

## Further Information

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NHS Western Isles Dietitians

NHSWI Dietitians (@NHSWI\_Diet)

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- tel. 01851 704704 (ext 2236) Monday-Friday between 10am-4pm.

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NHS Western Isles

Department of Nutrition and Dietetics

# Healthy eating following a Stroke



Help to reduce your risk of having another stroke; follow a healthy balanced diet, remember to exercise regularly and to limit your salt, fat and alcohol intake

## Introduction

Someone who has had a stroke will be at higher risk of having another one. To improve your health and reduce this risk, recovery must extend beyond medical care. Making significant lifestyle changes, like **eating a nutritious and balanced diet**, is a powerful way to take control of your well-being.

Healthy eating after a stroke can help reduce **risk factors**, such as:

- high cholesterol
- high blood pressure
- type 2 diabetes
- heart disease
- being overweight.

This booklet provides essential information and practical tips on **how to make informed choices that promote healing and help you prevent further strokes**.

## Foods you should try to reduce

### Salt

Eating a lot of salt and foods that are high in salt can increase your blood pressure. High blood pressure is the single biggest risk factor for stroke. For adults, it is recommended to limit the consumption of salt to **6g per day**. Foods that are high in salt and you should reduce may include:

- tinned and packet soups
- bacon, sausages and smoked meats
- tomato ketchup and sauces in a jar
- crisps and salted nuts
- cheddar cheese
- processed and ready meals.

Gradually reducing the amount of salt you add to food and replacing salt with herbs and spices e.g. garlic, pepper, chilli, lemon and lime juice can be a good way to add flavour to food.

**Top tip:** Many everyday foods contain a high amount of hidden salt. Check out food labels and prioritise lower salt choices. For foods that don't yet display the 'traffic light' label, here is a handy guide:

two 15-minute sessions. Gradually increase to a total of 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise per week.

### Reducing alcohol

It is recommended men and women should drink **no more than 14 units of alcohol a week**. This should be spread over three days or more and it is recommended to have at least 2 alcohol-free days per week.

Regularly drinking more alcohol than the recommended level **can increase your risk of having another stroke**. Overall, the risks of drinking alcohol far outweigh any possible benefits.

Know your units:

1.6 units = a small glass of wine

1 unit = a single pub measure of spirits e.g. gin, whiskey, vodka

2 units = a half pint of beer or lager

### Stop smoking

Smoking can seriously increase the risk of having another stroke. Contact your local Quit Your Way Hebrides team, tel. 01851 701623, who will be able to give you advice and support on how to stop smoking.

### Managing diabetes

Having diabetes puts you at a greater risk for developing heart disease and another stroke, as it can cause damage to your blood vessels.

You can lower your risk by following a healthy diet and maintaining a healthy weight. This will help you to control your blood sugar, blood pressure and blood cholesterol.

### What if I have trouble swallowing?

If you have trouble swallowing, you may have been provided with advice on a modified texture diet.

If you have queries about this, your dietitian will be able to provide you with more information.

turkey, roughly the size of your palm. Aim for at least two portions of fish per week, including one portion of oily fish such as salmon, mackerel, or herring.

### Oils and spreads

Choose unsaturated oils and spreads and eat in small amounts.

### Foods high in fat, salt and sugar

Eat these foods less often and in small amounts. These include chocolate, cakes, biscuits and sugary drinks.

### Fluids

Drink at least 1.5 litres (6-8 glasses) of fluid throughout the day. Water, milk and fruit juices are the healthiest choices. It is best to avoid sugary drinks.

## Other things you can do

### Maintaining a healthy weight

Being overweight puts you at greater risk of having another stroke so maintaining a healthy weight reduces your risk. We gain weight when we consume more calories from food and drink than we use up, so to lose weight we need to eat fewer calories and burn more energy by being physically active.

Losing even small amounts of weight can be very beneficial for your health.

### Being active and exercising

Staying active is a powerful way to lower your risk of stroke, boost your mood, and improve your overall well-being. Simple activities like gardening or taking the stairs count!

Choose enjoyable exercises you can manage, such as walking, swimming, or chair exercises. Consult a physiotherapist or occupational therapist for guidance on activities or modifications if needed and remember to consult your doctor before starting a new exercise program, especially to ensure safety and effectiveness, especially during recovery.

Aim to be physically active for at least 30 minutes, at least 5 days a week. You can break this goal into smaller sessions, such as three 10-minute or

	Low	Medium	High
Salt	0g - 0.3g	0.31g - 1.5g	More than 1.5g
Sodium	0g - 0.1g	0.1g - 0.6g	More than 0.6g

## Fat

In moderation, fat play a vital role in a balanced diet, providing energy and aiding in the absorption of essential nutrients. However, excessive fat intake can lead to weight gain, which can increase your risk of stroke. There are 2 different types of fats:

### Foods high in saturated fat (bad fats);

- Lard, ghee and butter
- Cakes, pastries and biscuits
- Full fat dairy products
- Take-away meals
- Processed meals
- Fatty cuts of meat

### Foods high in unsaturated fat (good fats);

- Seeds and nuts (choose unsalted versions)
- Sunflower, soya, corn and sesame oils
- Olive and rapeseed oils
- Avocado

Oily fish, eg. salmon mackerel, herring, sardines, kipper and trout are also good sources of unsaturated fats and Omega-3 Fatty acids.

