



University  
Hospitals Sussex  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Eating well after a hospital admission

Practical tips to help you eat well  
after your inpatient stay.

## What is this leaflet about?

Many people struggle to eat and drink enough after leaving hospital. Lots of people find that their eating returns to normal once they get home, but for some people it takes a bit longer.

**This leaflet tells you:**

- Why you need to eat and drink well
- How to have a healthy diet
- Ways to make eating well easier
- What you should eat if you are losing weight without meaning to.

## Why is eating and drinking well after being in hospital important?

Regardless of the reason for your hospital stay eating and drinking well helps with your recovery. When you are unwell your body will usually need more energy to get you better (for example, by fighting infections, healing wounds, or re-building lost muscle). The best way to make sure that your body has enough energy to do this is to eat and drink enough of the right foods and drink for your body type.

## What is healthy eating?

Healthy eating for most people normally means that they eat a wide variety of foods, in the right amounts, for good health.

**To have a healthy, balanced diet, you should try to:**

- Eat at least five portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables every day.
- Base meals on high-fibre starchy foods like potatoes, bread, rice or pasta.
- Have some dairy or dairy alternatives (such as soya drinks).
- Eat some beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other protein.

- Choose unsaturated oils and spreads, and eat them in small amounts.
- Drink plenty of fluids (at least six to eight glasses a day).

But if you have a poor appetite (don't want to eat), or are losing weight without meaning to, then making sure you are eating enough calories and protein is more important than trying to stick to a healthy diet.

## Why does my weight matter?

Being a healthy weight reduces the risk of developing other health problems. Being underweight can lead a variety of issues such as a weak immune system, poor wound healing, pressure damage, and poor kidney function. On the other hand, being overweight or obese increases the risk of developing problems like type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and strokes.

## What if I have a reduced appetite or I am losing weight?

If you have a poor appetite for a long time it can lead to you becoming undernourished (meaning your body is not getting enough nutrition through food to maintain good health).

A common symptom of this is losing weight without meaning to. Therefore, it is very important to eat enough calories and protein to prevent this from happening.

### **Here are some tips to help you eat enough calories and protein:**

- Choose full fat or high energy foods: avoid low calorie or diet options.
- Choose full fat (whole) milk and dairy products.
- Eating three smaller meals and three snacks may be easier than three large meals a day.
- Don't drink just before mealtimes as this may fill you up.

- If you are struggling to prepare foods, use convenience foods or ready meals.
- Add extra calories and protein to your food.
- Have snacks between meals.
- Have nourishing drinks that contain a high amount of calories & protein (e.g. homemade milkshakes, malted drinks, or hot chocolates).
- If you cannot eat much, you can buy general multivitamin and mineral tablets.

The table below shows foods that are high in calories and protein (there are other foods not shown in this list that have the same calorie and protein content).

Food	Serving size	Calories (kcal)	Protein (g)
Double cream	30g / 2tbsp	140	2
Hard cheese (full fat)	40g	165	10
Soft cheese (full fat)	30g / 2tbsp	75	1.5
Skimmed milk powder	25g	90	9
Butter or margarine	1 heaped teaspoon	75	0
Oil (olive, vegetable, rapeseed, coconut)	1 tbsp	100	0
Full fat milk	75ml	50	2.5
Jam/marmalade/honey (if you are diabetic, avoid eating a lot of this)	1 heaped teaspoon	50	0
Mayonnaise (full fat)	1/2 tbsp	50	0
Pesto	15g / 1 tbsp	70	1

**The table here shows a list of snacks with about 200 to 300 calories in each:**

- Slice of cake
- Sponge & custard
- Scone with butter & jam or
- Crumpet with butter & cheese
- Pork pie or scotch egg
- Sandwich with meat/fish/cheese/peanut butter
- Cheese & biscuits
- Hummus / avocado on toast
- Full fat/creamy yogurt
- Pot of trifle or chocolate mousse
- Poached or scrambled eggs
- Handful of dried fruit / nuts.

## **What should I do if I am still losing weight?**

For further advice if you are continuing to lose weight, please speak to your GP who may refer you to a Dietitian.

## **What if I am struggling to prepare my own food?**

Some people find that they can no longer carry out certain tasks by themselves, such as food shopping, cooking, or cleaning up.

You should still aim to eat regularly (for example, three meals a day). It can be helpful to stock up on convenience foods so that you have something easy to eat if you cannot make a meal.

See the table on the next page for ideas:

Breakfast	Main meal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Porridge sachets/pots</li> <li>• Cereal/cereal bars</li> <li>• Fresh/tinned/frozen fruit</li> <li>• Yogurts</li> <li>• Pastries (fresh or frozen)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ready meals</li> <li>• Instant noodles/pastas</li> <li>• Tinned spaghetti/ravioli/macaroni cheese</li> <li>• Instant mashed potato</li> <li>• Microwave rice</li> <li>• Frozen/tinned vegetables</li> <li>• Tinned soups</li> </ul>
Puddings	Savoury snacks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Custard (powder/premade)</li> <li>• Ice cream</li> <li>• Jelly pots</li> <li>• Rice pudding</li> <li>• Angel delight</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cheese/cheese spreads</li> <li>• Crackers</li> <li>• Crisps</li> <li>• Rice cakes</li> <li>• Breadsticks</li> </ul>

## What if I cannot get to the shops to buy my own food?

If you can no longer go food shopping, are there other ways to get food to your home?

### For example:

- Getting a relative, friend, or neighbour to get food for you.
- Ordering food online to be delivered to your home (most large supermarkets offer this service).
- Using click & collect services online and getting someone else to pick this up for you.

- Using approved meal providers local to your area:

**Wiltshire Farm Foods:** 0800 077 3100

**Oakhouse Foods:** 0333 370 6700

**HILS (West Sussex):** 0330 2000 103

**Hot Meals on Wheels (Apetito):** 0800 090 3604

**Cookmere Meals (East Sussex):** 01323 884274

## What If I am overweight?

The best way to treat being overweight is to eat a healthy diet and exercise regularly.

You may benefit from joining a local weight management programme with group meetings or online support.

Your GP can tell you about these.

## Where can I go for further information and advice?

If you require specialised dietary advice please see your GP who can refer you to a dietitian if necessary.

## References and further information:

### **NHS, Eating a balanced diet (2022).**

Available online at <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/how-to-eat-a-balanced-diet/eating-a-balanced-diet/>

### **NHS, Malnutrition (2023).**

Available online at Malnutrition - NHS [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

### **UH Sussex, Food as Treatment leaflet.**

### **HILS, West Sussex.**

Available online at <https://hils-uk.org/>

### **Wiltshire Farm Foods.**

Available online at <https://www.wiltshirefarmfoods.com>

### **Oakhouse Foods.**

Available online at <https://www.oakhousefoods.co.uk>

### **Apetito.**

Available online at <https://www.apetito.co.uk>

### **Cookmere meals.**

Available online at <https://cookmere.co.uk/>

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