

## Eating well for less: budget-friendly recipes and tips

A varied and balanced diet is important for health and doesn't need to be expensive. This information sheet gives examples of nutritious meals and recipe ideas, which can be made on a budget using simple cooking facilities.



The Eatwell Guide shows the five recommended food groups and how much from each group we need to eat over a day or week for a healthy balanced diet

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/food-guidelines-and-food-labels/the-eatwell-guide/>

Some information might not apply if you have been advised by a Healthcare Professional to follow a particular diet

### How to build a balanced meal by following the Eatwell Guide

For each meal aim for a source of protein, some starchy carbohydrates, a healthy fat source and one or more fruit and / or vegetables. The table below shows examples of budget-friendly options to help you achieve balanced meals each day or week. Include some dairy or non-dairy alternatives each day to make sure you also get enough calcium e.g. milk, yoghurt or cheese.

Protein	Starchy carbohydrates: wholegrain if possible	Healthy Fats	Fruit and veg
Tinned tuna, salmon, mackerel, pilchards, sardines	Pasta (dried or tinned)	Olive, rapeseed, sunflower oil	Tinned mixed vegetables, peas, sweetcorn, carrots, kidney beans, black beans, tomatoes
Tinned beans, lentils, chickpeas	Rice (uncooked, packet rice, frozen)	Tinned oily fish	Frozen vegetables, fruit (including berries)
Tinned meat (chicken, meatballs)	Potatoes (tinned or fresh)	Margarine, vegetable oil spreads	Fresh vegetables and fruit
Fresh/ frozen fish or meat	Bread	Nuts and seeds	Tinned fruit (in juice not syrup)
Eggs or tofu as vegetarian options	Couscous	Unsalted nut butters (peanut butter)	Vacuum packed vegetables
Unsalted nut butters (peanut butter)	Breakfast cereals	Low saturated fat cheese (cottage cheese, quark, grated mozzarella)	Pickled vegetables (gherkins, beetroot)

**Simple & budget-friendly recipe ideas** (tbsp = tablespoon, cup = standard measuring cup)

**Peanut butter noodles**

Requires a hob or microwave oven

1 pack of noodles / pasta  
1-2 heaped tbsp peanut butter

**Optional:** garlic granules to taste, vegetables (e.g. tinned mixed vegetables, cooked frozen peas or sweetcorn, tinned beans such as chickpeas / kidney beans)

**Method:**

1. Cook pasta / noodles according to instructions
2. Mix in peanut butter
3. Add cooking water if the sauce is too dry
4. Mix in vegetables and flavourings of choice

**Nutrition booster**

If you have a hob, consider adding more vegetables or tinned meat / fish of your choice.

Consider adding an egg to the dish, this can be scrambled, boiled, fried

**Pesto Pasta**

Requires a hob

2 handfuls (1/2 cup or 56g) dried fusilli (you can use any pasta shape of choice)  
1-2 tbsp pesto from jar

**Optional:** 1 can tuna / sardines (bones in for extra calcium if possible), 1 can sweetcorn or tinned vegetables, grated cheese

**Method**

1. Cook the pasta in boiling water for the time mentioned on the package
2. Once the pasta is cooked, drain, and add pesto
3. Mix in seasonings (salt/ pepper), and optional toppings (tuna, sardines, vegetables, cheese)

Can be refrigerated in an airtight container for up to 4-5 days or frozen for up to 3 months

**Nutrition booster**

Add more cheese to boost calories and protein

Add 1tbsp nutritional yeast flakes to each portion to boost protein, fibre and Vitamin B12

**Yoghurt or custard parfait**

100g or 5 heaped tbsp Greek yoghurt or Custard

Fruit of your choice e.g. apple, banana, orange, berries, tinned or frozen fruit

15g or 1tbsp peanut butter (tip: warm the peanut butter before adding for easier mixing)

**Method**

Add the yoghurt to a bowl, mix in the peanut butter

Add the toppings of your choice

**Nutrition booster:**

- Add 2 tbsp of porridge oats, rolled oats or granola to boost energy and fibre

**Flavour booster:**

- Add honey for extra sweetness

### Topped Jacket Potato

1 - 4 Baking potatoes (medium-large size)  
1tbsp Sunflower/olive oil (optional)

**Topping options:** butter / spread, baked beans, tuna mayonnaise, grated cheese, coleslaw, tinned chilli con carne, tinned vegetables, meat, or curry.

