

Small steps to a healthier you.

Toolkit

When it comes to health and wellbeing, what we do today has a huge impact in the years and decades to come.



Weight loss is often seen as the end-goal. But building healthy habits slowly and steadily gives us tremendous benefits such as better energy levels and better mood.

Registered Dietitian Misbah Ameen-Khan

Yet, as a nation we aren't prioritising our long-term health. In a survey, YouGov and the British Dietetic Association (BDA) found that 42% of us aren't prioritising our future health, with many of us not even thinking about it all.

But, did you know that investing in our health now can lead to a happier, healthier and longer life? We can futureproof our health, build a healthy lifestyle and reduce our risk of illness and chronic health conditions as we get older. We'll even benefit from better productivity, quicker recovery and more energy... just to name a few.

To do this, we need to be prioritising the four basic pillars of health – **nutrition, movement, mental wellbeing and sleep.**

11%

of people aren't eating foods to support their health despite knowing they would benefit them*

14%

of people eat what they want when they want*

42%

of people don't prioritise their future health*



*YouGov and BDA survey of 2000 people

Evidence shows us that each of these pillars is important in its own way. Together, they support our short and long-term health and wellbeing.

With 11% of us not eating foods to support our health despite knowing they would benefit us, it's time to take some small steps to a healthier you.

This dietitian-approved toolkit shares practical tips and ideas that we can implement on a daily basis to feel good from the inside out, which will support our health and wellbeing in the long-term. The aim is to inspire us to think beyond weight loss as our only health goal and instead to think about our overall health and wellbeing, now and into the future.

Start taking small steps to a healthier you today for your future self by:



Focusing on compounding

Small changes make a big difference.



Being nutrition savvy

Navigate the nonsense and know the red flags.



Thinking beyond food

Prioritise holistic health.



Starting to improve your wellbeing

Our future-selves will thank us for it!



Focus on compounding

Small changes make a big difference.

Compounding our health means focusing on little efforts in the present for big gains in the future.

Small changes that are consistent, sustainable, and enjoyable add up over time. Choose one small change, master it, maintain it, then move onto the next- you don't have to do everything at once.

In this first part, we roundup all the different ways we can compound our health through what we eat.

'Little by little, a little becomes a lot'
(Tanzanian Proverb)

Evidence tells us that having a balance of the right foods, which provide all the nutrients our body needs can reduce our risk of disease.¹

We don't need to have a complete overhaul of our diet or cut foods out. That's not sustainable. Keep it simple and let's enjoy our food and nourish our bodies with good quality, nutrient-dense foods.



Diets usually focus on large, unsustainable changes to your nutrition which you may be able to follow for a few weeks but then you fail, leaving you feeling worse than before. Instead, focus on a few small changes and build on them over time. Making small changes to your day can make a big difference over time to your physical and mental health.

Registered Dietitian
Priya Tew

Swaps



Swap out 50% of your regular cornflakes and **add bran flakes.**



Swap white varieties of things like bread, pasta or rice **for wholegrain varieties.** If it's too much of a leap, try 50:50.



Swap salt for **herbs and spices.**



Swap out flavoured yoghurt for **plain yoghurt** and **add your own toppings** such as nuts, seeds, honey, fruit or a nut butter.



Swap out **50% of the mince** used in your spaghetti bolognese, lasagne, chilli con carne or shepherd's pie and replace **with pulses like chickpeas or lentils.**



Swap sugary drinks for fruit infused water, fruit teas, herbal or black tea, coffee, diluted fruit juice, coconut water, or milk.





Focus on compounding

Small changes make a big difference.

Add ons...

+ If you're having a cooked breakfast, remember to add baked beans, tomatoes, mushrooms, spinach and wholegrain toast on the side.


+ If you eat a plant-based diet opt for a white bean mash or tempeh on your sandwich.² You could swap out butter or full fat mayo for an olive-oil spread, mustard, houmous or avocado instead.

+ For sandwiches, add colour! Think about adding cucumber, tomato, pickles, peppers, onions alongside your lean protein like chicken, turkey, canned tuna or salmon.


+ If you're having pizza, load up with veggies, top with rocket and drizzle with olive oil.


+ If you're having a Sunday roast, load up half of your plate with vegetables.

Try...


 Try **including more wholegrain** cereals such as wheat biscuits, porridge or muesli without added sugar.




 Try **bulk cooking** your favourite meal and pop in the freezer so you always have a quick and easy dinner to hand.


 Try **vegetarian sausages, chicken or turkey sausages** instead of beef or pork sausages.


