

eat *more*, lose weight

There is no magic way to lose weight. Put simply, we lose weight when we eat and drink fewer calories than our bodies use up. If only it were that simple! Modern life has become less and less active for many of us, so we burn off fewer calories than we once would have. Convenient, tasty and high calorie foods are also readily available - wherever we turn! It's no wonder we can easily end up consuming more calories than our bodies need.

We know that 'sticking' to a plan is key for successful weight loss. The trick is to find a method that works for you. One challenge many of us struggle with is thinking we have to cut down on the amount of food we eat. This can leave us feeling hungry or deprived, so not surprisingly, we give up.

In this leaflet we look at ways you can eat more, satisfy your appetite and still lose weight. Yes, this could really work for you!



Understanding ‘energy density’

Energy density is the amount of energy (or calories, kcal) per gram of food. Lower energy density foods provide less energy per gram which means you can eat larger portions for fewer calories. The greater amount or volume of food will help you feel full and satisfy your appetite as you lose weight. You can cut the energy density of your diet by reducing fat and increasing high fibre and water-rich foods, such as vegetables or pulses, in your favourite meals. This is because fat has a high calorie content per gram (9 kcal/g), whereas fibre is relatively low in energy. Water in foods can add volume to the meal, helping you to feel fuller, without adding to the calories. Many energy dense foods are also high in sugars, so you can also cut energy density by limiting the added sugars in your diet.

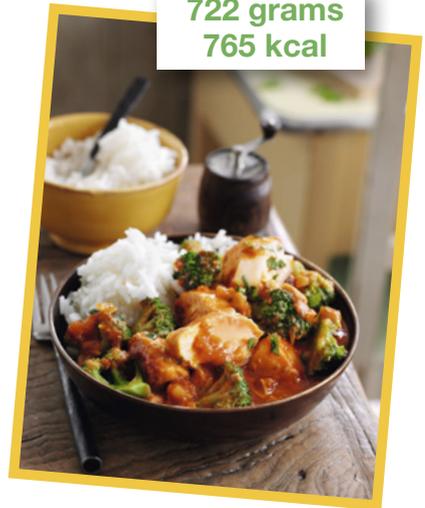
Understanding ‘energy density’ can help you lose weight without feeling hungry or deprived of food and help you maintain your weight loss in the long term.

Eat satisfying portions, feel full and still lose weight!

466 grams
1074 kcal



722 grams
765 kcal



What foods are good choices on a low energy dense diet?

Foods with high water content

Lower energy density foods include foods that are naturally high in water, such as fresh fruit and vegetables, foods like pasta, rice and pulses that absorb water during cooking and dishes with added water such as soups and stews.

Foods containing fibre

Dietary fibre cannot be fully digested and so it provides fewer calories per gram (only 2 kcal per gram) compared to carbohydrate, protein and fat. Choosing fibre-rich foods can help us feel fuller too. These are also great to include in your diet because eating plenty of fibre is associated with a lower risk of heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and bowel cancer.

Foods that are lower in fat

Reducing the amount of fat you add to dishes when cooking can also lower their energy density. Generally, if you lower the fat content of a recipe you can get a bigger portion for the same number of calories.

High-protein foods

High protein foods (such as lean meat, poultry, fish, eggs, pulses) may help decrease hunger and keep us fuller. For sustainability and health, it's recommended not to eat too much red and processed meat.

Which foods are lower in energy density?

It is important to eat well and have a varied diet. Healthy, balanced diets contain a number of lower energy density foods.

Here are some examples; choose these more often to help you feel full and satisfied.

Fruits and vegetables (with no added fat or sugar)

e.g. apples, raspberries, oranges, broccoli, carrots, cucumber, tomatoes. These are high in water and provide fibre. Fruit and vegetables are also a good source of vitamins and minerals.

Pulses (beans, peas and lentils)

e.g. red kidney beans, chickpeas, lentils, butter beans, baked beans. These are high in protein, low in fat and provide fibre. Pulses are also a good source of vitamins and minerals.

Low-fat and fat-free dairy products

e.g. semi-skimmed milk, 1% fat milk or skimmed milk, low-fat or fat-free lower sugar or plain yogurt, cottage cheese, reduced fat soft cheese. These are a source of protein and choosing lower fat dairy products will help reduce your total fat intake. These foods also provide vitamins and minerals, including calcium. Swapping to lower fat dairy products instead of full fat dairy products can help lower your saturated fat intake.

Potatoes and cereal-based foods that absorb water during cooking

e.g. pasta, rice, potatoes, noodles. These foods provide energy but also have a high water content. Choose wholegrain versions of pasta and rice and potatoes with skins for extra fibre.

Vegetable-based dishes

e.g. non creamy vegetable-based soups, vegetable-based stews/casseroles and sauces, such as tomato-based pasta sauces. These dishes have a high water content and are high in fibre. Try to stick to lower salt options if buying soups and sauces, and choose those without cream.