#### Oven method

Preheat the oven to 200°C (180°C fan). Scrub the potatoes, prick with a fork, and rub lightly with oil if using. Place directly on the oven rack or a baking tray and bake for 45 - 60 minutes, or until the skin is crispy and the inside is soft.

#### Microwave method

1. Scrub the potatoes, prick with a fork, and rub lightly with oil if using
2. Microwave on high on a microwavable plate. The time depends on the number and size of your potatoes. Start with 5 - 6 minutes, turning over halfway.
3. When the time is up, check the potato by gently squeezing with a cloth, if it gives in without resistance and starts to open, it's ready. If it still seems firm, microwave for another minute at a time until cooked.

### Toast Toppers

Try these nutritious toppings on toast for a quick and easy light meal:

- Baked beans
- Peanut butter, honey and banana
- Tinned fish (sardines, mackerel, tuna, pilchards)
- Cheese
- Eggs
- Mashed chickpeas (season with salt, pepper, lemon juice, mayonnaise)
- Tomato and cheese

### Hearty Porridge

This recipe can be made on the hob or adapted to be made in the microwave

#### Sweet

30g or 3 heaped tbsp porridge oats  
150ml (1/4 pint) milk or water  
Tinned / frozen / fresh fruit

#### Savoury

30g or 3 heaped tbsp porridge oats  
150ml (1/4 pint) milk or water  
Tinned/fresh/frozen: sweetcorn, peppers, mushrooms, potatoes, carrots, or any other vegetable of your choice

#### Method

Mix the oats into the milk and cook in the microwave or in a small pan on the hob. Add your chosen toppings and stir.

#### Nutrition boosters

- Try swapping porridge oats for grains or cereals of your choice e.g. rice
- Customise sweet oats with toppings e.g. peanut butter, Greek yoghurt, seeds and nuts
- Add a source of protein to your savoury oats e.g. egg, meat, fish, beans

### Flavour boosters

Low-cost ways to boost flavour:

- Powdered spice mixes
- Garlic granules
- Infused oils e.g. garlic or chilli
- Pre-made sauces: chilli sauce, mayonnaise, sweet-chilli sauce, mustard, salad cream, tomato ketchup, horseradish, mint sauce,
- Dried herbs and spices
- Vinegar
- Soy sauce (reduced salt / sodium)

**For more budget-friendly recipes and advice, take a look at these websites:**

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/food/budget>

[https://www.bbc.co.uk/food/collections/budget\\_dinner\\_recipe\\_and\\_ideas](https://www.bbc.co.uk/food/collections/budget_dinner_recipe_and_ideas)

[https://www.bbc.co.uk/food/collections/raid\\_the\\_storcupboard](https://www.bbc.co.uk/food/collections/raid_the_storcupboard)

<https://www.bda.uk.com/food-health/lets-get-cooking/recipes/microwave-meals.html>

<https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/collection/cheap-and-healthy-recipes>

<https://www.jamieoliver.com/recipes/budget-friendly/>

Many supermarkets offer free leaflets in-store full of budget-friendly food ideas

Charity shops often have a good selection of recipe books

Add to your collection by swapping budget-friendly recipes with family and friends

### **Fortifying and Enriching Foods**

If you have a poor appetite, have lost weight without meaning to or find it hard to keep your weight up, fortifying or enriching your everyday foods could help

Meals and snacks can be made more nutritious without increasing their portion size by fortifying or enriching them. This is done by adding small amounts of foods or ingredients which offer extra calories and nutrients e.g. protein, healthy fats or vitamins and minerals. Homemade nourishing drinks taken in between meals are another way to add extra calories and protein. If you have a poor appetite, try to make every mouthful as nutritious as possible.

**See our Eating Well and nourishing drinks recipes leaflets here:**

<https://nwknowledgenow.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Eating-Well-Guide.pdf>

<https://nwknowledgenow.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Eating-Well-Guide-Plant-Based.pdf>

<https://nwknowledgenow.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Easy-Homemade-Nourishing-Drinks.pdf>

If you are losing weight without meaning to, or you have concerns about your diet, please speak to your GP who may consider referring you to a Registered Dietitian

**Find our other “Eating well for less” information sheets (shopping smart & reducing food waste and information about food banks and financial support for food) here:**

<https://nwknowledgenow.nhs.uk/content-category/clinical-information/other-specialties/dietetics-nutrition-and-blood/eating-well/>