



EATING
WELL FOR
HEALTHIER
LUNGS

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We feature real life stories in this booklet. Some names have been changed. The information in this booklet has been reviewed by independent experts. We have made every effort to ensure that the information provided is correct. Asthma + Lung UK cannot accept liability for any errors or omissions, and policy, practice or medical research may change. If you are concerned about your health, you should consult a doctor.

If you're living with a lung condition, eating well is especially important. A balanced diet with lots of variety can help prevent infections and keep your lungs and the rest of your body healthy so you can lead an active life.

In this booklet, we cover what a healthy diet looks like and why it's important, and how you can stay at a healthy weight.

You'll find lots of tips about how you can adjust what you eat and drink to help ease your symptoms.

We've put this together for you, your family, your carers and friends.

Why is my diet important?

It's important to eat a nutritionally balanced and varied diet, and to maintain a healthy body weight. If you have a lung condition, eating well is especially important. Foods and fluids contain essential nutrients to help prevent infections and keep your lungs healthy.

What is a balanced diet?

Eating a well-balanced diet can help control your symptoms and keep you feeling as strong and fit as possible. A well-balanced diet includes five key food groups, shown below:



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Each of these food groups helps keep you and your lungs healthy:

- **Fruit and vegetables** have vitamins and minerals that support your immune system to help you fight off chest infections.
- **Starchy carbohydrates** give your body energy for breathing and everyday tasks. Choose high fibre or wholegrain versions, such as brown pasta and rice or wholemeal bread. They'll make you feel fuller for longer, protect your heart and keep your bowels moving.
- **Protein** helps to keep your muscles strong, including your chest muscles that help your ribs expand as you breathe. This helps you get the most out of exercise. Protein is also important for your immune system.
- **Dairy foods** are a good source of proteins, vitamins and minerals – including calcium and vitamin D for healthy bones. Calcium is important if you take steroids, which increases the risk of brittle bones or osteoporosis.
- **Oils** contain a range of vitamins, such as vitamins A and E which are important for fighting infections.

How much fluid do I need to drink?

It's very important to drink plenty of fluid. This helps keep you hydrated and keeps mucus moving. If mucus sits in your airways and lungs, you're more likely to get an infection.

Aim to drink a minimum of six to eight cups of fluid a day. This can include water, tea, coffee, milk, squash or fruit juice. But limit fruit juice and smoothies to one small glass (150ml) a day. The colour of your urine is a good indicator to check you are hydrated: it should be clear or pale yellow. If it's darker, try to drink more fluid.

Staying a healthy weight

When you have a lung condition, it's important to stay a healthy weight. If you're overweight, it can make breathing harder. If you're underweight, your breathing muscles will be weaker and your body will have less strength to complete daily activities and fight off infections. Everyone is different, so speak to your doctor if you want to find out more about a weight that's healthy for you.

It's important to maintain a healthy weight when you have a lung condition, so try to weigh yourself regularly and keep a record.

I've lost weight

If you have a lung condition, you might lose weight unintentionally. You may eat less because eating makes you feel breathless or your appetite might be low. If you feel tired or out of breath, you might find it more difficult to shop and prepare your own meals.

If you're losing weight without planning to, you feel thin and unable to gain weight, and you feel weak and your energy levels are affected, it's very important to talk to your doctor or health care professional. You may be at risk of malnutrition, which can weaken your breathing muscles and make you more likely to get chest infections.

You can also try our suggestions to gain weight on the next page. If you continue to lose weight, speak to your doctor or health care professional. They may refer you to a dietitian.

Top tips to gain weight

- **Eat little and often.** When you have a small appetite, eating smaller amounts more regularly can help you get enough energy and protein. Try three to four small meals and two to three small snacks spread through the day.

Snacks can include toast, scones or pancakes with butter and jam or nut butters; crackers or biscuits with spread or cream cheese; a small cake; handful of seeds, dried fruit or nuts; full-fat yoghurt or rice pudding. Nourishing drinks are full-fat milk, hot chocolate, malted drinks, flavoured milk and milkshakes, smoothies or fruit juice. You can also buy nutritional drinks, or add three to four tablespoons of dried milk powder to a pint of milk (fortified milk).

