

Get the balance right

When people think of eating less fat they often try to reduce visible fat (eg fat on meat) and added fat (eg oil used to fry food).

However in Northern Ireland a lot of the fat we eat is hidden in foods such as cakes, biscuits, crisps, pastry and processed meat products like sausage rolls and meat pies.

It's easy to reduce the amount of hidden fat we eat by making a few simple changes to our everyday meals. For example, if cooking:

- spaghetti bolognese - serve a larger portion of spaghetti and less of the meat sauce. This provides more starch and fibre and cuts down on the hidden fat often found in meat sauce;
- savoury meat pie - top the pie with mashed potato instead of pastry. This provides more starch and fibre and cuts out the hidden fat found in pastry.

The Balance of Good Health

These small changes are based on the Balance of Good Health (see diagram below) which shows the types and proportions of foods we should eat for a balanced and healthy diet.

We can see that the biggest proportion of our food should come from the two largest food groups:

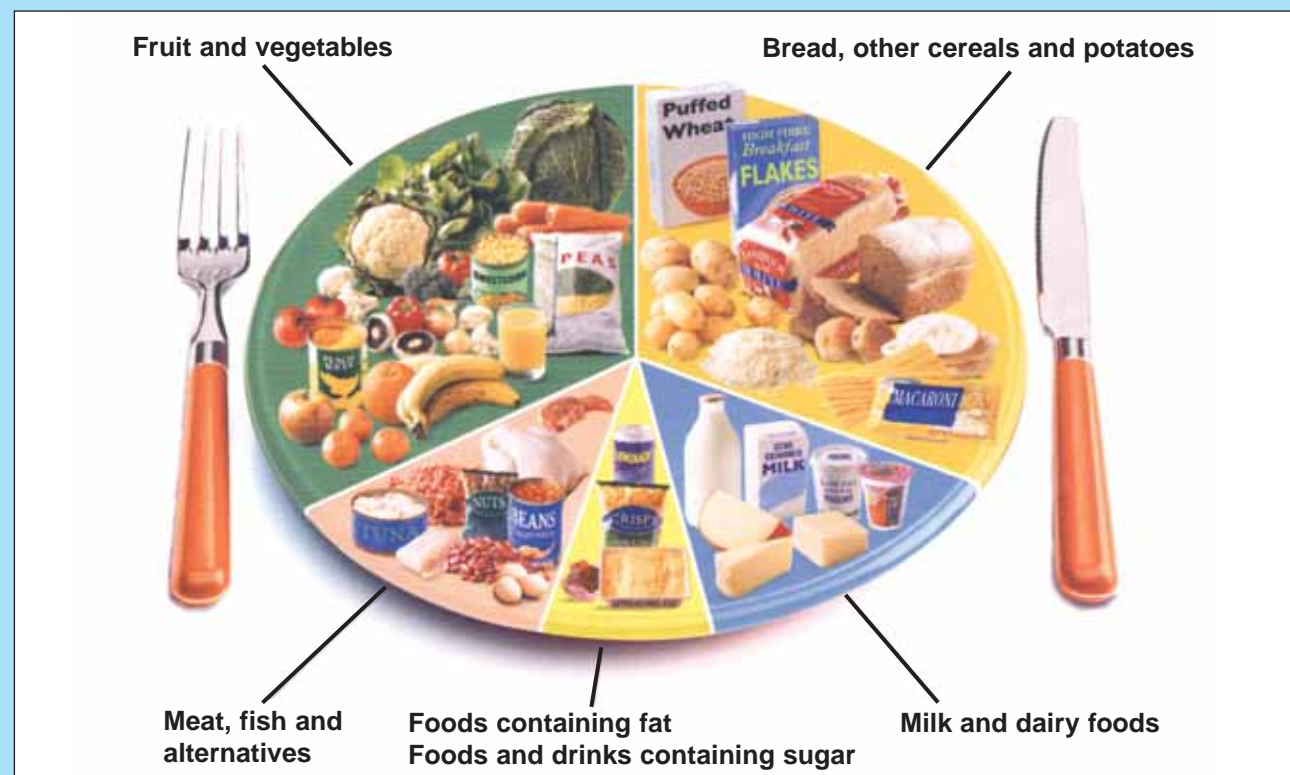
- **fruit and vegetables;**
- **bread, other cereals and potatoes.**

For a balanced diet we should also include some foods from the next two food groups:

- **meat, fish and alternatives;**
- **milk and dairy foods.**

We should try not to eat foods from the smallest group too often and only eat them in small amounts:

- **foods containing fat and foods and drinks containing sugar.**



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Ten top tips to tackle fat

- 1 When making gravy from meat juices, skim as much fat off as possible.
- 2 When cooking mince, heat gently without oil for a few minutes and then drain off any fat.
- 3 To use less cheese, choose a more strongly flavoured cheese when making cheese sauce and grate instead of slicing when making sandwiches or adding to a salad.
- 4 Don't roast potatoes - parboil them, brush lightly with an oil high in polyunsaturates or monounsaturates and crisp them in a hot oven.
- 5 Use cornflour to thicken sauces instead of starting with fat and flour.
- 6 Try to grill instead of fry. If you have to fry, use a small amount of oil, make sure the oil is hot and drain food on kitchen paper afterwards.
- 7 Try to eat less deep-fried food and less food coated in batter or breadcrumbs.
- 8 Use low fat yogurt instead of cream in sauces. Mix a teaspoon of cornflour into a small carton of yogurt to stop it curdling when heated.
- 9 When eating Indian or Chinese food, choose lower fat alternatives, eg tandoori or chow mein, boiled rice instead of fried or pilau rice and chapattis instead of naan bread.
- 10 When ordering pizza, ask for less cheese and more low fat toppings such as mushrooms, peppers, pineapple and sweetcorn.



