

**FACTSHEET No. 22**

**BREAD AS PART OF A HEALTHY DIET**

**Background**

There is increasingly persuasive evidence that our diets have a significant effect on our long term health. Not only does being over or underweight lead to health problems but so does not eating enough of the right foods in the right balance.

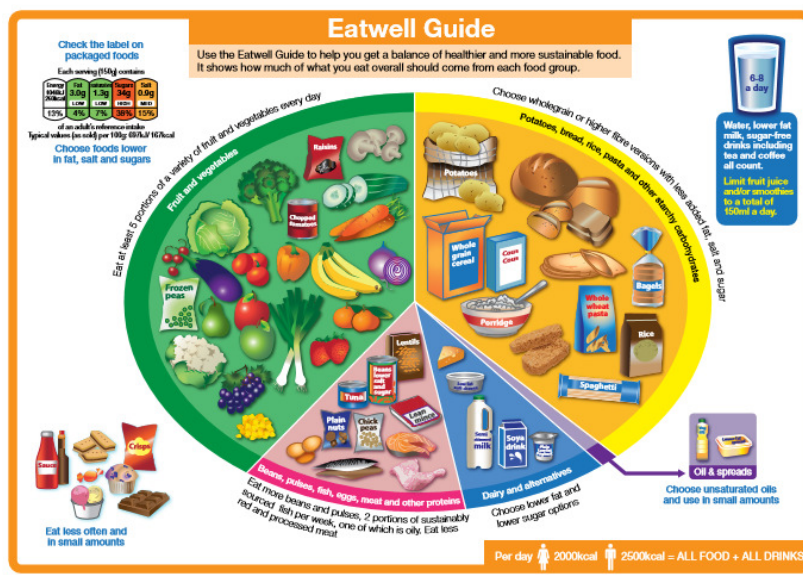
The key to a healthy balanced diet is eating the right amount of food for how active you are and eating a range of foods including:

- plenty of fruit and vegetables
- plenty of bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods (choosing wholegrain varieties when possible)
- some milk and dairy foods
- some meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein
- just a small amount of foods high in fat and sugar.

It is best to avoid any diet that promotes the avoidance or severe limitation of a whole food group, such as carbohydrate foods or dairy foods, unless advised to do so by your GP. Eliminating these foods will be hard to maintain and you also risk missing out on essential nutrients which could have an adverse effect on your health.

**The Eatwell Guide**

As a guide experts have produced the Eatwell Guide to demonstrate the proportion of what foods should make up our diet. The Department of Health encourages use of the Eatwell Guide to help ensure everyone receives consistent messages about the balance of foods in a healthy diet.



The Eatwell Guide is based on the five food groups:

- Bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods
- Fruit and vegetables
- Dairy and alternatives
- Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins
- Oils and spreads
- Foods high in fat, salt and sugars

It encourages the choice of different foods from the first four groups every day, to help ensure the population obtains a wide range of nutrients needed to remain healthy.

Choosing a variety of foods from within each group will add to the range of nutrients consumed.

About a third to a half of the food we eat should come from carbohydrate foods such as bread. In the UK we don't eat enough carbohydrate or fibre.

Our diets should also contain plenty of fruit and vegetables. Again in the UK we need to eat more of these – at least 5 portions a day.

We should cut back on (but not exclude) foods high in fat, salt and sugars as these are not essential to a healthy diet. These foods contain the highest number of calories gram for gram and therefore cutting back can help if you want to lose weight.

### **Bread's Role in a Healthy Diet**

Starchy foods, including bread, are our main source of carbohydrate, and play an important role in a healthy diet. Starchy foods are a good source of energy and the main source of a range of nutrients in our diet. Experts advise that we should try to include at least one starchy food with each of our meals.

Bread, especially wholemeal, brown and seeded breads, is a healthy choice to eat as part of a balanced diet. It is a nutritious and economical food and there are a wide range of breads on the market to suit every diet and budget.