Try to include snacks that are high protein as well. These could be a hardboiled egg, handful of shredded chicken, a chunk of cheese on its own or on a biscuit, small pot of yoghurt, canned tuna or salmon, cheese slices, hummus with vegetables, or a small handful of nuts.

- **Don't skip meals.** Try to eat a small meal or snack even if you don't have much of an appetite. Some people find that setting an alarm on their phone, to trigger them to get a snack, meal or nourishing milky drink, helps them eat regularly.
- **Avoid foods labelled 'sugar-free', 'low fat' and 'diet'.** Choose higher calorie options like full-fat milk, yoghurts, fruit drinks and desserts.
- **Drink enough fluid to keep hydrated but avoid drinking too close to a meal.** It can make you feel fuller and more bloated.
- **Talk to family and friends.** They might be able to help you with shopping or preparing meals.

- **Contact your local social services team.** They may refer you for an occupational therapy assessment. You may get equipment around your house to make life easier. You can also get advice about local meal delivery services or support from paid carers.
- **Exercise or get out into the fresh air** to stimulate your appetite. Check with your doctor before starting a new activity and don't overdo it. You don't want to become too tired to prepare food or eat.

I'm putting on too much weight

You may find your lung condition causes you to put on weight. This may be because you become less active and burn fewer calories. Taking some kinds of steroids can increase your appetite.

Being overweight can make breathing more difficult, especially if you're carrying extra weight around your middle that squashes your lungs. If you're carrying excess weight, it also takes more effort to be active. Bending becomes difficult and will make you feel short of breath.

When trying to lose weight, it's important not to cut out any food groups. Cutting out food groups altogether could prevent you from getting important nutrients and vitamins your body needs to function properly. Avoid fad diets as they tend to be unrealistic and misleading.

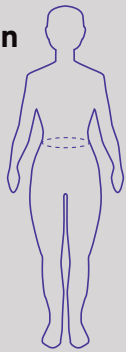
If you want to lose weight, speak to your doctor or health care professional. They can refer you to a dietitian or a local weight loss scheme.

Why is my waist size important?

It's not just what you weigh on the scales, but also how you feel and where your extra weight is. Where we store our fat is particularly important. Carrying too much fat in your middle can make breathing more difficult, and it's linked to a greater risk of cancer, heart disease and type 2 diabetes.

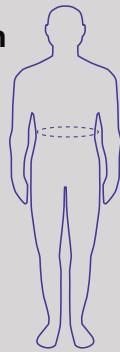
The diagram below is a guide to healthy waist measurements for men and women.

Women



Less than 32 inches (80cm)

Men



Less than 37 inches (94cm)

You should try to lose weight if your waist is:

- 94cm (37in) or more for men
- 80cm (32in) or more for women

You're at an even higher risk of some serious health conditions if your waist is:

- 102cm (40in) or more for men
- 88cm (34.5in) or more for women

“ I keep my diet simple but varied and try to eat mostly fresh food. ”



At his heaviest, Gary weighed over 19 stone. After he was diagnosed with OSA, he went on a weight loss journey to improve his symptoms.

After I was diagnosed, I wanted to make a change. I met a personal trainer at my local gym and worked hard to lose weight.

The weight loss took about two years. I use an intake calculator app to track what I eat, based on my current weight. From this I can set out my protein, carbohydrates and healthy fats accordingly. I make adjustments often!

I keep my diet simple but varied and try to eat mostly fresh food. A key point is not to exclude any food groups, if you want it eat it... in moderation. This satisfies the cravings and keeps you on track.

I try to keep active with my work as a professional gardener. In a day, I can walk over 10 miles plus training at my local gym. There's no way I could've done this before I was diagnosed with OSA – I'd have been too exhausted. To begin with I was only able to do a few minutes and I'd battle with the fatigue. Gradually I built on it. As I lost the weight I felt a noticeable change in my overall health.

I believe the focus for weight loss should be on lifestyle and changes to behaviour. Being realistic and staying consistent is key.