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Find out more about fat...

for better health!



Facts about fat

A small amount of fat is an essential part of a healthy diet because it:

- contains some essential vitamins;
- is a rich source of energy (calories);
- brings out flavours in foods;
- makes foods easier to swallow.

However, eating too much fat:

- can cause weight gain (in Northern Ireland more than half the population is overweight);
- can increase the risk of heart disease, which is the major cause of death in Northern Ireland.

How much is too much?

Q How much fat do we need?

A Most people eat too much fat. The amount we need will vary as everyone has different energy (calorie) requirements depending on factors such as age and physical activity. However as a rough guide:

- adult men will need about 100g of fat per day;
- adult women will need about 75g of fat per day.

Q How much fat do children need?

A The amount of fat children should eat depends on their age:

- up to 2 years of age children should not have their fat intake reduced at all;
- between 2 and 5 years of age, lower fat products, eg semi-skimmed milk can be introduced gradually as long as children are eating well and growing normally. Skimmed milk is not recommended for this age group;
- over 5 years of age children can safely follow healthy eating guidelines to eat less fat.

Q How do we know how much fat we're eating?

A We can work out the fat content of most foods by checking the ingredients label on the products we buy.



Some labels may also give a breakdown of the different types of fat in food. *See section 'Confused about fats and oils?'*

Sample food label - soup

Nutritional information		
Typical values	per 100g	per 425g can
Energy	179kJ 43kcal	761kJ 183kcal
Protein	0.7g	3.0g
Carbohydrate (of which sugars)	4.6g 2.1g	19.6g 8.9g
Fat (of which saturates)	2.4g 0.8g	10.2g 3.4g
Fibre	0.5g	2.1g
Sodium	0.4g	1.7g

Q If food isn't labelled, how can we tell how much fat it contains?

A We often eat food which isn't labelled, eg when in a canteen or buying a takeaway lunch.

So it helps to know a little about the average fat content of some foods and snacks. *See table opposite.*

This can make surprising reading as we can't always see the fat in food.



Foods and snacks - what's on your menu?

Food	Average serving	Fat content in grammes (g)
sausage roll	2 medium	52.8
pizza (cheese & tomato)	1 medium deep pan	43.9
chips (fast food 'fries')	150g portion	32.0
quiche	1 medium slice	31.1
peanuts	50g bag	26.5
chips (chip shop)	210g shop portion	26.0
mayonnaise	1 heaped tablespoon	24.9
lemon meringue pie	1 slice	21.6
cheese (cheddar)	60g	20.6
coleslaw	2 heaped tablespoons	19.5
double cream	2 tablespoons	14.4
whipping cream	2 tablespoons	12.0
crisps	30g bag	11.3
salad cream	1 heaped tablespoon	10.2
chips (homemade - thick cut)	150g portion	10.0
reduced fat mayonnaise	1 heaped tablespoon	9.3
butter	2 teaspoons	8.2
margarine	2 teaspoons	8.2
digestive biscuit	2 biscuits	6.3
chips (oven chips)	150g portion	6.3
cheese (processed)	1 slice	5.4
scone	1 scone	4.9
low (half) fat spread	2 teaspoons	4.4
wholemeal bread	2 slices	1.8
low fat yogurt	150g carton	1.1
white bread	2 slices	1.0

Confused about fats and oils?

Most people have heard of the different types of fat but many are not sure where they are found or what effect they have on the body. The two main types of fat are listed below.

Saturated fats (saturates)

- These can increase the level of cholesterol in the blood which may encourage the development of fatty deposits in the arteries. It is therefore important to cut down on saturated fats.
- Saturated fats are found in bought cakes, biscuits, pastry, meat and meat products (eg sausage rolls), cream, hard margarine, butter, solid cooking fat and some oils labelled 'vegetable oil'.

Unsaturated fats (unsaturates)

- These can help to lower the levels of cholesterol in the blood and are of two types:
 - polyunsaturated fats (polyunsaturates);
 - monounsaturated fats (monounsaturates).
- Polyunsaturated fats are found in corn oil, safflower oil and sunflower oil or spread.
- Monounsaturated fats are found in olive oil, rapeseed oil and spreads made from these oils.

Most fatty food products contain the different types of fat in various proportions, eg sunflower oil is high in polyunsaturates but it also contains some monounsaturates and saturates.

When buying fat, eg spreads and oils, try to choose those labelled 'high in monounsaturates' or 'high in polyunsaturates'.

