



# Healthy Eating



**Muslim Health Service**

***Supporting the NHS***

# You are what you eat

Although it sounds cliché, the old proverb “you are what you eat” is very true. ***What we eat, how we eat, how often we eat and how much we eat*** are all important factors that determine our health.

## ***Enjoying food***

Taking the time to enjoy our food is an important part of maintaining a healthy diet.

When we eat quickly we don't give our bodies enough time to tell us that we are full. As a result we continue eating even though we are no longer hungry. The excess food is then stored as fat.

Taking the time to chew our food properly helps us digest the food and stimulates the production of gastric juices.

We should also appreciate that while we may often have more than enough to eat, many people in the world face starvation. The food we have is a blessing and we should treat it with the appropriate respect and appreciation.

Because of the easy availability of food, we are prone to taking it for granted. However, it is important to remember that even though we may pay for it, the food we eat is not produced because of our efforts.

***Islam teaches us to thank the our Creator, the One who provides the food for our sustenance, before and after we eat in order to truly appreciate our food.***

### ***Eat in company***

Eating in company makes our meals more enjoyable. It can also be an opportunity to spend quality time with loved ones or a good way to make new friends. Sharing food can create a positive bond between people.

***The Islamic manner of sharing food is to offer the food to the person next to us before serving our selves.***

### ***Wash your hands***

Making sure the crockery and cutlery we are using and the place where we are eating is clean is very important.

It is also important to wash our hands before eating or preparing food as it ensures we don't consume any dangerous germs with our food.

Raw meats and fish should be prepared separately to other foods as these can often contain bacteria that are only killed by high heat.

***In Islamic culture, it is recommended to eat with the right hand, using only the first three fingers and thumb. It is also recommended to wash our hands and rinse our mouth after eating to ensure germs don't build up in these areas.***

### ***Don't drink water with your meal***

Drinking water with our meals increases the speed with which solid food leaves our stomach. As a result, we become hungry again soon after we have eaten and may end up eating excessively.

***The Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) recommends that we only drink water either thirty minutes before or after a meal.***

## HOW OFTEN TO EAT

### ***Eat regular meals***

Eating regular meals helps us maintain a good routine. We should also avoid snacking in between meals.

### ***Avoid eating late at night***

If we eat late at night or just before going to sleep, the food we eat is not used and is stored as fat. It is also advised to walk a hundred steps after eating.

## HOW MUCH TO EAT

### ***Avoid Excess – The Rule of Thirds***

It is easy to forget that “we eat to live and not live eat” when such an enormous variety of attractive foods are readily available. Certain foods can become addictive. Unfortunately these foods are often those that cause weight gain or may be related to an increased risk of developing certain cancers, heart disease, diabetes and stroke.

***The Islamic Philosophy on eating is “everything in moderation” – i.e. to maintain a balanced diet which avoids excess. It is also recommended by the Prophet SAWS that we fill one third of our stomachs with solid food, one third with liquid and one third is left empty.***

It is important to remember that the stomach stretches, so the more we eat, the larger it becomes. Every time we eat until we are full, our stomach stretches slightly. As a result, our capacity to eat increases and soon becomes more than the actual needs of our body. This is when we start putting on weight and it’s often a slippery slope that can lead to us become dangerously overweight and developing health problems.



# What to eat – Maintaining a Balanced Diet

It is important to have a varied diet that provides all the different things that our bodies need to function. The following table is a guide to some common foods.

Type of Food	What it contains	How it affects our bodies
Rice, Bread, Pasta, Potatoes	These are <b>high energy</b> foods that contain a lot of carbohydrates	Usually these foods are a good source of energy. How much we need depends on how active we are. <b>If we eat more than we need, it is stored as fat.</b>
Chicken	<b>Protein</b> ; chicken skin is also high in <b>fat</b>	Protein is very important in the functioning of our bodies. Our <b>muscles</b> and tissues are made of protein. However the saturated fat in chicken skin can be harmful to us if taken in large quantities.
Beef/Lamb	Protein; <b>Iron</b> ; different levels of fat depending on the cut of meat	Iron is used by our bodies to make <b>haemoglobin</b> which carries oxygen around the body. There is more saturated fat in red meat than in chicken. Therefore eating large amounts of it can cause excess weight gain and clog up our arteries. Eating large amounts of red meat is also thought to increase the risk of certain cancers.
Fish	Protein, vitamins, Oily fish contain <b>Essential fatty acids</b>	Different fish are rich in different vitamins; these are important in our organs working well. Essential fatty acids help maintain <b>brain</b> function.
Milk	A balanced mix of a wide range of nutrients including <b>Calcium</b>	Calcium is needed to maintain strong <b>bones, teeth and nails.</b>
Cereals	Carbohydrates, <b>fibre, iron,</b>	Fibre allows food to pass more easily through our bowels and prevents constipation
Fruits and vegetables	<b>Vitamins, minerals, fibre, water</b>	Different fruits and vegetables contain different nutrients. Many of them are rich in water, fibre and vitamins. Fruits also contain sugars.

## ***Avoid unhealthy foods***

Foods high in saturated fat or sugar cause weight gain. Examples are sweets, desserts and fried foods. The saturated fat and high sugar content damages the wall of blood vessels increasing the increase risk of heart disease and strokes.

Foods high in salt such as crisps can contribute to a high blood pressure and increase the risk of stroke.

Processed foods contain chemical additives which may be harmful and some may even cause cancer. Even though we may find it easier to eat processed foods such as instant noodles or microwave meals, in the long term they can cause harm to our health.

***The Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) advises on avoiding food that is too hot or cold.*** Recent research has shown that very hot or cold food can damage the lining of our food pipe and stomach and increase the risk of cancer in these parts of the body.

## ***Drink plenty of water***

Water makes up about two thirds of our weight and this volume needs to be constantly replenished. Water is also used by the body to get rid of waste products and toxins.

We often underestimate how much water we need to drink. Many people confuse thirst with hunger and therefore eat when they need to be drinking. The **average adult should drink at least two litres of water during the day**, more if it is hot and for pregnant women. Fresh fruits and fruit juice can also help fulfil our water requirements.

## ***Eat fresh fruits and vegetables***

Fresh fruits and vegetables are an essential part of our diet. They contain fibre which helps us regulate our bowel movements. They also contain a variety of vitamins and minerals without which we may develop serious health problems. It is recommended that we eat **at least five portions of fruit and vegetable a day to maintain good health**. Buying locally produced fruits and vegetables may be cheaper, help support local farms and reduce our carbon foot print.