 Prioritise **cooking methods such as roasting, baking, steaming** and using an air fryer instead of deep frying.

 **Have nutritious snacks to hand**, including dried fruit, nuts, pieces of fruit to dip in nut butter, dark chocolate, slices of veg to dip in houmous, popcorn, wholegrain crackers, homemade oat bars...




 Go for **chocolate with a high cocoa percentage** (70%+) or melt down a mix of milk and dark chocolate and use as a dip with fruit.

 Go for variety packs instead of single packets to **add some variation** in the benefits you are getting from your fruit, veggies and nuts.


 Keep the **skins on fruit and vegetables** when you can – potatoes, kiwis, cucumber, apples, carrots, aubergine.




Don't forget the principles of eating well, which feed into all of these tips:

 **Add colour** - fruit and vegetables are packed full of phytochemicals and powerful antioxidants that protect the body in a number of ways

 **Eat more fibre** to get your gut working normally³

 **Get a good proportion** of carbohydrates, fruit and vegetables, protein, dairy (and non-dairy alternatives) and unsaturated fats and oils. For most people you don't want to be cutting out any of these food groups unless you've been advised by a registered dietitian or medical professional (there's a lot of misinformation out there!)

 **Eat wholegrains**⁴

 **Drink water!** Good hydration is so important and ensures many functions in the body can take place⁵



Be nutrition savvy

Navigate the nonsense and know the red flags.

We're bombarded with huge volumes of information (and misinformation) about the food we should or shouldn't be eating every day.

This constant stream of conflicting advice makes it hard to know who to trust, to know what works, and how to avoid things that won't work.

In this second part, we outline the top ten red flags that signal nutrition nonsense.

Start to look for these red flags and question the information you are seeing online.

Being more aware of these things can prevent us from being guilt-tripped into focusing on weight loss, trying supposed quick fix solutions, buying expensive equipment or supplements or cutting out important food groups.

If you are spotting some of the below then it's probably best to ignore their so-called advice!

Remember, if it sounds too good to be true then it probably is.

only
2%

of nutrition information on TikTok has been found to be evidence-based⁶

Ask yourself...

- Are they using buzz words like 'toxins', 'inflammatory' and 'natural'?
- Are they pushing specific food products or supplements as the only thing you need to solve [enter health issue here]?
- Are they criticising the scientific community, focusing on conspiracies, or positioning themselves against the general consensus?
- Are they offering advice based on personal stories or the stories of others?
- Are they demonising specific foods or recommending eating only specific foods?
- Are they offering oversimplified miracle solutions?
- Are they advocating extreme approaches like maple syrup, raw food, juice cleanses?
- Are they giving themselves compelling titles despite not having the appropriate qualifications or relevant expertise like a registered dietitian has?
- Do they talk in absolutes, making something sound completely unquestionable e.g. 'gluten is bad' or 'dairy is inflammatory'?
- Are they cherry picking (questionable) studies to support their statements and making themselves sound sciency?



Be nutrition savvy

Navigate the nonsense and know the red flags.

Tips



Unfollow social media accounts that demonstrate any of the red flags.



Don't be drawn in by 'clickbait' headlines – always read the full article, as often you'll see that the evidence doesn't stack up.



Look for the 'PIF TICK' kitemark on health information (the only independently assessed quality mark for health information – pifonline.org.uk/pif-tick).



Know where to look for evidence-based information – we at the British Dietetic Association (BDA) have a host of Food Fact Sheets with all the latest evidence on things like folic acid, irritable bowel syndrome and iron.

The NHS also has plenty of information to support you on their website.



If you have any underlying health conditions or simply want some advice, we would always recommend speaking to a registered dietitian, either via your GP or by seeking out a freelancer.



Dietitians are the only qualified and regulated health professionals that assess, diagnose and treat diet and nutrition problems, at an individual and wider public-health level.

Useful links:



BDA Food Fact Sheets

bda.uk.com/FoodFacts



BDA Find a freelance dietitian

bda.uk.com/FindaDietitian



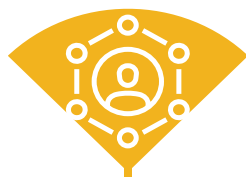
Think beyond food

Prioritise holistic health.

There are four key pillars to supporting our short and long-term health. Nutrition (the food we eat) is one of them, but it's not the only one. Movement, mental wellbeing, and sleep are all key for maintaining good health now and in the future.

In this third part, we highlight the other pillars of health and ways to include them in our daily routine. Just like the food we eat, each of these can have a profound effect on our health. Movement makes our bodies stronger and more resilient as we age. Sleep repairs and restores us.

