendation is to limit consumption of red meats such as beef, pork and lamb to no more than 500g (cooked weight) per week and to avoid processed meats such as ham, bacon, salami, hot dogs and some sausages. Grilling, roasting or stewing are healthier ways to cook meat.
	Dairy foods are a good source of protein and calcium. Opt for reduced-fat varieties.	Skimmed or semi-skimmed milk, reduced-fat cream cheese or cheddar cheese, low-fat cottage cheese, low-fat yoghurt and low-fat fromage frais.

Meal planning ideas – lunch and dinner

Food	Notes	Examples
Carbohydrates (eg. bread, rice, pasta, potatoes)	Choose wholegrain varieties of carbohydrate foods where possible. This will increase your daily fibre intake, which can help reduce your risk of bowel cancer as well as help you to feel fuller for longer.	Switch between bread, pasta, rice, quinoa and other grains, potatoes and squashes to add variety to your meals.
Vegetables and fruit	Including vegetables and fruit in all your meals will help you towards your 5 A DAY target. Mix and match with different varieties to add colour and flavour.	Steamed greens – fresh, frozen and canned (in water) all count. Add salad leaves, grated carrot, sliced cucumber, tomatoes and peppers to a sandwich, or as the base to a healthy salad. You could also finish your meal with a piece of fruit, like an apple or peach, or a fruit salad.

Meal planning ideas – snacks

Healthy snacks, although not essential, can contribute to a healthy diet. It's a great opportunity to include more vegetables, fruit and wholegrains in our diet.

To avoid weight gain, aim for no more than one mid-morning and one mid-afternoon snack a day and keep portion sizes small.

Food	Notes	Examples
Wholegrains	Choose wholegrain snacks, low in salt, sugar and fat.	Wholegrain bread, oatcakes, rice cakes and rye crackers. Serve with a small amount of reduced-fat hummus, cottage cheese or soft cheese with a few slices of cucumber.
Vegetables	Bags of pre-cut vegetables are easy to grab when you're on-the-go. But if you can, buying whole veg and cutting it up yourself is much better value.	Carrots, cucumber, celery, peppers, mange-tout, broccoli and cauliflower. Eat alone or serve with reduced-fat hummus, guacamole, or salsa.
Yoghurt and fromage frais	These are high in protein and calcium, and are perfect as a healthy snack.	A small pot of low-fat, natural yoghurt or low-fat natural fromage frais with chopped fruit or berries. You could serve with a few nuts or seeds for a more filling snack.
Fruit	Fruit often doesn't need any preparation, so it's great if you're short on time. Choosing different coloured fruit will give you a variety of nutrients. Fresh, frozen and canned (in natural fruit juice) all count towards 5 A DAY.	Fruit like bananas, apples, peaches, berries, grapes and satsumas are easy to eat on-the-go as they need little preparation. Other fruit such as melon, kiwi and oranges can be chopped up in advance and stored in a plastic container in the fridge.
Dried fruit, nuts and seeds	These provide a variety of nutrients and can be a healthy and filling snack. They are high in calories for their weight, so limit consumption to a small handful. Choose unsalted versions.	Dried fruit like raisins, sultanas and dried apricots, cranberries, dates and figs. Nuts like brazil nuts, hazelnuts, walnuts, almonds and pecans. Seeds like sunflower, pumpkin, sesame, and linseeds. You could serve with a couple of tablespoons of low-fat natural yoghurt.

Meal planning ideas – drinks

Food	Notes	Examples
Alcoholic drinks	To reduce your risk as much as possible, we recommend not drinking alcohol at all. If you do choose to drink alcohol, follow national guidelines. In the UK the recommendation is to drink no more than 14 units a week, spread over at least three days - this is roughly equal to seven drinks a week.	One alcoholic drink is: a small glass (125ml) of wine, a single measure of spirits or half a pint of regular strength lager or cider.
Non-alcoholic drinks	Fruit and vegetable juice counts towards your 5 A DAY, but only the first glass. Sugary soft drinks – such as cola, lemonade, cordials and squashes like blackcurrant juice drink – can contribute to weight gain if consumed regularly or in large amounts. Opt for low-calorie alternatives.	250ml orange juice or tomato juice. Water (still or sparkling), low-calorie soft drinks, or unsweetened tea and coffee with a small amount of milk.

