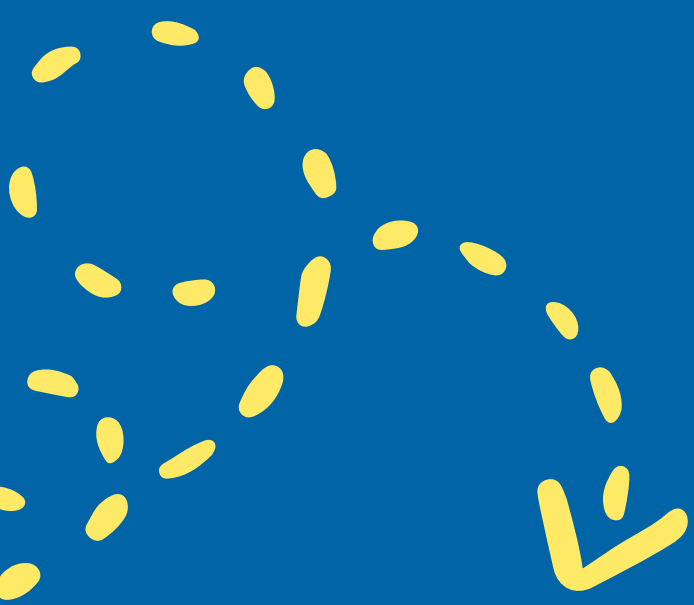




for Scotland's mental health



# FOOD AND MOOD



## FOOD AND MOOD

*This resource explores the relationship between what you eat and how you feel, including tips on how to incorporate healthy eating into your life.*

We also have a publication that can help you find out more about **eating problems**.

If you require this information in Word document format for compatibility with screen readers, please email:

**[info@samh.org.uk](mailto:info@samh.org.uk)**.



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# HOW CAN FOOD AFFECT MOOD?

Knowing what foods we should and shouldn't be eating can be really confusing, especially when it feels like the advice changes regularly. However, evidence suggests that what we eat may affect the way we feel, as well as our physical health.

Improving your diet may help to:

- Improve your mood
- Give you more energy
- Help you think more clearly

## Eating regularly

If your blood sugar drops you might feel tired, irritable and depressed. Eating regularly and choosing foods that release energy slowly will help keep your sugar levels steady.

Slow-release energy foods include pasta, rice, oats, wholegrain bread and cereals, nuts and seeds.



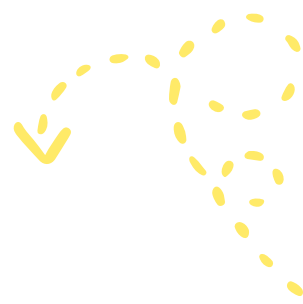
## Quick tips:

- Eating breakfast gets the day off to a good start
- Instead of eating a large lunch and dinner, try eating smaller portions spaced out more regularly throughout the day
- Avoid food and drinks which make your blood sugar rise and fall rapidly, such as sweets, biscuits, sugary drinks and alcohol



***I made a decision that I was going to [...] make positive lifestyle changes to try and live as happily and stress-free as I could. I gave up red meat and try to eat no sugar [and drink] hardly any alcohol.***





## Staying hydrated

If you don't drink enough fluid, you may find it difficult to concentrate or think clearly. You might also start to feel constipated (which puts no one in a good mood).

### Quick tips:

- It's recommended that you drink 6-8 glasses of fluid a day
- Water is a cheap and healthy option
- Tea, coffee, juices and smoothies all count towards your intake (but be aware that these may also contain caffeine or sugar)

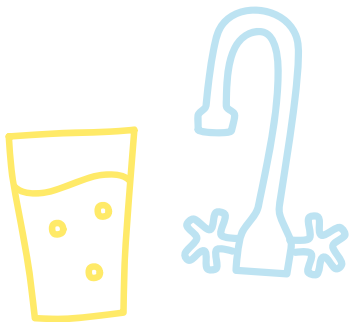
## Looking after your gut

Sometimes your gut can reflect how you're feeling emotionally. If you're stressed or anxious this can make your gut slow down or speed up. For healthy digestion you need to have plenty of fibre and fluid. You should also try to exercise regularly.

Healthy gut foods include fruits, vegetables and wholegrains, beans, pulses, live yoghurt and other probiotics.

### Quick tips:

- It might take your gut time to get used to a new eating pattern, so make changes slowly to give yourself time to adjust
- If you're feeling stressed and you think it's affecting your gut, try some [relaxation techniques](#) or breathing exercises





## Managing caffeine

Caffeine is a stimulant, which means it will give you a quick burst of energy. But for some people, caffeine then may make you feel anxious and depressed or disturb your sleep (especially if you have it before bed). It can also give you withdrawal symptoms if you stop suddenly.