Bread provides an excellent source of many nutrients including:

- **Fibre.** Bread, particularly wholegrain varieties, is a good source of fibre and provides a fifth of our daily intake. Fibre from wheat bran, oats, rye and barley can help to keep our digestive system healthy and can help us to feel full, which means we are less likely to eat too much.
- **Calcium.** By law white and brown flour are fortified with calcium. Four medium slices of white bread provides nearly 30% of Reference Intake for calcium. Calcium is an essential nutrient for strong bones and healthy teeth but is equally vital as a regulator in most of our body tissues, helping nerves and muscles to work properly.
- **Iron.** Flour is one of the major sources of iron in the diet making bread an excellent source of iron which is an important mineral, essential for healthy blood cells and good circulation.
- **B vitamins.** Over a third of our daily requirement of thiamin comes from cereals and flour-based foods such as bread. Bread also provides niacin, another B vitamin and vitamin B<sub>9</sub> (folate).

Some people think starchy foods are fattening, but gram for gram carbohydrates contain fewer than half the calories of fat.

Most breads are low in fat and sugars (which are naturally found in grains). Bread contains only 2 - 4% fat and sugars. An average slice of bread has less than 100 calories. It is important to be careful with your choices of spreads and toppings as this is what can increase the calorie content. Remember to use spreads sparingly and avoid high fat toppings and fillings.

Sliced and wrapped bread is available in a range of thickness of slices depending on your preference and there are also a number of bread products available on the UK market that have a lower calorie count per slice.

### **Salt in Bread**

Medical evidence shows that too much salt (sodium) in the diet can contribute to high blood pressure and has been linked to an increased risk of other diseases.

The UK government has set a target of reducing the average salt consumption for adults to 6g a day.

Salt plays a major role in dough formation, fermentation rate and flavour and eating properties of bread and so all breads will contain some salt. Since the mid-1980s, the baking industry has been actively reducing salt in bread and working closely with the government, has made significant strides to meet agreed targets for food.

Federation of Bakers' members have implemented salt reductions to meet the Department of Health's 2012 target of 0.40g of sodium (1g salt) per 100g of bread. This is in addition to reductions made prior to the introduction of the targets. Salt in bread has been reduced by over 40% since the 1980's, with a 10% reduction in the last three years alone.

Since then discussions have taken place regarding the 2017 targets which require a 10% reduction on the 2012 target. Further reductions are very challenging for the bread industry as salt has a significant technological role in bread-making. However, bakers are committed to working with DH to continue to investigate ways of reducing salt where it is technically feasible to do so.

The UK has one of the lowest levels of salt in bread in the world.

### **Bread and Bloating**

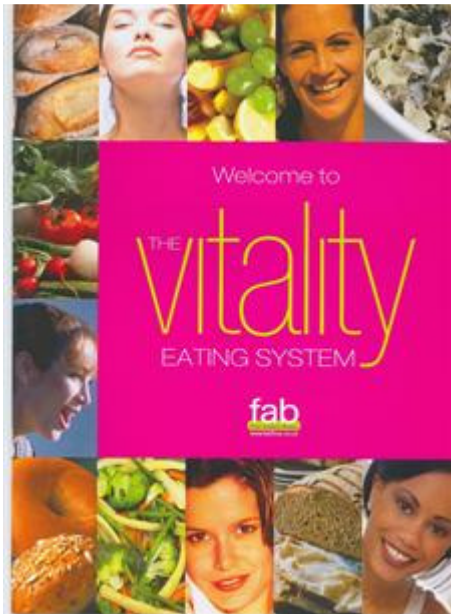
Some people avoid bread because they think they're allergic to wheat, or because they think bread makes them bloated. But cutting out any type of food altogether could be bad for your health, because you risk missing out on a whole range of nutrients that we need to stay healthy.

A report published by the British Nutrition Foundation in the journal Nutrition Bulletin reviews the science behind this common claim and confirms that, to date, there is no evidence to support claims that bread affects the gastrointestinal system of healthy adults.

### **The Vitality Eating System**

The Federation of Bakers works hard along with the millers' association Nabim to support the nutrition advice given out by doctors, nutritionists, dietitians and government about diet and health.

