Daily nutrition

How do carbohydrates, protein, fats and fluid fit into my day?

The whole day

Foods combine carbohydrate, protein and fat. Vitamins, minerals, fibre and fluid also matter. Balance can sit across the day or week; meal ideas alone do not prove a complete diet.

Carbohydrate and fibre

Include starchy foods such as oats, potatoes, bread, rice and pasta. Choose wholegrains or potato skins where practical. Carbohydrate includes more than sugars: label sugars are already part of total carbohydrate. Adult fibre guidance is 30 g daily.

Animal and plant proteins

Protein is used to build and maintain body tissues. Fish, chicken, turkey, beef, eggs and dairy foods provide it, as do beans, lentils, chickpeas, tofu, nuts and seeds. Pulses also add fibre. Vegetarians may eat eggs and dairy; vegans exclude animal foods. Ordinary vegetables alone need not supply the protein of a substantial protein food.

Protein foods and saturated fat

Protein itself is not saturated fat, but protein foods contain different amounts. Choose skinless poultry and lean meat; compare packet saturates. White fish is generally low in fat; oily fish contains long-chain omega-3 fats. Butter, cheese or coconut cream added to a dish change its fat content. If usually eating over 90 g cooked red/processed meat daily, reduce the average to 70 g; this is not a daily target.

Types of fat

Replace some saturated fat with unsaturated fat. Saturated fat is found in butter, ghee, fatty meat, hard cheese and coconut/palm oils. Monounsaturated examples: olive/rapeseed oils, avocado and some nuts. Polyunsaturated examples: sunflower oil, walnuts, seeds and oily fish; these include omega-3 and omega-6. Limit trans fat too. All fats supply substantial energy, so use small amounts. NHS practical saturated-fat limits: women 20 g daily; men 30 g.

Daily nutrition: fluids and the whole day

Hydration

Usually aim for 6 to 8 cups or glasses of fluid daily. Water, milk, unsweetened plant drinks, tea and coffee count. Moderate caffeine. Needs can rise with heat, activity or illness; pale-yellow urine is a general check. Follow prescribed fluid limits. Juice/smoothies: 150 ml combined daily, with a meal.

Vegetarian and vegan planning

Use varied plant proteins, a starchy food and vegetables. For vegan eating, consider B12, calcium, vitamin D, iodine, iron and selenium. Check fortification; some nutrients may need fortified foods or suitable supplements. Read NHS guidance. Collection 01 now includes vegan breakfast recipes as written; check the listed ingredients.

Other daily guidance

At least 5 portions of fruit/vegetables, no more than 6 g salt and 30 g free sugars daily. Adults need 10 micrograms vitamin D daily; consider a supplement in autumn/winter and follow NHS all-year advice where relevant. Age alone does not determine portions. Seek help for persistent poor appetite or unplanned weight loss.

Sources and full guidance

NHS: The Eatwell Guide
NHS: Starchy foods and carbohydrates
NHS: Meat in your diet
NHS: Fish and shellfish
NHS: Fat - the facts
NHS: The vegetarian diet
NHS: The vegan diet
GOV.UK: Vegan food labelling
NHS: Water, drinks and hydration
NHS: How to get more fibre into your diet
NHS: Salt in your diet
NHS: Sugar: the facts
NHS: Vitamin D
NHS: Malnutrition

A summary of the web guide, not a complete assessment of your needs. Full guide | Scope and personal advice.