Caffeine is in tea, coffee, chocolate, cola and other manufactured energy drinks.

### Quick tips:

- If you drink tea, coffee or cola, try switching to decaffeinated versions
- You might feel noticeably better quite quickly if you drink less caffeine or avoid it altogether

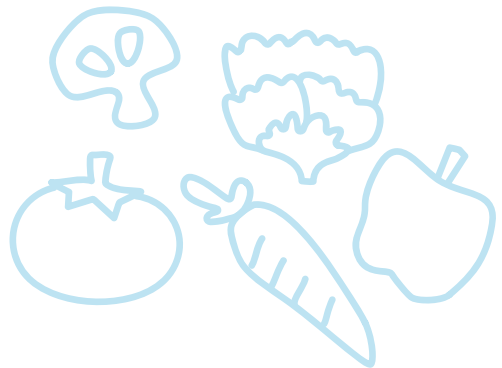
## Getting your five a day

Vegetables and fruit contain a lot of the minerals, vitamins and fibre we need to keep us physically and mentally healthy.

Eating a variety of different coloured fruits and vegetables every day means you'll get a good range of nutrients.

### Quick tips:

- Fresh, frozen, tinned, dried and juiced fruits and vegetables all count towards your five a day
- As a general rule, one portion is about a handful, small bowl or small glass
- For ideas on how to get your five a day, visit [NHS Inform](#)



## Getting enough protein

Protein contains amino acids, which make up the chemicals your brain needs to regulate your thoughts and feelings. It also helps keep you feeling fuller for longer.

Protein is in lean meat, fish, eggs, cheese, legumes (peas, beans and lentils, for example), soya products, nuts and seeds.

### Quick tip:

- Whatever your diet, why not do some research into other foods that contain protein, and find something new to try? For ideas on healthy recipes, visit [NHS Inform](#)

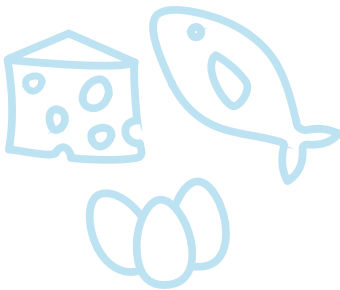
## Eating the right fats

Your brain needs fatty acids (such as omega-3 and omega-6) to keep it working well. So rather than avoiding all fats, it's important to eat the right ones.

Healthy fats are found in oily fish, poultry, nuts (especially walnuts and almonds), olive and sunflower oils, seeds (such as sunflower and pumpkin), avocados, milk, yoghurt, cheese and eggs.

### Quick tip:

- Try to avoid anything that lists 'trans fats' or 'partially hydrogenated oils' in the list of ingredients (such as some shop-bought cakes and biscuits). They can be tempting when you're feeling low, but this kind of fat isn't good for your mood or your physical health in the long run







## Managing medication

Some foods can be dangerous to eat if you're taking certain medications. For example:

**If you're taking an MAOI** (a kind of antidepressant) you should avoid eating anything that has been fermented, unpasteurised, pickled, smoked, cured, hung, dried or matured. This is because when food is exposed to the air, a substance called tyramine rises to high levels, and the interaction between tyramine and the MAOI can be very dangerous.

You may also want to avoid food and drinks containing caffeine, such as chocolate, tea and coffee, as these can also contain tyramine.

**If you're taking lithium**, you'll need to be very careful about the amount of salty foods and liquid in your diet. This is because suddenly changing the amount of salt and fluid in your body can affect your lithium level. If your lithium level becomes too high it can be very dangerous.

**If you're taking an anti-anxiety medication** such as buspirone you may need to avoid drinking grapefruit juice or eating grapefruit. This is because grapefruit can affect the way that enzymes break down medications, which can cause too much or too little of the drug to be absorbed into your blood.

Before prescribing you any medication, your doctor should fully explain any possible risks or side effects, so you can make an informed decision.

If you're currently taking medication and are unsure or worried about what food and drinks to avoid, it might help to speak to your GP or ask at your local pharmacy.

For more information about healthy eating and how food can affect your mood, visit the [British Dietetic Association's website](#) to read their range of food fact sheets.

# HOW CAN I EAT MORE HEALTHILY?

Eating a healthy diet can do a lot to improve your mood and sense of wellbeing. You can use the tips below to start making positive changes to the way you eat.

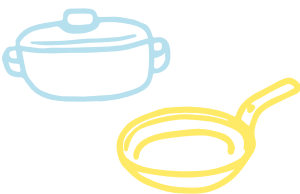
## Take small steps

Making changes can be really tough – especially if you’re feeling low. It might help to start by making small changes rather than changing your whole diet suddenly.

You might not feel better right away, and there may be times when you feel frustrated. But try to keep going! Even making very small changes can make a difference in the long term.