We previously developed a Vitality Eating System to encourage people to eat a healthy balanced diet and take exercise.



The System was based on pioneering work undertaken by the Grain Chain with the Medical Research Council. Leading obesity expert Susan Jebb reviewed the studies into weight loss interventions and found that the best way to lose weight and keep it off was essentially a reduced calorie, low fat diet including plenty of carbohydrate foods like bread coupled with exercise.

A copy of The Vitality Eating System can be downloaded from the publications section of the FOB website at [www.fob.uk.com](http://www.fob.uk.com)

## Q&As

### Is bread fattening?

No most bread is low in fat (3g or less per 100g). An average slice of bread has less than 100 calories. It is important to be careful with your choices of spreads and toppings as this is what can increase the calorie content. Remember to use spreads sparingly and avoid high fat toppings and fillings.

Over recent years bread consumption in the UK has been falling, whilst the number of overweight and obese people has been rising. This, and evidence from the national diet and nutrition survey, suggests that bread consumption is more likely to be associated with a healthy diet.

### Cutting out bread from your diet is the easiest way to lose weight, isn't it?

Being overweight is caused by an imbalance where energy intake (food eaten) exceeds energy expenditure.

Bread had some bad press in the wake of the anti-carb celebrity diet craze, but it's important to realise that carbohydrates are necessary as part of a healthy balanced diet.

Bread is a low fat food and provides only a modest amount of energy per slice (normally less than 100 calories – that's about 5% of your Dietary Reference Values for Energy).

It is important to watch how much spread is used and to be smarter with our choices of fillings and toppings as these are what often add to the fat and calorie content. For example, fill sandwiches with lean cuts of meat like chicken breast, fish such as tuna, and add salad.

## **How much bread should be included in a healthy diet?**

Starchy foods, such as bread, potatoes, cereals, rice and pasta, are our main source of carbohydrate and play an important role in a healthy diet. These foods should make up about a third of the food we eat.

Data published by the National Diet and Nutrition Survey most recently published in 2016, which looks at food consumption in the UK, shows that most of us should be eating more starchy foods.

Bread, especially wholemeal, malted grain/ brown and seeded breads, is a healthy choice to eat as part of a balanced diet.

Wholegrain, wholemeal and brown breads give us energy and contain B vitamins, vitamin E, fibre and a wide range of minerals. White bread also contains a range of vitamins and minerals, and although it has less fibre than whole grain, wholemeal or brown breads, it still has about 2.5% (compared to wholemeal at around 7%)<sup>1</sup>.

## **Is white bread healthy?**

Bread makes an important contribution to carbohydrate, fibre, iron, calcium and thiamin intakes. For example, bread provides nearly 20% of UK adult total dietary fibre intake and just under half of this (9%) is contributed by white bread. Bread's mean percentage contribution to adult intakes of calcium and iron is 17% and 16% respectively<sup>2</sup>. White bread's contribution is 8% for iron and 10% for calcium.

## **When I eat bread I feel bloated and uncomfortable. Surely I should cut it out of my diet and then I will lose weight and that bloated feeling?**

There are a number of reasons why some people can feel bloated after eating. These include eating too quickly, hormonal fluctuations, consuming carbonated drinks at the same as eating, stress and a large increase in the amount, or change in the type, of fibre eaten.

Many people blame irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) or wheat intolerance without being properly diagnosed by a qualified healthcare professional and cut out food groups from their diet. Cutting out food groups means you are cutting out the nutrients these foods provide, such as vitamins and minerals that are essential for health.

If you are concerned about bloating it is best to consult with your GP or a registered dietitian to rule out any issues around food intolerance or allergy before cutting out any food group from your diet. Wheat should not be excluded without diagnosis from a qualified healthcare professional and subsequent support to ensure a healthy diet is maintained with appropriate substitution of foods. This is especially important for children, who are more prone to nutritional problems when foods are excluded from the diet.

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<sup>1</sup> McCance and Widdowson's composition of foods, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition 2014

<sup>2</sup> The National Diet and Nutrition Survey (NDNS Years 5 - 6) 2012-13 and 2013-14