

Zinc helps growth and tissue repair, wound repair and immune function. Good food sources of zinc include red meat, shellfish, milk and dairy foods such as cheese, bread, and cereal products such as wheatgerm.

Iron helps make red blood cells, which carry oxygen around the body. Good sources of iron include red meat, eggs, beans, nuts, offal, dried apricots, wholemeal bread, brown rice, fortified breakfast cereals, and most dark green leafy vegetables.

Calcium is needed for strong teeth and bones, muscle and nerve function and blood clotting. Good sources include dairy products, canned fish, green leafy vegetables, dried fruits and beans.

Folate is essential for blood cells, growth and preventing anaemia. It is found in small amounts in many foods. Good sources include broccoli, Brussels sprouts, asparagus, peas, chickpeas and brown rice.

Vitamin C helps protect the body from infections and disease and enhances absorption of iron. It is found in a wide variety of fruit and vegetables. Good sources include peppers, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, sweet potatoes, strawberries, citrus fruits and kiwi fruit.



Minimum levels are set for these nutrients because too little can be harmful.

Carbohydrate provides energy and there are two main types, sugars and starch. Starchy carbohydrates should provide at least half the energy in the diet. Good sources of starchy carbohydrates are bread, rice, pasta, potatoes, couscous, noodles and breakfast cereals.

Fibre is a non-digestible type of carbohydrate found only naturally in plants and it is needed for a healthy digestive system. Sources of fibre include brown rice, oats, wholegrain cereals, wholemeal pasta and bread, beans, lentils, fruits and vegetables.

Protein provides energy and it is also needed for growth and the repair of the body. Good sources of protein are meat, fish, milk, cheese, eggs, yoghurt, nuts and seeds, beans, lentils and meat alternatives, e.g. tofu.

Vitamin A is essential for a healthy immune system, good eyesight, for the structure and function of the skin and for growth, repair and development. Sources of vitamin A include oily fish, eggs, liver, cheese, butter, milk and red, orange and yellow coloured fruits and vegetables, e.g. peppers and carrots and mangoes.

Energy is important for growth, repair, development and activity. Different people need different amounts of energy and it is commonly expressed in calories or kilocalories. It comes from fat, carbohydrate and protein. Starchy carbohydrates should provide at least 50% of our energy needs and no more than 35% should come from fat.

Fat provides a concentrated source of energy, with more than double the amount of calories than those found in either carbohydrate or protein. Too much fat can lead to weight gain and ill health.

Saturated fats are found in meat products, butter and margarine, mayonnaise, cakes, pastries, biscuits and fried food and these should be restricted.

Some fats are necessary for good health, however, particularly those from fish and plant oils.



Maximum levels are set for these nutrients because too much can be harmful.

Sodium is found in salt and is needed to maintain water balance in the body and for nerve and muscle function. Too much sodium can be bad for your health and too much causes tiredness, thirst, cramps and increased blood pressure. Sodium can be found naturally in food but is added to processed foods during manufacturing.

Non-milk extrinsic sugars occur naturally in foods such as honey, but most NME sugar has been added to foods and drinks during manufacturing. NME sugars provide energy (calories) but contain few other essential nutrients. A diet high in NME sugars can increase the risk of tooth decay and weight gain. NME sugars can be found in table sugar, jam, cakes, biscuits, fruit juices, sweetened drinks, confectionery and chocolate.