The changes I made have had a huge impact on my quality of life. I've still got OSA, but it no longer affects my daily life. It's been hard work but worth every ounce of effort.

Top tips to lose weight if you are overweight

- **Keep an eye on your portion sizes, especially if eating out.**
- **Fill up on vegetables or salad.** These should cover about half your plate. Vegetables are a good source of fibre which can help you to feel full.
- **Avoid frying foods.** Try grilling, steaming, boiling, baking, dry roasting or microwaving instead. To reduce salt, add herbs and spices when cooking.
- **Choose healthier food and drink options.** If you take sugar in tea and coffee, use sweeteners or gradually reduce the amount of sugar you add. Choose lean cuts of meat, trim off any visible fat, remove skin and choose reduced fat mince. Have skimmed or semi-skimmed milk, low-fat spread and low-fat yoghurts – but check the food label, as low-fat products aren't always healthier.
- **Check food labels.** Often low-fat products replace fat with high amounts of sugar, and low sugar or sugar free products can be high in fat. NHS has guidelines on how to read food labels. Go to www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/how-to-read-food-labels
- **Think about why you eat.** Why do you snack between meals? Are you really hungry? Perhaps you're actually thirsty. Are you bored and eating out of habit or for comfort? Try distracting yourself with another activity.
- **Be as active as possible.** Being active helps you retain muscle while losing weight. In the longer term, this can help with weight maintenance and muscle strength including how strong your lungs are.

Commonly asked questions about your diet

Do I need to take vitamins?

Most people can get everything they need to be healthy by eating a varied, well-balanced diet. However, if your diet is restricted or limited in variety you might need to take a multivitamin or mineral tablet. If you're concerned, check with your doctor or pharmacist.

Vitamin D

The government recommends UK adults should consider taking a daily supplement of 10 micrograms of vitamin D, especially in winter.

If you have COPD or bronchiectasis and get frequent chest infections, a vitamin D supplement may reduce your risk of getting future chest infections if you are deficient. However, for some people with lung conditions, such as those with sarcoidosis, vitamin D supplements are not advisable. Talk to your health care professional to ask if a vitamin D supplement is suitable for you before you consider taking extra vitamin D. For more information, go to www.nhs.uk/conditions/vitamins-and-minerals/vitamin-d

Fact or fiction? Milk and mucus

You might worry if you drink milk or eat cheese or yoghurt, you'll produce more mucus. However, there's not enough scientific evidence to support this concern. You should include dairy foods in your diet unless you've been diagnosed with an allergy.

If you do find dairy makes your mucus stickier or harder to shift, try rinsing your mouth and drinking a little water.

I get out of breath when I eat

Sometimes people with lung conditions feel too breathless to eat much.

Top tips

- If you struggle to eat and breathe, go for softer, moist foods that are easier to chew and swallow. Using a slow cooker or cooking casseroles tenderises foods, so you don't have to chew as much and eating and breathing is easier. You can also prepare these meals in advance at a time when you have more energy or are less fatigued.
- Try having more nourishing liquids such as milk, smoothies, juice and soups.
- Breathing can sometimes become harder after eating a large meal. Try eating smaller meals and snacks more often.
- Take time when you eat. Try to swallow every mouthful before going on to the next. This is especially important if you have a chest infection. Breathlessness can make it harder for you to swallow safely. If you have trouble swallowing or notice you are coughing when eating and drinking because you feel food or drink is going down the wrong way, talk to your health care professional.

If you're losing weight without planning to or are struggling to eat enough, talk to your doctor. They may prescribe a nutritional supplement or refer you to a dietitian.

My mouth is dry

A dry mouth can be caused by breathing through your mouth, taking some inhaled medications and using oxygen.

- Make sure you drink enough fluids. If your appetite is low or you feel full quickly, take sips of fluid to keep your mouth moist whilst eating, and drink the rest of your fluids between meals.
- Eat more soft foods, use more sauces such as gravy and cheese sauce, and eat moist dishes like stews or casseroles.
- After using inhalers, remember to rinse your mouth out and gargle with water.
- Look after your teeth and mouth by brushing your teeth regularly and using dental floss. Avoid using mouthwash that contains alcohol, as this can dry out your mouth.
- Try sugar-free gum or mints or sweets, or frozen fruit to help you produce more saliva.
- Smoking and alcohol can irritate a dry mouth. Try to reduce or avoid these.
- If your dry mouth causes soreness or problems with eating, tell your doctor. They can prescribe products that help you produce saliva.

