

Hot tips for good health despite lockdown rules and cold weather

SMALL LIFESTYLE CHANGES CAN HELP PEOPLE EAT HEALTHY AND IMPROVE FITNESS

Eastern Eye (UK) · 22 Jan 2021 · 19

WINTER is a time to feast on warm, nourishing, comfort food – and during the pandemic lockdown, when most of us have spent more time indoors than during previous years, this could prove to be a challenge.



Some of us have put on weight, others might have not focused on physical activity. But eating well and choosing the right foods are easy to do, despite the chilly days and the current restrictions. These are a few pointers to help you adopt a balanced and nutritious diet.

Ditch denial – and guilt

Lock down has been tough on all of us, and it's understandable that it may have led some people to comfort eat and snack more often – in particular, increasing their consumption of fatty and sugary foods, says Dan Howarth, head of care at Diabetes UK. The two best ways to keep healthy are getting active and eating a balanced diet rich in fruit and vegetables and low in fatty foods. Howarth says, “The best approach is to find a diet that you enjoy and which fits in with your lifestyle; so you're more likely to stick to it in the long term.”

Set realistic goals

Check out the Live Well section on the NHS website – go to [nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-weight/](https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-weight/). Here you can find out if you have a healthy weight for your height by calculating your body mass index (BMI), get help with a weight loss plan, and learn more about a healthy balanced diet.

Plan ahead

Families can draw up meal plans where adults and children both get a say on lunch and dinner options, with room for an occasional take away. That way, it takes the pressure off those who are

Make healthier choices

We often eat more than we need in terms of calories, so try to eat healthily, says professor Kiran Patel, chief medical officer and consultant cardiologist, University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust. “We all need a balanced diet of protein, fat and carbohydrates, and too much fat and carbohydrates in adults is not good.” His advice? Avoid foods high in fat, sugar and salt. Also, enjoy more vegetables and fruit.

When cooking, another healthier option is to use whole grain basmati rice, and whole meal flour when making chapattis, as well as avoiding adding salt, says Howarth.

Beans and pulses are also great choices, and a good source of soluble fibre. Aim for at least five portions of fruit and vegetables each day, and try to limit the amount of fruit juices and smoothies consumed, Howarth adds. He also recommends trying unsaturated fats like olive oil, vegetable oil, rapeseed oil, spreads made from these oils, and nut butters instead of saturated fat like butter, palm nut oil and coconut oil.

While it might be tempting to indulge during the lockdown, Howarth's suggestion is to try to limit the intake of foods with little or no nutritional value, such as cakes, chocolates, biscuits, gulab jamun, jalebi, crisps and Bombay mix. Snita Sharma, from Buckinghamshire, whose diabetes is in remission, revealed that she makes her own treats and stays away from crisps and chocolates. "I make energy balls and I have actually turned it into a business, selling them at local coffee shops," she said. She uses whole ingredients and natural food such as nuts, avoiding any white or refined flours and sugars.

Have drink-free days

January is when some of us give up alcohol, but in these exceptional circumstances, where we have not socialised with colleagues and friends and a lot of us are working from home, alcohol consumption may have increased. There are a lot of calories in alcoholic drinks, which can affect your weight, says Howarth, so limit consumption of alcohol. The NHS has a free Drink-Free Days app (nhs.uk/oneyou/apps) to help.

Move more

According to the NHS, adults are encouraged to do some type of physical activity every day and should aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity or 75 minutes of vigorous intensity activity a week. During lockdown, it's natural that many people have become more sedentary. Howarth says, as many of us are working from home, "Increasing physical activity levels will help with weight loss, and can help reduce your risk of developing type 2 diabetes in the future. "Try getting out for a walk before or after work, or taking an exercise class online in your lunch break." Research shows that physical activity can also boost self-esteem, energy, mood and sleep quality, according to the NHS. "It will do you a world of good once you get out there," says Snita, who is in remission from diabetes after ditching her unhealthy diet and inactive lifestyle. "When I am out and come back, I feel amazing."

Keep track

Once you get started on a routine of healthy meals and daily exercise, keeping track of progress will motivate you to stick with the plan. The NHS Weight Loss app allows you to record everything from exercise done to weight lost. Keeping a food, activity and mood diary also works for some people. Howarth says, "Tracking what you're eating, and seeing how it affects the way you're feeling from day to day can be a big help."