Omega-3 fatty acids are very important for good health as they can protect the heart and blood vessels from disease. Try to eat 2 portions of fish per week, one of which should be oily.

Eating too much saturated fat raises cholesterol levels, which can clog arteries, lead to heart disease and increase your chances of having another stroke. Men should aim for less than 30g and women less than 20g of saturated fat daily. Switching to unsaturated fats can help lower cholesterol and this can be achieved by making small changes to your diet, such as:

- using low-fat dairy products
- trying sunflower, rapeseed or olive oil based spreads instead of butter
- avoiding frying food
- limiting the amount of takeaways and processed food you eat
- choosing bread, nuts, fruit and vegetables, low fat yogurt and seeds, which are low in saturated fats
- choosing lean cuts of meat, eat chicken without the skin, and eat two portions of fish each week.

Regularly including oats, beans, pulses, fruit and vegetables in your diet can also help to reduce cholesterol.

## Understanding food labels

Understanding food labels can help you to make better choices.

Many packaged foods display a front-of-pack label showing nutrition information per serving. It includes details on energy, fat, saturated fat, sugar, and salt. Colour-coded labels (green, amber, red) help quickly identify if a food is low, medium, or high in fat, saturated fat, sugars, and salt. Choose foods lower in fat, saturated fat, sugar and salt by aiming for more greens and ambers and fewer reds for a healthier diet.

### Top tips

- Look for lower energy (calories) options to manage weight.
- Choose foods with less fat, especially saturated fat, for heart health.
- Opt for reduced sugar options to maintain blood sugar levels.
- Pick foods with less salt for better blood pressure control.

## Eatwell Plate - a balanced diet

The Eatwell Guide shows how much of what we eat overall should come from each food group to achieve a healthy balanced diet.

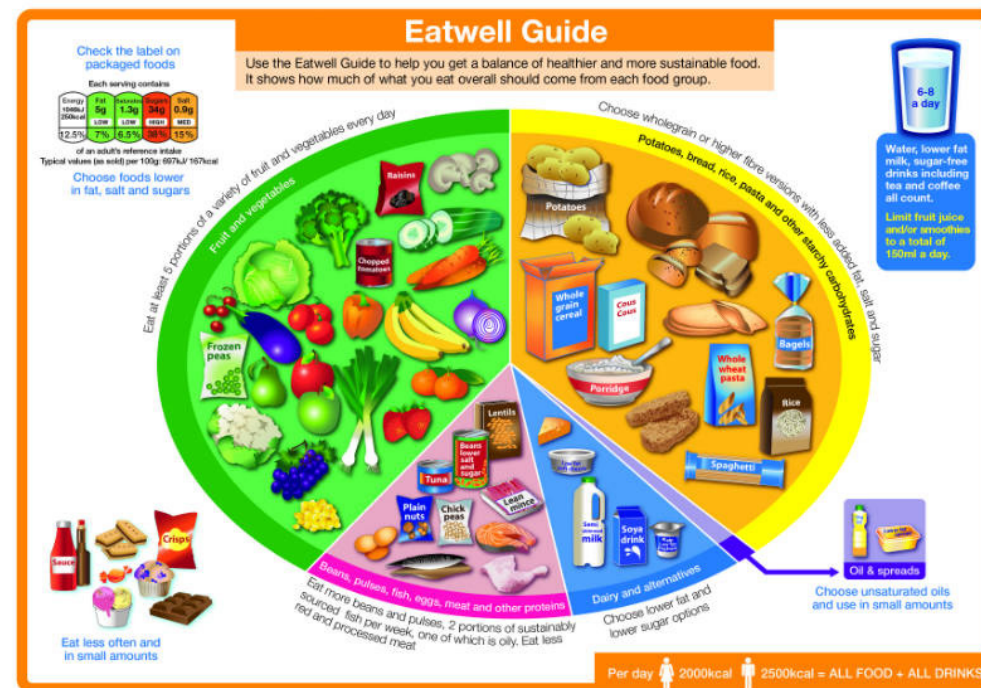
You do not need to achieve this balance with every meal, but try to get the balance right over the day or even a week

### Fruit and vegetables

Fruits and vegetables are excellent sources of vitamins, minerals, and fiber. Strive to eat at least five portions each day. One portion is approximately 80 grams, which can be a medium-sized apple, banana, pear, or orange, or three heaped tablespoons of vegetables.



Fruit juice and smoothies should be limited to a combined total of 150ml per day. This is because they lack the fibre that whole fruit have and contain concentrated sugars that can contribute to weight gain and dental issues.



### Dairy and alternatives

Milk and dairy foods are an excellent source of calcium and protein. Aim to have 2-3 portions per day and choose low-fat varieties. A portion is a glass of milk or one small pot of yoghurt. Alternatives to dairy products include soya, oat and nut milks and dessert.

### Potatoes, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates

These are known as starchy foods. Aim to include these foods with every meal, especially wholegrain and high fibre varieties. Starchy foods are a good source of calories and contain a range of nutrients e.g. fibre, calcium, iron and B vitamins.

### Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other alternatives

These foods are excellent sources of protein, vitamins, and minerals. Some meats are high in saturated fat, so the type of cut and cooking method can make a difference. Beans, lentils, peas, chickpeas, and tofu are good meat alternatives and are rich in iron.

One portion is equivalent to four tablespoons of beans, cooked pulses, or lentils, or a serving of cooked lean beef, pork, lamb, minced meat, or