## Share meals and cooking

Preparing your own food might feel daunting, but cooking with others can be a lot of fun. Ask your family, friends, colleagues or other social groups to join in – they might be very happy to plan, cook and eat a meal with you.



## Take care of yourself

We can often put a lot of pressure on ourselves to eat a healthy diet, but it’s also important to enjoy the food you eat and not be too hard on yourself.

Remember that other things can help improve your mental health as well, such as:

- Getting [physically active](#) (especially outdoors to boost your vitamin D levels)
- Getting enough [sleep](#)
- Maintaining good relationships
- Limiting the amount of alcohol you drink

For more information, see our resource on [five ways to better mental health](#).

## Manage food intolerances

Intolerances to particular foods (such as wheat, dairy or yeast) can cause lots of unpleasant feelings, both physical and mental. If you’re concerned about this, ask a health professional to help you investigate your tolerances safely.

See [NHS Inform](#) for more information about food intolerances.



## Plan ahead

Finding the time to eat well can often be difficult. If you have times when you're feeling well and enjoying preparing food, try making some extra meals to store. You could make enough to last for several days, and freeze them in portions to use at times when you can't face cooking.

## Keep a food diary

Write down what you eat and make notes about how you're feeling. Over time you might work out how particular foods:

- Make you feel worse, or better
- Keep you awake or help you [sleep](#)

Plus, it can be reassuring to track improvements in your wellbeing.

## Get professional support

Sometimes the best way to improve your diet is with the help of a health professional.

- **Dietitians** can help you work on specific problems
- **Nutritional therapists** can help you improve your overall health
- **Nutritionists** can help you explore how food and nutrition affect your health and wellbeing

You could ask your doctor to refer you to an NHS service. Alternatively, you can find private practitioners on the [Association for Nutrition website](#) and the [British Association for Applied Nutrition and Nutritional Therapy \(BANT\) website](#).

If you go private it's important that you ask any professional you see about their qualifications and experience. Going private also means that you'll usually have to pay a fee.

## Eating problems

Food plays an important part in our lives. Most of us will spend time thinking about what we eat, and change our habits now and again. But if your thoughts about what and when you eat feel like they're taking over your life, it can become a problem.

Eating problems aren't just about food – they can be about difficult experiences and painful feelings which you may be finding hard to face or resolve. If you're finding your relationship with food is becoming difficult, it's OK to seek help.

See our pages on eating problems for more information, including tips on how to cope and ideas about recovery.

# A MINDFUL MEAL: RECIPE



We've put together a recipe for a simple, tasty, healthy meal that's good for you mentally and physically. It combines a range of proteins, omega-3 fats, vitamins, wholegrains and healthy gut foods in a single meal. It's also low in sugar, caffeine and additives.

**Serves:** 2-4 people

**Time to prepare:** about 20 minutes

**Skill level:** very easy

**Cost:** under £10\*

\*This is based on our experience of making this meal. Some ingredients work out cheaper if you buy larger packets of ingredients like pasta, dried fruits, nuts and seeds.

## Main course pasta with pesto and oil-rich fish

### YOU'LL NEED:

**250g packet of wholemeal pasta**

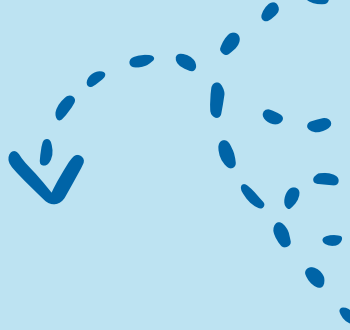
**100g jar of pesto**

**180g tin of tuna in brine or water**

**Why not swap in...** *gluten-free pasta; nut and dairy-free pesto; any oil-rich fish, such as salmon, sardines or mackerel; soybeans; roasted butternut squash*

### How to make it:

1. Cook the pasta in boiling water following the packet instructions, then drain the water
2. Add three tablespoons of pesto to the drained pasta and mix together
3. Open the tin of fish, drain the liquid, stir the fish into the pasta and serve



## Side dish

### avocado salad and seeds

#### YOU'LL NEED:

- 250g mixed lettuce leaves
- One ripe avocado
- 50g of sunflower and pumpkin seeds

**Why not swap in...** *spinach or watercress leaves; other seeds, such as flaxseed, linseed or a mixture; a light drizzle of olive oil*

#### How to make it:

1. Wash the salad leaves, and place on a dish
2. Remove the skin and stone from the avocado, slice it up, and add the slices to the salad
3. Sprinkle the seeds over the top and serve



## Dessert

### fruit and yoghurt

#### YOU'LL NEED:

- Fresh fruit (such as one apple and one banana)
- Eight dried apricots
- 40g broken walnuts
- Four spoonfuls of plain probiotic yoghurt

