Good Food Matters: a practice resource
VODG represents organisations within the voluntary sector whose work is focused on enabling disabled people of all ages to live the lives they choose. VODG believes that an ambitious, trusted and vibrant voluntary sector that works together plays a unique role in achieving this aim.

VODG’s mission is focused on two key areas – enabling its members to achieve excellence and influencing those who can improve the environment in which they operate. VODG believes that policymaking should be informed by the views of disabled people and by professional expertise.

Please visit www.vodg.org.uk or follow @VODGmembership on Twitter to find out more.
INTRODUCTION

Good nutrition and hydration are fundamental to living a healthy life. The nutrients in the food we eat support our capacity to carry out daily activities, protect and repair our cells and promote a healthy immune system. Without good nutrition our bodies are more prone to disease and fatigue. Rising levels of obesity and diabetes are examples of the impacts of poor diet and lack of exercise.

VODG (Voluntary Organisations Disability Group) and Lancaster University have been working with a group of organisations to explore how social care providers can support disabled people to maintain healthy levels of nutrition and hydration. We held an event that brought VODG members together to explore progress and this report brings together some of the key learning. It also includes examples of good practice, links to useful organisations and resources.
OBESITY

There is a two-way relationship between obesity and disability in adults\textsuperscript{1}. Adults with disabilities are at higher risk of obesity and obese adults may experience disabilities related to their weight.

Obesity is also linked to common mental health problems such as depression and anxiety. One review\textsuperscript{2} of studies found that people who were obese had a 55% increased risk of developing depression, while people who were depressed had a 58% increased risk of becoming obese.

People with learning disabilities are at increased risk of being obese due to a complex mix of behavioural, environmental and biological factors\textsuperscript{3}. These include poorly balanced diets, low levels of physical activity, the effects of some genetic conditions and the side effects of psychotropic medication.

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**WHAT IS A HEALTHY DIET?**

How can social care providers ensure that people eat and drink in ways that promote good health?

The Eatwell Guide by Public Health England shows how much we should eat from each food group. However, nutritional needs vary according to sex, age, size and activity levels. The table is a general guide to the reference intakes (RIs) or daily amounts recommended for an average, moderately active adult to achieve a healthy, balanced diet for maintaining rather than losing or gaining weight. Where a person requires a special diet, their support staff should follow the guidelines provided by a healthcare professional over dietary guidance for the general population.

The RI's for fat, saturates, sugar and salt are the maximum amounts while those for carbohydrates and protein are figures we should aim to meet each day. There is no RI for fibre, although health experts suggest we have 30g per day.

The Eatwell Guide helps to balance healthier and more sustainable food. It shows how much of what you eat overall should come from each food group.

**Table:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nutrient</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Energy (kcal)</td>
<td>2500</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protein (g)</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carbohydrates (g)</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugar (g)</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fat (g)</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturates (g)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salt (g)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FOOD LABELLING

It is important to be aware of hidden fats, sugars and salt in processed food. The traffic light system can be useful for choosing healthier options.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Per 100g</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sugars</td>
<td>5g or less</td>
<td>5.1 - 15g</td>
<td>More than 15g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fat</td>
<td>3g or less</td>
<td>3.1 - 20g</td>
<td>More than 20g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturates</td>
<td>1.5g or less</td>
<td>1.6 - 5g</td>
<td>More than 5g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salt</td>
<td>0.3g or less</td>
<td>0.31 - 1.5g</td>
<td>More than 1.5g</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Check the label on packaged foods

Each serving (150g) contains

Energy 1048kJ 250kcal
Fat 3.0g LOW
Saturates 1.3g LOW
Sugars 34g HIGH
Salt 0.9g MEDIUM

13% 4% 7% 38% 15% of an adult’s reference intake

Typical values (as sold) per 100g: 897kJ/ 211kcal

Choose foods lower in fat, salt and sugars
Public Health England recommends that we each eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day\(^5\). Fruit and vegetables contain thousands of compounds known as phytochemicals which have evolved to help plants protect themselves from disease, pests and ultraviolet light. Phytochemicals reside mainly in the outer layers and consequently are responsible for the colour of fruit and vegetables. It follows that the more colours we eat, the wider the variety of phytochemicals we consume and the greater the spread of benefits we reap.