If you have problems swallowing your food, talk to your doctor. They may refer you to a speech and language therapist for a swallowing assessment.

My sense of taste has changed

A dry mouth can also affect your taste. Experiment with herbs, spices, chutneys and pickles. Sauces and oils can help enhance and carry the flavours of your food. If you go off a particular food, try it another time as your tastes may continue to change.

I feel bloated and have trapped wind

If you're breathless, you may gulp air when you eat. This causes bloating. Talk to your doctor, as bloating is a symptom of many conditions.

Top tips

- Eat in a relaxed environment and sit upright while eating and for up to half an hour after.
- Don't rush, and make sure you chew your food well.
- Try to limit fizzy drinks.
- Cut down on foods that you find produce more gas such as cabbage, sprouts, broccoli, cauliflower and beans.
- Try using peppermint. It can be taken as a tea, a cordial or a capsule.

Following a restricted diet

If you have a restricted diet, you might find it hard to adjust your diet to eat well without professional help. You might have a particular diet for a medically diagnosed reason if you have:

- another condition that affects what you can or should eat. For example, if you have diabetes
- coeliac disease or another medically-diagnosed food allergy

If this applies to you, ask your doctor to refer you to a dietitian. They will be able to help you adjust your diet to meet all your nutritional needs while considering your medical condition, lifestyle, likes and dislikes, and any practical support you might need.

Vegan or vegetarian?

Your diet might also be restricted if you follow a vegan or vegetarian diet. As a milk replacement, you might have rice, soya, oat, coconut-based or almond milk instead.

Be aware that non-dairy milks may not always be the healthiest choice. Some can be low in calories and protein so may not be suitable for people who are trying to put on weight. Many are low in calcium which is needed for healthy bones. Make sure you read the nutritional information carefully and choose fortified versions as they will have added vitamins and other nutrients.

Always consult a health care professional before making any changes to your diet. This will make sure you find suitable alternatives to get all the nutrients you need.

Information and support

Explore the interactive version of the eatwell guide at www.nhs.uk/goodfood

For more information on healthy eating go to www.nhs.uk or the British Dietetic Association food facts website www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts

The COPD Malnutrition Pathway provides practical help and leaflets for people with COPD and their carers. They can also be used as a starting point for people with other lung conditions. Go to www.malnutritionpathway.co.uk/leaflets-patients-and-carers

Go to www.gov.uk to find details of your local council and ask about food delivery services near you.

Our friendly helpline team can also help. Call them on **0300 222 5800**.

Visit blf.org.uk/support-for-you to read or order our information, including:

- exercise and pulmonary rehabilitation
- why it's never too late to stop smoking
- looking after someone with a lung condition

Get help

Call our helpline on **0300 222 5800**

We are here to help if you want:

- answers to your questions – whether it's about coping with symptoms, your rights or finding equipment
- clear and trustworthy information about breathing problems and living with a lung condition
- to get in touch with your local Asthma + Lung UK support group

Our friendly team are here Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm. Ringing will cost the same as a local call. It's usually free, depending on your call package, even from a mobile.

Or visit AsthmaAndLung.org.uk to find support information or to join our web community

- get support and information blf.org.uk/support-for-you
- sign up to our newsletter blf.org.uk/signup
- find your local support group blf.org.uk/breathe-easy
- join our web community healthunlocked.com/asthmalunguk-lung

Help others like you

You can help us to fund more research to find cures and new treatments, and make sure everyone has the support they need. We're the only UK charity looking after the nation's lungs, and we rely on your donations. Visit AsthmaAndLung.org.uk or call **0300 222 5800**.

**Together we fight
for lung health**



Helpline: **0300 222 5800**

[AsthmaAndLung.org.uk](https://www.AsthmaAndLung.org.uk)

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