

top tips for healthy eating

We're all aware of the importance of eating a healthy, balanced diet, but with busy jobs, family commitments and limited time, making it a reality can sometimes seem impossible – something that was highlighted in the RCM's *Caring for You* survey, which showed that many midwives and maternity support workers frequently work over their hours and miss breaks.

The good news is that making some small, simple changes to how we shop, cook and eat can help healthy eating fit into a busy working day.

planning ahead

When you're leading a busy life, it's easy for 'grabbing something quick' to become the norm. With a bit of forward planning, 'something quick' can also be healthy, filling and delicious. Finding a quiet half-hour each week to meal plan your next seven days can make all the difference – taking into account your shifts, when you have time to make larger batches of meals (leftovers are great to take to work the next day), when you'll be 'out and about' and when you need quick and easy options (like the chicken and vegetable curry, which you'll find at the end of this article). As well as knowing what you'll be enjoying when, it makes creating a shopping list much easier, so you can stock up your fridge for the week ahead and avoid an extra trip to the shops (saving you time in the long-run!).



Working together to support the
Caring for You Campaign

filling up on fruit and veg

Fruit and vegetables are at the heart of healthy eating – they're packed with vitamins, minerals and other nutrients, they provide slow-release energy, fibre and water plus many are low in calories while still being filling.

Adding fruit and veg into your usual meals helps to make them extra filling and adds variety in taste, texture and colour, keeping all your favourite dishes interesting. If you're not already a fruit and veg fan, aim to gradually introduce more into your meals, and opt for these first when filling your plate. Have you tried... sweet potatoes or swede added to mashed potato on a cottage pie, or bulking up a curry with mushrooms, chopped peppers or green beans?

To support your intake of a variety of nutrients, aim for a rainbow of different coloured fruit and vegetables each day. For example:

- top cereal or porridge with raspberries and blackberries for breakfast
- choose bananas and oranges for snacks
- enjoy a veggie-packed frittata for lunch
- serve up an evening meal of grilled courgette and aubergine with chicken and new potatoes.

Fruit and vegetables are also great sources of fibre, an important part of a healthy diet. Enjoying plenty of fibre has been linked to a lower risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes and bowel cancer, and also supports healthy digestion. You'll also increase your fibre intake by choosing wholegrain or wholemeal varieties of bread, pasta, rice and other grains, helping you on your way towards meeting the 30g a day recommendation.



make simple swaps to reduce fat intake

While it's important we have some fat in our diets for good health, it's recommended we don't have too much. Reducing our intake of saturated fats in particular can also have significant health benefits. Making small changes to the way foods are prepared and cooked can have a big impact on their fat content. For instance:

- trimming all visible fat off meat, removing the skin from poultry and choosing a leaner variety of mince (5% fat or less)
- swapping oils or butter for low-calorie cooking spray
- grilling, baking or steaming food instead of frying

To support intake of 'good' fats, enjoy some heart-healthy omega 3 by choosing a portion of oily fish at least once each week, such as salmon, mackerel or sardines. Simply grilled with a side of vegetables and some rice or potatoes means you've got a delicious after-work meal in minutes.

cutting down on sugar

Sugar has been a hot topic in the media for a while now, with the latest recommendations advising us to cut our consumption down to no more than 5% of our total food intake each day. This can seem quite daunting, especially as sugar is added to a number of everyday foods. As with reducing fat, it's all about making small and simple swaps which can add up to an overall healthier diet.

Sugar can be hidden in shop-bought versions of sauces and dressings such as salad dressing and ketchup, so swap them for your own homemade versions:

- A simple squeeze of lemon juice or drizzle of balsamic vinegar can dress a salad.
- A spoonful of passata is a great replacement for ketchup on a homemade burger.
- Make the most of herbs and spices to add plenty of flavour to sauces and dressings.

This can also help with reducing your salt intake too. Check the food labels to spot added sugar and where possible, opt for a product with less added sugars

(or preferably none). Ultimately, preparing meals from scratch means you know exactly what's in them.

Drinks can also contribute lots of sugar to our diets.

- For good health, aim to have water as your first choice as often as possible.
- If you take sugar in hot drinks, switching to tablet sweetener will help reduce your sugar intake... or gradually reduce the amount of sugar you add – you might end up enjoying it without!
- Swap sugary drinks for diet versions which are lower in sugar and calories.

take a break to keep hydrated

The RCM's *Caring for You* survey showed that over a half of respondents said they felt dehydrated at work because they don't have time to drink, and only a fifth of respondents were taking their entitled breaks. It's clearly a big challenge on a busy day however keeping hydrated is essential for good health – keeping the body working well, supporting healthy digestion, skin and energy levels, plus you're less likely to experience dehydration-related headaches and sluggishness.

Whenever it's possible, take a break to stay hydrated. If you can, keep a bottle of water on-hand at work and add a squeeze of low-calorie cordial or some fruit slices for extra flavour.

It's also beneficial to take some time to sit and eat a meal. As well as giving us the opportunity to focus on and savour our food, eating more slowly helps us to better notice when we're full, and may improve digestion.

a little of what you fancy

Overall, aim to increase your intake of those healthier, more nutritious foods, such as:

- fruit and vegetables
- lean meat, poultry, fish and meat replacements
- low fat dairy
- carbohydrate-rich foods such as potatoes, rice, pasta and other grains

and reduce your intake of high fat and high sugar foods such as cakes, pastries, biscuits, chocolate and crisps.

However, don't feel that you need to get too restrictive. Avoiding certain foods and drinks can be counterproductive, as it can lead to cravings and feelings of guilt if you fall off track.

Eating well is about finding a balance where you're getting all the nutrients you need and meeting your energy needs, while still enjoying food and not feeling deprived. So, whether it's enjoying a drink with friends, an ice cream with the kids, or a chocolate treat, don't be afraid to still have a little of what you fancy when you really fancy it. Choose something you'll enjoy and take the time to savour it. Feeling in charge of your own eating habits is vital to keeping a healthy weight in the long-term.



mild chicken and vegetable curry

Chunks of succulent chicken, tender potatoes and a perfectly spiced tomato sauce will satisfy your hunger and dance on your tastebuds!

This curry is also delicious with Quorn – use 350g Quorn chicken-style pieces instead of the chicken, or leave out for a delicious vegetable curry.

Serves 4

Ready in 25 minutes

Low-calorie cooking spray

4 skinless and boneless chicken breasts, cut into bite-sized chunks

2cm piece of fresh root ginger, peeled and finely grated

2 garlic cloves, finely grated

2 tsp fennel seeds, crushed

1 tsp ground cinnamon

2 tbsp mild curry powder

700g passata with onion and garlic

400ml boiling chicken stock

2 x 300g cans new potatoes in water, drained

500g prepared diced carrot and swede

200g stringless beans, roughly chopped

Fat-free natural yogurt, roughly chopped fresh mint and mild chilli powder, to serve



- 1 Spray a large non-stick frying pan with low-calorie cooking spray and place over a high heat.
- 2 Add the chicken and stir-fry for 3 minutes. Add the ginger, garlic, fennel seeds, cinnamon and curry powder and stir-fry for 30 seconds.
- 3 Add the passata, stock and all the vegetables and bring to the boil. Season to taste, reduce the heat to a simmer and cook for 15 minutes or until everything is cooked through.
- 4 Divide between bowls. Drizzle with yogurt, scatter the mint and sprinkle with a pinch of mild chilli powder. Serve hot with extra yogurt on the side, sprinkled with mint and chilli powder.

For more recipe and meal ideas visit [slimmingworld.co.uk](https://www.slimmingworld.co.uk)