Weekly meal planner

Using the meal ideas on the previous pages, you can begin to plan your meals for the day, or even the whole week. Below is an example of a weekly planner.

Planning meals in advance is an easy way to ensure you are getting a balanced diet. It can also make shopping easier and your money go further as you can mix and match ingredients to avoid wastage.

A useful tip is to have leftovers for lunch – why not make enough dinner to leave an extra portion for the next day?

Day	Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner	Snacks (optional)
Mon	Boiled egg with wholemeal toast and a small glass of pure fruit juice	Small jacket potato with baked beans (reduced sugar and salt) and salad	Stir-fry of mixed vegetables and chicken, turkey, or tofu with brown rice	Mixed fruit salad
Tues	Porridge with mixed fresh fruit or frozen berries	Leftover stir-fry from the night before	Homemade chicken or bean burgers in wholemeal bread roll or pitta, with salad	Vegetable sticks with salsa
Wed	Muesli (no added sugar or salt) with dried fruit and skimmed milk	Lentil and vegetable soup (homemade or, if store-bought, check it's low in sugar and salt) with wholemeal toast	Omelette with mushrooms, peas, tomatoes, boiled potatoes and a sprinkling of grated cheese with salad	Rye crackers topped with soft cheese
Thurs	Wholemeal toast with a thin layer of reduced-fat spread and low-fat natural yoghurt with fresh fruit	Salad (tuna, boiled egg, tomatoes, mixed leaves, grated carrot, boiled new potatoes) with an olive oil and lemon dressing	Wholemeal pasta with chicken and vegetables, such as courgette, mushrooms and peppers in a tomato sauce	Handful of dried fruit, nuts and seeds
Fri	Porridge with mixed fresh fruit or frozen berries	Homemade wholegrain sandwich with a healthy filling such as chicken or salmon and lettuce, cucumber and tomatoes	Fish and vegetable pie, topped with mashed potato, served with steamed greens like spinach and green beans.	Vegetable sticks with reduced-fat hummus
Sat	Scrambled eggs on wholemeal toast and a small glass of pure fruit juice	Leftover pie from the night before	Night off weekly plan (go out for a healthy dinner or make your own restaurant favourite at home – see wcrf-uk.org/recipes)	Apple
Sun	Porridge with banana and mixed nuts	Homemade wholegrain sandwich or wrap with a healthy filling such as boiled egg or reduced-fat hummus with salad	Roast chicken (remove skin) with green beans, carrots and boiled new potatoes Homemade spiced apple and cranberry crumble – see wcrf-uk.org/recipes	Small pot of low-fat natural yoghurt topped with mixed berries

My daily meal planner

Please circle: **Mon** **Tues** **Wed** **Thurs** **Fri** **Sat** **Sun**

You can use the daily or weekly planners on to plan your meals.

Try to include a variety of foods including at least five portions of vegetables and fruit each day. This will help you get the nutrients you need and will help keep your food interesting.

Vegetables and fruit	Carbohydrates eg. bread, rice, potatoes, pasta (choose wholegrain and wholemeal options)	Milk and dairy foods (choose reduced-fat options)	Meat and alternatives eg. fish, eggs, pulses, tofu (limit red meat to less than 500g a week and avoid processed meat)	Fats eg. spreads, oils, butters & foods high in fat or sugar eg. fried foods, pastries, biscuits, cakes
5 or more	6	2–3	2–3	Limit your intake
Number of portions				
	2			
				</

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Please circle: **Mon** **Tues** **Wed** **Thurs** **Fri** **Sat** **Sun**

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5 or more	6	2-3	2-3	Limit your intake
Food	Amount	Number of portions		
Example	Wholegrain bread	2 medium slices	2	
Breakfast				
Snack				
Lunch				
Snack				
Dinner				
Total				