**Why not swap in...** *any fresh fruit, such as strawberries or pears; any dried fruit, such as cranberries; any nuts, such as almonds or pecans; dairy-free yoghurt*

#### How to make it:

1. Wash the fresh fruit and cut it into small pieces (removing cores if you want)
2. Rinse the dried apricots, cut them into quarters, then put them in a bowl with the yoghurt and fruit
3. Serve with walnuts sprinkled over the top

# USEFUL CONTACTS



## THE SAMH INFORMATION SERVICE



@ [samh.org.uk/info](https://samh.org.uk/info)

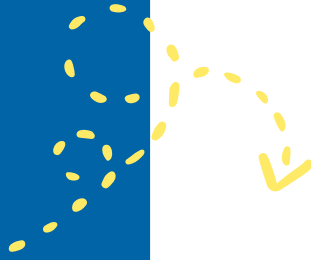
📞 0344 8000 550

💻 [info@samh.org.uk](mailto:info@samh.org.uk)

Whether you're looking for more information, have questions or are seeking support, SAMH can help. The SAMH Information Service provides information and signposting for pathways to better mental health and wellbeing over the phone, through emails and through a range of online information.

The SAMH Information Service is open from 9am to 6pm, Monday to Friday, except on Bank Holidays.

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## Who else could help?

This section contains details of organisations and support services you may find useful.

SAMH doesn't endorse any particular support service, including those listed on this page. This isn't an exhaustive list – you may be able to find other services near you.

## Listening and crisis services

### Breathing Space

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 [breathingspace.scot](https://breathingspace.scot)

 0800 83 85 87

Offers a free, confidential phone and webchat helpline for people in Scotland experiencing low mood, depression or anxiety.

### Samaritans

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 [samaritans.org](https://samaritans.org)

 [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

 116 123 (freephone)

Provides 24-hour emotional support over the phone, webchat or email for anyone struggling to cope.

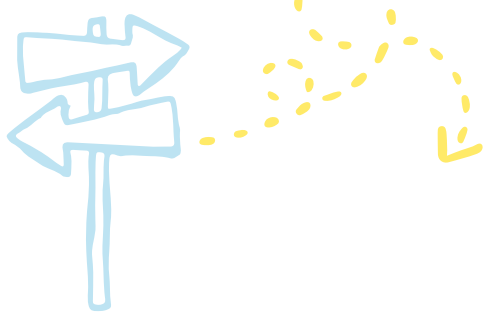
### Shout

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 [giveusashout.org](https://giveusashout.org)

 85258 (text)

Shout is the UK's first 24/7 crisis text service, free on all major mobile networks, for anyone in crisis anytime, anywhere.



## General services

### Allergy UK

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 [allergyuk.org](http://allergyuk.org)  
 01322 619 898

Offers support and advice to adults and children on all allergies and intolerances.

### Association for Nutrition




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 [associationfornutrition.org](http://associationfornutrition.org)  
 020 3198 9312

Provides a register of nutritionists.

### Beat

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 [beateatingdisorders.org.uk](http://beateatingdisorders.org.uk)  
 Helpline for adults:  
0808 801 0677  
 Helpline for under18s:  
0808 801 0711

Offers information on eating disorders and runs a supportive online community. Also provides a directory of support services.

### British Association for Nutrition and Lifestyle Medicine (BANT)

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 [bant.org.uk](http://bant.org.uk)  
 01425 462 532

Provides a register of nutritional therapists.

### British Dietetic Association (BDA)

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 [bda.uk.com](http://bda.uk.com)  
 0121 200 8080

Membership organisation for UK dietitians. Provides a range of [fact sheets](#) on food and nutrition.

### CYANS (Children and Young People's Allergy Network Scotland)

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 [cyans.scot.nhs.uk](http://cyans.scot.nhs.uk)  
 0131 275 6000

A network of health professionals focused on improving health service provision for children and young people with allergies in Scotland. Provides information, guidance and a directory of local services.



## Food and Drug Administration

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 [fda.gov](https://www.fda.gov)

American government body which provides information about how different foods can interact with medication.

## NHS Inform

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 [nhsinform.scot](https://www.nhsinform.scot)

NHS information and advice on a range of healthy lifestyle topics, including diet and nutrition.





for Scotland's mental health




SAMH is Scotland's mental health charity and is dedicated to mental health and wellbeing for all. We are here to provide help, information and support to people affected by mental health problems.

**[samh.org.uk](http://samh.org.uk)**

 **[@samhtweets](https://twitter.com/samhtweets)**

 **[facebook.com/SAMHmentalhealth](https://facebook.com/SAMHmentalhealth)**

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 **0344 8000 550**

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Registered Office: Brunswick House, 51 Wilson Street, Glasgow G1 1UZ.

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