The easiest way to think about this is that eating a rainbow of colours helps to promote good health. It is also important to remember that most phytochemicals are found on or near the surface, so wherever possible encourage people to eat the skin or outer layer of fruit and vegetables.


### WHAT COUNTS AS FIVE-A-DAY?

- **Red foods:**
  - May protect cells, helping in the prevention of heart disease.
  - Help protect the skin from sun damage.
  - May help protect against certain cancers.

- **Orange foods:**
  - Enhance the immune system.
  - Can be converted to vitamin A in the body; this is essential for vision, immune function, skin, bone health.

- **Yellow foods:**
  - Have strong anti-cancerous properties.
  - Help protect the eyes from damage and reduce the risk of developing cataracts.

- **Green foods:**
  - Enhance the immune system.
  - Can be converted to vitamin A in the body; this is essential for vision, immune function, skin, bone health.

- **Purple foods:**
  - Provide protection against pain and inflammation.
  - May support healthy blood pressure.
  - Have anti-aging effects.

- **White foods:**
  - Increase the body’s ability to fight infection.
  - Have strong antimicrobial, antifungal, antiparasitic and antiviral properties.

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**One portion =**

- ½ red pepper
- 1 tablespoon tomato puree
- 1 tomato
- 2 tinned tomatoes
- 2 handfuls raspberries
- 2 tablespoons cooked rhubarb
- 7 cherry tomatoes
- 7 strawberries
- 14 cherries
- 1 orange
- 2 slices mango
- 2 satsumas, tangerines or clementines
- 3 tablespoons butternut squash
- 3 apricots
- 3 tablespoons carrots
- 3 tablespoons red lentils
- 3 tablespoons baked beans
- ½ grapefruit
- 1 slice pineapple
- 1 banana
- 3 tablespoons sweetcorn
- 3 tablespoons yellow lentils
- 3 tablespoons chickpeas
- ½ courgette
- 1 slice melon
- 1 apple/pear
- 1 ceramic bowl lettuce/mixed leaves
- 2 spears broccoli
- 2 kiwi fruit
- 3 tablespoons peas
- 4 tablespoons green beans
- 8 brussels sprouts
- ½ aubergine
- 1 tablespoons raisins, currants or sultanas
- 2 figs
- 2 plums
- 2 prunes
- 3 tablespoons kidney beans
- 4 tablespoons blueberries
- 7 slices beetroot
- 10 blackberries
- 1 leek
- 1 onion
- 1 parsnip
- 2 handfuls beansprouts
- 3 tablespoons chopped mushrooms
- 3 tablespoons cooked swede
- 3 tablespoons butter beans
- 8 cauliflower florets
**FLUIDS**

Dehydration can make people feel tired, dizzy and confused and increase the risk of low blood pressure and urinary tract infections. Our brains are 77% water, so even mild dehydration can impact on our mental functioning. For some people their disability makes it harder to stay hydrated, so it is vital to ensure that they are drinking enough to stay well.

The amount of fluid each person needs varies according to their weight, age, gender, level of activity and the climate. On average we each need to drink 6–8 glasses of liquid a day. This excludes alcohol which promotes dehydration. Water, low-fat milk, sugar free drinks including tea and coffee all count. Fruit juice or smoothies should be limited to 150ml a day.
Care and support provider PossAbilities has worked with a nutrition specialist to support Ken to manage a range of health issues through diet.

Ken was experiencing multiple seizures along with skin irritations, water retention and inconsistent and irregular bowel movements. A ketogenic diet was recommended for Ken in an attempt to reduce the frequency of his seizures.

His support provider kept a detailed food diary and a daily seizure record to assist in establishing correlations between trigger foods and seizures. Records were initially monitored weekly.

