

## Food to have sometimes

Some foods should only be eaten occasionally. These 'extra foods' (sometimes called junk food) are foods like potato chips, chocolate, cakes, lollies, soft drinks and some takeaway food like hamburgers and hotdogs. These foods are usually low in nutrients and high in salt, sugar or fat. They are 'extras' to be enjoyed occasionally.

If these foods regularly replace more nutritious and healthy foods in your diet, you are likely to become overweight and may develop vitamin and mineral deficiencies, and other health problems.

### Have treats occasionally

We all enjoy a 'treat' and it's okay to have some of these foods now and then as an extra. How often you have them depends on your weight, age and how active you are. But you should keep to small amounts.

If you are overweight and want to lose weight, you should not exceed the recommended number of serves for the Five Food Groups (meat, dairy, fruits, vegetables and cereals) and should limit your intake of 'extra foods'.

If you are active and not overweight, you could probably have 'extra foods' sometimes and in small amounts – as long as you've had your daily requirements of meat, dairy, fruits, vegetables and cereals.

### Foods prepared outside the home

Australians spend around one third of their weekly household food budget on foods prepared outside the home. These include restaurant meals, fast food and takeaway. These foods are often high in fat, salt and sugar. High consumption of these foods may contribute to obesity, heart disease and other disorders.

### Fast food and takeaways are often high in saturated fats

The foods sold by popular fast food and takeaway outlets, including fried chicken, hamburgers and hot chips (fries), are often high in saturated fats. These types of fats can cause high cholesterol levels and may cause health problems.

These outlets prefer to use saturated fat because it is cheap and can withstand high cooking temperatures. One fast food or takeaway meal may have more than 50 per cent of your daily fat allowance and almost 100 per cent of your daily saturated fat allowance.

Saturated fats should make up less than 20 g of the fat in your daily diet. However, Australians consume, on average, more than 40 g of saturated fat per day.

Examples of takeaway meals that contain about 20 g saturated fat include:

- fish and chips
- four slices of pizza supreme
- hamburger with the lot and chips
- fried chicken and chips.

### Fat is high in kilojoules

Fat is energy dense. It contains twice the amount of kilojoules per gram (37 kJ) as protein (17 kJ) or carbohydrates (16 kJ). Regularly eating more kilojoules than your body needs will lead to weight gain.

Saturated fats also contribute to the risk of heart disease by increasing blood cholesterol levels. Substituting saturated fats with polyunsaturated fats and monounsaturated fats is associated with a reduced risk of heart disease.

## High-salt foods

Convenience foods usually contain high amounts of salt. The body needs some salt. However, too much salt in the diet has been associated with an increased risk of high blood pressure, which is a known risk factor for heart disease and stroke.

A maximum salt intake of no more than 6 g of salt per day is recommended for adults with normal blood pressure. Many Australians consume double this amount each day. The majority of the salt in the diet of Australian adults comes from processed foods. Cutting back on takeaway foods will help reduce your salt intake.

## High-sugar foods

Foods like soft drinks, cordials, biscuits, cakes and lollies have a high sugar content. Although sugar has not been directly linked to developing heart disease or diabetes, there is evidence that a high sugar intake may contribute to the development of overweight and obesity.

In Australia, soft drinks have become among the most popular beverages. Soft drinks, along with other sugar-sweetened drinks, are the largest source of sugars in the diets of Australians. The size of containers has also increased. Ten years ago, soft drinks were available in 375 ml cans. Now they are commonly sold in 600 ml bottles, which provide at least 12–15 teaspoons of sugar.

Studies suggest an association between increasing consumption of sugar-sweetened drinks and the development of childhood obesity. That's why eating foods and drinks with a high sugar content should be limited.

## Problems caused by too much sugar

High sugar intakes have been associated with:

- tooth decay
- decreased levels of good cholesterol
- increased levels of blood fat associated with diabetes and heart disease
- childhood obesity.

## Additives in food

Food additives in junk foods are generally used to prolong shelf life or to enhance colour, flavour or texture. Some people are sensitive to food additives. Symptoms may include diarrhoea and skin rashes.

## Healthier food choices

Market surveys indicate that Australians would like healthier takeaway foods. Perhaps the easiest way to enjoy a fast food meal, without consuming too much fat, is not to have the hot chips or fries. A large serve of chips can contain around 50 g of fat.

Fast foods that have relatively low levels of fat and salt include:

- pizzas with less cheese and meat
- skinless chicken
- grilled chicken
- souvlaki
- grilled, lean meat hamburgers
- grilled fish burgers.

## Moderation is the key

'Extra foods' may have higher levels of fat, salt and sugar, but they still contain nutrients and can be considered as a small part of a healthy diet. A general rule of thumb is to eat fresh, healthy foods about 90 per cent of the time, and indulge in the 'extra foods' no more than 10 per cent of the time.

## Suggested amounts of 'extra foods'

A healthy diet doesn't need extras, but if you want to include some 'extra foods' in your daily diet, it is recommended that people over four years of age, who are not overweight, could have one serve of 'extra foods' each day, in addition to a nutritious diet.

Examples of one serve include:

- 1 doughnut
- 4 plain sweet biscuits
- 1/2 small bar of chocolate
- 2 tablespoons of cream or mayonnaise
- 1 can of soft drink (375 ml)
- 12 hot chips
- 1 1/2 scoops of ice cream (50 g scoop).

## Alcohol is also an 'extra'

For adults who choose to consume alcohol, one serve equals:

- 200 ml wine (2 standard drinks)
- 60 ml spirits (2 standard drinks)
- 600 ml light beer (1 1/2 standard drinks)
- 400 ml regular beer (1 1/2 standard drinks).

## Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Dietitians Association of Australia Tel. 1800 812 942

## Things to remember

- Fast foods, takeaway, lollies and chips are typically high in fat, salt or sugar. They should be considered as extras to your usual diet.
- Australians are spending more money on extras. Spend your money wisely. Choose the healthy option when eating out or having snack foods.
- 'Extra foods' can be enjoyed occasionally as part of a healthy diet.

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