

Eat well to stay healthy and happy

By Dr Paul Williams, West Norfolk CCG's Governing Body member responsible for Prescribing and Education and the CCG's prescribing team.

You may have heard of the saying 'you are what you eat'. This is certainly true when it comes to thinking about our health and what effect this has on our risk of having a heart attack, a stroke, developing diabetes or cancer and also the effects it can have on our mental wellbeing.

Obesity can increase your risks of all of the above. I can hear you think, "Oh I'm not obese, just a bit overweight". Well, it is surprising how easy it is to slip into the medical category of obesity. It is getting incredibly common in our society and the statistics suggest it is especially a problem here in West Norfolk.

Our diet can have a huge impact to help prevent us developing these diseases and also reducing our risks if we already have them. Eating a healthy diet is not just sensible it is responsible. Why actively do something that harms our health?

The key to a healthy diet is to:

- Eat the right amount of calories for how active you are, so that you balance the energy you consume with the energy you use. If you eat or drink too much, you'll put on weight. If you eat and drink too little, you'll lose weight.
- Eat a wide range of foods to ensure that you're getting a balanced diet and that your body is receiving all the nutrients it needs.

It is recommended that men have around 2,500 calories a day. Women should have around 2,000 calories a day. Most adults are eating more calories than they need and should eat fewer calories. With modern packaging and labelling it is not difficult to count calories. Do an experiment, work out how many calories you have eaten today and compare with these targets. There are eight themes, listed here, you can use to plan a healthy diet (you can get more details from the NHS Choices Healthy eating website, <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/healthy-eating/Pages/Healthyeating.aspx>).

Base your meals on starchy carbohydrates

Eat lots of fruit and veg

Eat more fish – including a portion of oily fish

Cut down on saturated fat and sugar

Eat less salt

Get active and be a healthy weight

Don't get thirsty

Don't skip breakfast

Unfortunately many of us find it difficult to lose weight, there is not a simple treatment – however, clubs like Weightwatchers and Slimming World have been proven to work and I would encourage you to try these out if you have a weight problem.

As we get older it is important to make sure we eat enough to get the right amount of nutrients to keep us healthy and prevent us becoming malnourished. This is especially important during illness or if you have a reduced appetite. Malnutrition (poor nutrition) can result in a lack of energy, weak bones and muscles, an increased risk of infections and reduced ability to heal wounds.

Ensuring we get the right amount of nutrients when we are ill doesn't mean eating large quantities but making sure the foods you eat are high in energy and contain protein. There are many ways that the nutrition and calorie content of food can be boosted rather than buying or asking your GP for build-up supplements. Adding cheese, cream or full fat milk to meals can help to add extra calories and also vitamins and minerals. Your GP or Community Pharmacist will be able to help by giving you leaflets on fortifying food and drinks.

Over recent years there has been an increase in the nutritional supplements that are available to purchase online or from pharmacies, supermarkets and health food shops. Nutritional supplements are products containing vitamins and minerals, antioxidants, fish oils, glucosamine, evening primrose oil and herbal remedies. Please be aware that some of these products may interact with your prescribed medications therefore please tell your doctor or pharmacist if you are taking any supplements. Supplements may also be harmful if taken in larger than the recommended daily doses or if you do need to boost your intake. Take care if you are taking multiple supplements to ensure you are not doubling up on certain vitamins or minerals. Please do not ask your GP to prescribe nutritional supplements as most are not licensed medications and are costly for the NHS. If you have a proven deficiency in a particular vitamin or mineral your GP will prescribe the appropriate treatment.

Earlier this year, West Norfolk Clinical Commissioning Group stopped the prescribing of gluten free foods for patients with coeliac disease over the age of 18 years. Although this may not have been welcomed by many patients with coeliac disease, the estimated annual savings of £73,000 will enable the CCG to maintain its investment in NHS services such as ambulance services, mental health services and accident and emergency care. A wide selection of gluten free foods are available through supermarkets and many foods are naturally free from gluten such as potatoes, rice, polenta, meat, fish, vegetables etc.