Lean meat, poultry, fish, shellfish and eggs

e.g. lean or extra lean beef, pork (fat trimmed), chicken (skin removed), turkey breast mince, white fish (baked, grilled or steamed), prawns, mussels, eggs (poached or boiled). These foods are high in protein and provide other useful minerals and vitamins.



A note on oily fish like salmon, sardines, mackerel. These contain healthy omega-3 fats that may be beneficial to heart health and are the richest food source of vitamin D. Aim to include a can or fillet of oily fish per week.

Which foods have a higher energy density?

Higher energy density foods are usually high in fat and/or sugar and contain relatively little water and fibre so they provide more calories per bite. Here are some examples of higher energy density foods. If you include these foods, aim to consume them less often and in small amounts.

Fried foods

e.g. fried chips, fried chicken, fish in batter, pakoras, bhajis, spring rolls, sesame prawn toast, doughnuts.

Snacks

e.g. biscuits, chocolate, potato crisps, bombay mix, cheese straws.

Fatty meats

e.g. beef burger (fried), chorizo, streaky bacon (fried), sausages (fried), standard lamb mince.

Pastries, pies, cakes and desserts

e.g. sweet and savoury pies made with pastry (such as pork pie and apple pie), cakes, cream- and chocolate-based desserts.

Higher fat dairy products and butter

e.g. cream, ice cream, butter, full-fat cheese.

A note on cheese

Full-fat cheese, such as cheddar can be a good source of calcium in the diet. If you enjoy cheese, choose stronger varieties and have small portions, or swap to a reduced fat version!

Healthy foods with a higher energy density

Whilst it's beneficial for weight control to see where you can make lower energy food choices, there are some higher energy foods that are a useful part of a balanced diet. It's good to include some of these. These foods are rich in healthy fats:

- Nuts, nut butters and seeds – unsalted, unsweetened nuts, seeds and nut butters can be a healthy snack or addition to curries and stir fries. As well as unsaturated (healthy) fats they contain fibre, protein, vitamins and minerals.
- Oils for cooking and salads and spreads for bread – some unsaturated oils (like olive and rapeseed) should be included in a healthy, balanced diet but do measure out the amount you need carefully or use spray oils. You can also opt for reduced fat, unsaturated spreads rather than full-fat spreads.
- Avocados – these have a high unsaturated (healthy) fat content compared to other fruit and vegetables. You can include avocados as part of a healthy, balanced diet.

Aim for overall variety in your diet and include choices like nuts, seeds, avocado and oils like olive and rapeseed oil as they provide important nutrients. As these foods are more energy dense, being mindful of portion sizes and frequency when choosing these foods means you can enjoy them while managing your weight.

How does energy density work in practice?

These two sample menus show how the meals we eat can be of different energy densities.

Menu 1 has less food but is higher in calories and has a higher energy density.

Menu 2 provides a greater amount of food (and more variety!) but fewer calories and has a lower energy density.

Menu 1* High energy density menu

	Average weight	Kcal	
Breakfast			
Regular latte (coffee shop, semi-skimmed milk)	364ml	151	
Almond croissant (coffee shop)	83g	374	
Lunch			
Chicken triple sandwich (from supermarket)	261g	529	
Bag of crisps	25g	130	
Can of sugars-sweetened cola	330ml	139	
Dinner			
Half a deep pan pepperoni pizza (shop bought)	191g	502	
Slice of apple pie and custard (ready to eat)	230g	392	
Late evening			
Hot chocolate made with whole milk and topped with full fat cream, grated chocolate and marshmallows	266g	367	
Total		1750g	2584kcal

* Based on average values.

Menu 2* Low energy density menu

	Average weight	Kcal	
Breakfast			
Scrambled eggs and grilled mushrooms on wholemeal toast	395g	412	
Tea (or instant coffee) and semi-skimmed milk	260ml	17	
Lunch			
Salmon pasta with asparagus	360g	460	
Apple	174g	89	
Can of diet cola	330ml	1	
Dinner			
Cheese and tomato topped chicken with homemade sweet potato wedges and a side salad	588g	494	
Low-fat yogurt and mixed berries	190g	120	
Late evening			
Instant low calorie hot chocolate topped with a squirt of reduced fat whipped cream and grated dark chocolate	229g	93	
Total 2526g 1686kcal			

To calculate grams (g) for liquids in millilitres (mls), appropriate specific gravities were applied.
 * Based on average values.

Using a lower energy density diet to help manage your weight

A healthy, balanced lower energy density diet may help you enjoy satisfying portions and not only lose weight but also to maintain your weight loss.

To try this approach:

Make foods with a lower energy density the major part of what you eat. Examples include:

- fruit and vegetables
- pulses
- lower fat dairy
- fibre-rich foods like wholegrains and
- good sources of lean protein

Aim to limit portion sizes of foods with a higher energy density, particularly foods like pies, pastries, cakes, biscuits and deep fried foods. These are not as effective at filling you up for the amount of calories they provide. Having plenty of foods with a lower energy density alongside smaller portions of foods with a higher energy density in a meal can reduce the overall energy density. So, choose plenty of salad and vegetables as part of your meals.

