



**University
Hospitals Sussex**
NHS Foundation Trust

How to gain weight and look after your heart

Dietetics

Patient information

What is this information about?

This information is about what you can eat and drink to help you to stay at the same weight or put on weight, if you need to, without harming your heart's health.

Why have I been given this information?

You have been given this information because it would be good for your health for you to stay at the same weight or gain weight. Many foods which cause you to gain weight are also high in fat. They can cause heart problems or make them worse.

If you follow the advice in this information, it will help you to choose foods that:

- help you to stay at the same weight or gain weight
- are good choices for heart health.

What ideas can I try to help me to gain weight?

- try to increase portion sizes of the food and drinks that you already have
- if you do not feel like eating much small meals and snacks that you have often are easier to manage
- aim for three small meals a day with two or three snacks in between.

Should I try to have one pint of full cream milk each day?

Yes. You do not have to drink a pint in one go.

Do try:

- adding it to your food and drinks
- having a hot milky drink before bed.

For example, hot chocolate, Ovaltine or Horlicks.

Be aware

If you prefer not to drink cows' milk you could use full-fat soya milk.

How can I make milk even better for helping me to gain weight?

You can make milk more nourishing by adding 4 tablespoons of dried milk powder to a pint of milk. Use this in cooking, drinks, puddings, soups, and breakfast cereals.

Tip:

You can also add milk powder to ready-made foods such as milk puddings custard or soup. Dissolve the milk powder in a small amount of milk before adding it.

Might supplement drinks help me to gain weight?

Yes. Milkshakes and soups designed for people who find it difficult to eat enough of the usual healthy foods may help. You can buy these products, such as Complan and Foodlink Complete, from most supermarkets and pharmacies.

Your dietitian will also check whether other special nutritional drinks may help you. If so, your doctor will prescribe them for you.

Should I eat more foods that are high in protein?

Yes. Eating enough protein helps to build-up your muscles. It is also important for stopping you from losing weight and helping you to regain weight.

Which foods that are high in protein could I include in my diet?

Do try and eat:

- **lean meats or fish** with your lunch and evening meal. Cook these in olive or rapeseed oil.
- **tofu**. Use vegetable or sunflower oil if you are frying it.
- **pulses**. For example, beans, peas, or lentils. Try adding them to soups, casseroles, or dishes like cottage pie.
- **nuts**.

For example, you could try:

- ground almonds sprinkled over cereal
- cashew nuts added to a stir-fry
- snacking on walnuts.

Can eating more sugary foods and snacks help me to gain weight?

Yes. Sugar gives us energy. Eating more sugary foods and snacks can help you to gain weight.

Do try to:

- use sugar rather than artificial sweeteners. If this makes your food taste too sweet, try glucose powder instead.
- add jam or honey to porridge, puddings or yoghurts instead of sugar.
- have a pudding after your meals. For example, yoghurt, custard, or ice cream.

Should I try to eat oily fish as part of my diet?

Yes. Oily fish are high in protein. They also contain omega-3 fats. These can protect you against heart disease.

Oily fish include herring, kippers, mackerel, pilchards, salmon, sardines and trout.

Do aim to have at least two large servings of oily fish a week.
A serving is 100 to 150g.

Are all fats bad for my heart?

No. If you have heart problems you may have been told to limit how much fat you have in your diet but not all fats are bad for your heart.

If you need to gain weight it is important to have plenty of fat in your diet.

Avoid saturated fats in your diet. These can increase your cholesterol levels so are not healthy for your heart. They are mostly in animal products such as meat, butter, and lard. Be aware of hidden sources of saturated fats, such as in pastry and suet puddings.

Do include plenty of unsaturated fats in your diet. These are healthy for your heart. They are in vegetable oils such as sunflower oil, olive oil, rapeseed oil. They are also in spreads (margarines) made from them.

Use plenty of the heart-healthy oils in cooking and the spreads on your bread or added to potato and vegetables.

Who can I contact if I have any questions, would like further information, or want to give feedback after I have read this information?

Dietetics department

Please email or phone the hospital and ask for the Dietetics department. Leave a message for the dietitians who will respond as soon as possible.

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