Evidence shows us that people with certain mental health conditions are more likely to have preventable physical health conditions, so it's important that we prioritise each of these.⁷



Movement

Choose something you enjoy - a yoga session, a walk, a dance class, a swim at your local leisure centre or a Parkrun.

Explore new activities you haven't tried before.



Build movement into your everyday routine - house chores, gardening, taking the stairs instead of the lift all count.

Consider investing in a wearable physical activity monitor.



Mental Health

Consider an app such as Headspace or Calm.



Have a break and block out protected time to relax - watch a film, read a book or bake.

Try meditation or taking some slow, deep breaths.



Spend time outdoors and get closer to nature.



Sleep

Avoid a large meal late into the evening, instead opt for light snacks.

Limit napping in the daytime. If you really need to nap, keep it to mid-afternoon for 20-30 minutes.

Keep to a sleep schedule - try to wake up and go to sleep at similar times, including weekends.

Minimise caffeine after midday and avoid alcohol in the evening.





Think beyond food

Prioritise holistic health.



Movement

Do a YouTube exercise video in your living room while watching something on TV.



Mental Health

Use a journal to jot down your stress and worries.



Sleep

Create a restful sleep environment – keep your bedroom a comfortable temperature, use low level lighting and minimise noise.

Find a workout buddy such as a friend or family member.



Food and hydration are incredibly important when it comes to mental health, so make sure you eat regular meals to give you a steady supply of energy.¹⁰

Have a relaxation wind-down routine such as reading a book, listening to music, meditation, gentle stretching or taking a hot bath or shower.



Don't forget to stay hydrated, you will need to drink more when you are moving more.⁵



Ensure you have enough glucose in your blood to avoid feeling weak, tired or fuzzy minded. You get this from carbohydrates, so unless you have a medical reason to - don't cut them out!⁹

If you work night shifts, block out daylight using a blackout blind or eye mask. Keeping to a regular sleep pattern and not going to bed hungry or thirsty will help you sleep better.

Include resistance training to preserve and build muscle mass, and some cardio exercise to improve your heart and lung health.

This is important for overall health at any age, and key for those going through the menopause.⁸

20%

of us want to improve our fitness levels

12%

of us want to improve our mental health

10%

of us are prioritising sleep

*YouGov and BDA survey of 2000 people



Sleep is such an important part of the health puzzle and in my opinion it's one of the greatest investments you can make in your health. It feeds in to so much of life, from recovery and repair of the body, reducing inflammation, impacting your hunger hormones and ultimately reducing your risk of disease.

Registered Dietitian Claire Fudge



What else do we need to know?

Using this toolkit and extra reading.

You don't have to implement all of the things contained in this toolkit at once. The idea is that you make small changes bit by bit, which all add up.

The information contained in this toolkit is general. If you have a medical condition, are pregnant or a child, please seek advice from a dietitian or health care team before making any changes to usual dietary advice.

This toolkit has been written and peer-reviewed by volunteer dietitians on behalf of the British Dietetic Association (BDA).

Extra reading



BDA Healthy Eating Food Fact Sheet
bda.uk.com/HealthyEating



BDA Plant Based Diet Food Fact Sheet
bda.uk.com/PlantBasedDiet



BDA Fibre Food Fact Sheet
bda.uk.com/Fibre



BDA Wholegrains Food Fact Sheet
bda.uk.com/Wholegrains



BDA Fluid & Hydration Food Fact Sheet
bda.uk.com/Hydration



BDA Menopause Food Fact Sheet
bda.uk.com/Menopause



BDA Food and Mood Food Fact Sheet
bda.uk.com/FoodandMood



Mental Health Foundation
Physical Health and Mental Health and further resources available at mentalhealth.org.uk



BDA Depression and Diet Food Fact Sheet
bda.uk.com/DepressionandDiet

Information sources: 1. BDA Healthy Eating Food Fact Sheet, 2. BDA Vegan, Vegetarian and Plant Based Diet Food Fact Sheet, 3. BDA Fibre Food Fact Sheet, 4. BDA Wholegrains Food Fact Sheet, 5. BDA Fluid and Hydration Food Fact Sheet, 6. Study by MyFitnessPal and Dublin City University - <https://business.dcu.ie/dcu-and-myfitnesspal-study-on-social-media-health-and-wellness-trends-highlights-urgent-need-for-digital-health-literacy/> 7. Mental Health Foundation - Physical & Mental Health, 8. BDA Menopause Food Fact Sheet, 9. BDA Food and Mood Food Fact Sheet, 10. BDA Depression and Diet Food Fact Sheet.