Following this kind of eating pattern can help reduce your risk of chronic disease as well!



Here are some tips to lower the energy density of your diet:

- ✓ Choose tomato-based sauces and soups instead of creamy or cheese-based ones.
- ✓ Opt for low-fat or fat-free dairy products.
- ✓ Use lower fat mince and lean cuts of meat, removing any excess fat and take the skin off poultry.
- ✓ Avoid using too much fat when cooking – grill, steam or bake instead of frying.
- ✓ Swap mayonnaise for low-fat plain yogurt or reduced-fat mayonnaise in dips and for salad dressings.
- ✓ Add extra vegetables or beans, peas or lentils to dishes. You could use these to replace some of the meat in recipes.
- ✓ For nibbles, enjoy vegetable sticks with reduced fat houmous instead of crisps with full-fat dips.
- ✓ When eating out or getting a takeaway, go for boiled rice, noodles and potatoes instead of fried, swap deep fried foods for grilled and order extra vegetables.
- ✓ For dessert, mix fruit salad or berries with low-fat yogurt instead of cream.

For further information on energy density and foods that can help you feel fuller, please refer to our website:

www.nutrition.org.uk

Preparing lower energy density meals

There are some simple steps you can take to lower the energy density of your favourite recipes. For example, you can make a lower energy density spaghetti bolognese, which has fewer calories and still tastes delicious.

Spaghetti bolognese

A standard recipe uses spaghetti, minced beef, bacon, onions, garlic, canned tomatoes and oil. A lower energy density spaghetti bolognese has around half the calories of a standard bolognese for the same sized portion!

Lower the energy density by:

- Choosing extra lean minced beef instead of regular minced beef to lower the fat.
- Omit the bacon and add more veg like carrots, celery, peppers and mushrooms to increase the volume and lower the fat.
- Use spray oil instead of pouring oil.
- If you want to sprinkle cheese on top use a reduced fat variety.
- Use wholewheat spaghetti to get a bigger fibre boost.



What other things can have an effect?

There are a number of other factors that can influence how many calories we consume.

Drinks

Drinks are important to help keep our bodies hydrated, but some, like sugary drinks (e.g. sugars-sweetened fizzy drinks, energy drinks, milkshakes) can be surprisingly high in calories and do not fill us up. It's easy to drink a sugary drink very quickly and take in a lot of calories without it making you feel as full as you would when eating food with the same energy content. If you like soft drinks, diet or no added sugar versions are a good alternative or add a splash of unsweetened fruit juice to sparkling water.

You can reduce the energy density of your cappuccinos and lattes by asking to have them made with skimmed milk and not adding whipped cream, sugar or sugary syrups. Fruit juices and smoothies provides vitamins but also contain free sugars so aim to have no more than one glass (150ml) per day.

Water is calorie free so is a great choice!

Alcohol

You might be surprised how high in calories alcoholic drinks can be. It's been estimated that the average wine drinker in England takes in around 2000 kcal from alcohol every month.

As well as the calories in alcohol itself, alcohol may encourage us to increase our energy intake as it can stimulate appetite. It can also go hand in hand with high energy density snacks like crisps and roasted/salted nuts, and depending on how much you have, it can reduce your chances of doing exercise the following day! Choosing alcoholic drinks with fewer calories, such as wine spritzer with soda water, using low calorie mixers with spirits or alternating alcoholic drinks with a glass of water can help to cut down on alcohol and calorie intake.

Distractions

Distractions, such as watching TV or using computers, tablets and phones while eating, make us less likely to notice the feeling of fullness. Avoiding distractions while eating and concentrating on the food itself can make us less likely to overeat.



Eat mindfully

Try eating more slowly and enjoying your food; eating more slowly can give you time to realise you're full. Pause between mouthfuls to chew and be aware of the taste of the food. It takes about 20 minutes after eating a meal for your brain to register you're full.

Sleep

A healthy lifestyle includes getting enough good quality sleep. Not getting enough sleep has been linked to being overweight and having a poor diet, including a higher intake of calories, eating more snacks and snacking on less healthy foods. Being sleep deprived can change levels of hormones which influence appetite, making us feel hungrier. Feeling more tired can also mean we're less likely to be physically active. These factors all increase the chance of weight gain.

For better quality sleep, aim to establish a regular routine for going to bed, avoiding heavy meals, caffeine, nicotine and alcohol late at night and keep screens like TVs and phones out of the bedroom. A dark, quiet and cool environment will make it easier to sleep.

Being active

Incorporating physical activity into our lifestyle can help support weight loss when used alongside changes in our diet, and has been shown to be extremely beneficial in helping to keep the weight off long term. It also provides lots of other health benefits too including being beneficial to our overall mental health and wellbeing. Some evidence even suggests that regular physical activity may help regulate our appetite!

For more information please visit
www.nutrition.org.uk



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