My daily meal planner

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Number of portions				
	2			

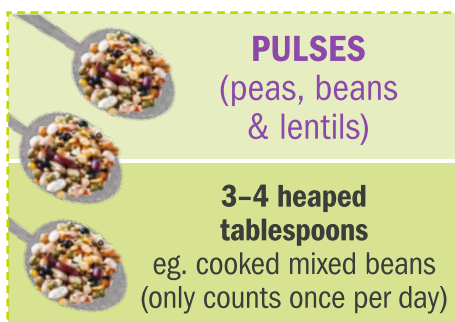
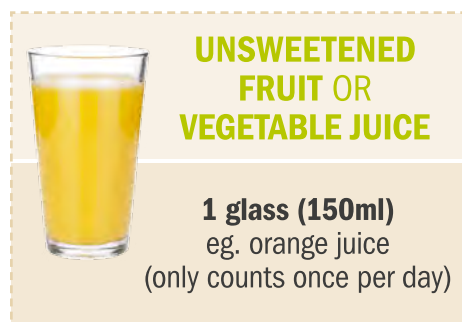
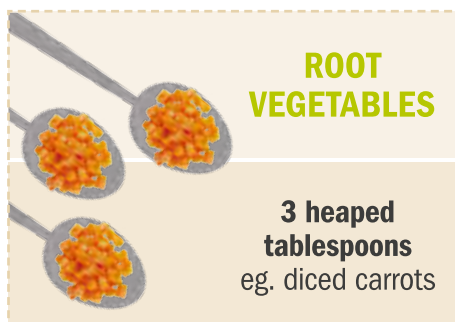
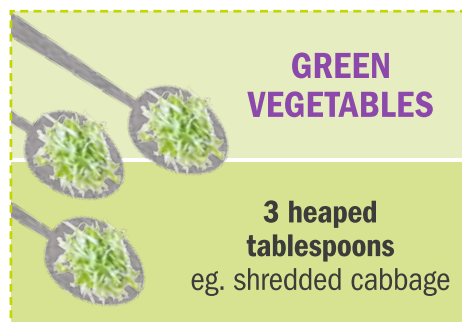
My weekly meal planner

Remember to include drinks when planning your meals.

Day	Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner	Snacks (optional)
Mon				
Tues				
Wed				
Thurs				
Fri				
Sat				
Sun				

Portion size guide

Eating a wide variety of vegetables and fruit is a great first step to eating well and reducing your cancer risk. Aim for at least five portions every day. Here are some examples of what counts as a 5 A DAY portion for an adult. One portion weighs roughly 80g, equivalent to:



Portion size guide

Here are some examples of what a healthy portion size is for an average adult. The number of portions you should have may vary depending on your age, gender and how active you are.

CARBOHYDRATES: Eat 2 portions at each main meal. Choose wholegrain varieties.

RICE & PASTA

2-3 tablespoons
(cooked)



POTATO

2 egg-sized potatoes



BREAD

1 medium slice



BREAKFAST CEREAL

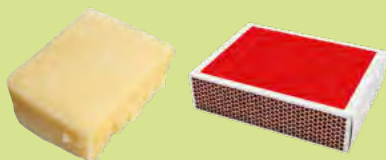
2-3 tablespoons
(unsweetened)



DAIRY FOODS: Eat 2-3 portions a day. Choose low-fat, unsweetened varieties when possible.

CHEESE

30g the size of a small matchbox



YOGHURT & FROMAGE FRAIS

1 small pot
eg. low-fat plain yoghurt



MILK

1 glass
eg. skimmed milk



MEAT & ALTERNATIVES: Eat 2-3 portions a day. Eat more pulses and fish.

Choose lean meat and aim for less than 500g of red meat (cooked weight) a week. Avoid processed meat.

MEAT & POULTRY

80g (cooked weight)
the size of a pack of cards



WHITE & OILY FISH

140g (cooked weight)
the size of a slim glasses case



SOYA, TOFU & QUORN

120g
the size of a snooker ball



PULSES

(peas, beans & lentils)

3-4 heaped tablespoons
eg. cooked mixed beans



EGGS

2 eggs



FATTY & SUGARY FOODS

Try to avoid high-calorie processed foods.
eg. crisps, chips, sweets, cakes, biscuits, pastries.

