**5 tips for a healthy diet this New Year**

World Health Organization

26 December 2019

Whatever your New Year’s Resolution, a healthy and balanced diet will provide many benefits into 2019 and beyond. What we eat and drink can affect our body’s ability to fight infections, as well as how likely we are to develop health problems later in life, including obesity, heart disease, diabetes and different types of cancer.

The exact ingredients of a healthy diet will depend on different factors like how old and how active we are, as well as the kinds of foods that are available in the communities where we live. But across cultures, there are some common food tips for helping us lead healthier, longer lives.

**Eat a variety of food**

Our bodies are incredibly complex, and (with the exception of [breast milk](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail) for babies) no single food contains all the nutrients we need for them to work at their best. Our diets must therefore contain a wide variety of fresh and nutritious foods to keep us going strong.  
  
Some tips to ensure a balanced diet:

* In your daily diet, aim to eat a mix of staple foods such as wheat, maize, rice and potatoes with legumes like lentils and beans, plenty of fresh fruit and veg, and foods from animal sources (e.g. meat, fish, eggs and milk).
* Choose wholegrain foods like unprocessed maize, millet, oats, wheat and brown rice when you can; they are rich in valuable fibre and can help you feel full for longer.
* For snacks, choose raw vegetables, unsalted nuts and fresh fruit, rather than foods that are high in sugars, fats or salt.

**Cut back on salt**

Too much salt can raise blood pressure, which is a leading risk factor for heart disease and stroke. Most people around the world eat too much salt: on average, we consume double the WHO recommended limit of 5 grams (equivalent to a teaspoon) a day.

Even if we don’t add extra salt in our food, we should be aware that it is commonly put in processed foods or drinks, and often in high amounts.  
  
Some tips to reduce your salt intake:

* When cooking and preparing foods, use salt sparingly and reduce use of salty sauces and condiments (like soy sauce, stock or fish sauce).
* Avoid snacks that are high in salt, and try and choose fresh healthy snacks over processed foods.
* When using canned or dried vegetables, nuts and fruit, choose varieties without added salt and sugars.
* Remove salt and salty condiments from the table and try and avoid adding them out of habit; our tastebuds can quickly adjust and once they do, you are likely to enjoy food with less salt, but more flavor!
* Check the labels on food and go for products with lower sodium content.

**Reduce use of certain fats and oil**

We all need some fat in our diet, but eating too much – especially the wrong kinds - increases risks of obesity, heart disease and stroke.  Industrially-produced [trans fats](https://www.who.int/nutrition/topics/replace-transfat) are the most hazardous for health. A diet high in this kind of fat has been found to raise risk of heart disease by nearly 30%.

Some tips to reduce fat consumption:

* Replace butter, lard and ghee with healthier oils such as soybean, canola (rapeseed), corn, safflower and sunflower.
* Choose white meat like poultry and fish which are generally lower in fats than red meat, trim meat of visible fat and limit the consumption of processed meats.
* Try steaming or boiling instead of frying food when cooking.
* Check labels and always avoid all processed, fast and fried foods that contain industrially-produced trans fat. It is often found in margarine and ghee, as well as pre-packaged snacks, fast, baked and fried foods.

**Limit sugar intake**

Too much sugar is not only bad for our teeth, but increases the risk of unhealthy weight gain and obesity, which can lead to serious, chronic health problems.  
  
As with salt, it’s important to take note of the amount of “hidden” sugars that can be in processed food and drinks. For example, a single can of soda can contain up to 10 teaspoons of added sugar!

Some tips to reduce sugar intake:

* Limit intake of sweets and sugary drinks such as fizzy drinks, fruit juices and juice drinks, liquid and powder concentrates, flavoured water, energy and sports drinks, ready-to-drink tea and coffee and flavoured milk drinks.
* Choose healthy fresh snacks rather than processed foods.
* Avoid giving sugary foods to children. Salt and sugars should not be added to complementary foods give to children under 2 years of age, and should be limited beyond that age.

**Avoid hazardous and harmful alcohol use**

Alcohol is not a part of a healthy diet, but in many cultures New Year’s celebrations are associated with heavy alcohol consumption. Overall, drinking too much, or too often, increases your immediate risk of injury, as well as causing longer-term effects like liver damage, cancer, heart disease and mental illness.

WHO advises that there is no safe level of alcohol consumption; and for many people even low levels of alcohol use can still be associated with significant health risks.

* Remember, less alcohol consumption is always better for health and it is perfectly OK not to drink.
* You should not drink alcohol at all if you are: pregnant or breastfeeding; driving, operating machinery or undertaking other activities that involve related risks; you have health problems which may be made worse by alcohol; you are taking medicines which directly interact with alcohol; or you have difficulties with controlling your drinking.
* If you think your or someone you love may have problems with alcohol or other psychoactive substances, don’t be afraid to reach out for help from your health worker or a specialist drug and alcohol service. WHO has also developed a [self-help guide](http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/44322/9789241599405_eng.pdf;jsessionid=9917A7EBC76201E14E567A9809EBFF2C?sequence=1) to provide guidance to people looking to cut back or stop use.