A ketogenic diet is a treatment option for people whose seizures are not controlled by medication. It is a high fat, low carbohydrate, controlled protein diet and is usually only considered when at least two medications have been tried and have not worked.

Usually the body uses glucose from carbohydrates as its energy source. When the body uses fat for its energy source, chemicals called ketones are formed. Decanoic acid is also produced as a result of this diet. These chemicals help to reduce seizures for some people.

Important: Dietary treatments for epilepsy must only be followed with the support of an experienced epilepsy specialist and dietitian.

It became clear that on days when Ken had a high consumption of carbohydrates and sugars, he experienced a significant increase in the frequency of his seizures. Certain foods were also identified as triggers and removed from his diet. The nutrition specialist continued to adjust Ken’s diet as more data was gathered.

The dietary changes resulted in a reduction in Ken’s seizures by almost half. He became calmer and more alert. There was also a positive impact on his other health conditions:

- Reduced water retention.
- Reduced inflammation of the skin.
- Regular and formed bowel movements.

As a result, there has been a significant improvement to Ken’s overall wellbeing and quality of life.
IN PRACTICE: SUPPORTING PEOPLE WITH DYSPHAGIA

Care and support provider Aspire has developed a solution for how staff can maintain easy access to a person’s support planning information at meal times.

Aspire runs a nine-person residential home for people with learning disabilities and complex physical needs. Some of the people living in this service have dysphagia and have speech and language therapy guidelines around the support they need to eat and drink as safely as possible. It is essential that staff closely follow each individual’s guidelines in order to minimise the risks of aspiration and choking.

In order to ensure that staff have immediate access to the key information in each person’s support plan, a member of staff proposed formatting this as a placemat which is then laminated and used as a table mat at mealtimes. She went on to design and evaluate this as a course project.

The idea was initially trialled with two people and the content of each mat was taken from each individual’s person-centred support plan and the speech and language therapist assessment. It also included photographs of specific tableware and cutlery used by the person.

Sixteen staff completed ‘before’ and ‘after’ questionnaires on the impact of the placemats. Following the introduction of the mats staff reported markedly increased confidence in following each person’s dysphagia plan (increased from 31% to 94%) and increased agreement that the guidance in place supports them in their daily role (increased from 25% to 81%).

The placemats are updated quarterly or after any change in need. As they are developed it is anticipated that they will contain more information, particularly around people’s food and drink preferences. Placemats are now being developed with each person who wants one.
Care and support provider Milestones Trust has worked with the Square Food Foundation, a Bristol-based cookery school, to develop a food and nutrition course for support workers. This course aims to enthuse staff about preparing high quality food and equip them with the practical skills to deliver simple, nutritious meals. But this initiative is about more than developing skills; it’s about shifting individual attitudes and organisational culture to one where food is seen as a key factor in how people value and relate to each other.

Consequently, a psychological approach to food underpins this course. Many of the staff who have completed it have taken their learning into their own lives. They also often act as food champions within their team.

Milestones Trust has found that preparing nutritious meals is possible within budget and is now aiming to embed this focus on food and nutrition by introducing food standards. These have been discussed by the service user council and as a result the training is going to be rolled out to people supported by Milestones Trust.

**Milestones Trust good food standards**

**Good food principles**

- All homes to comply with recommendations of the Eatwel Guide.
- Food should be freshly prepared every time a main meal is offered.
- No undesirable additives or artificial trans fats to be used.
- Drinking water to be prominently available.
- Menus to be seasonal as far as possible.
- Information about food provenance to be on display for all staff and residents.
- Menus to provide for dietary and cultural needs and meet expectations of other involved professionals (e.g. dieticians and speech and language therapists).
- All staff, regardless of role, should be aware of and understand the charter.
- Induction and training periods for all staff should include information on this standard.

- Every service should encourage their services users to engage with the Good Food Standard, even in services where we do not provide food.
- Every home should design recycling and waste systems suited to their circumstances.

**Good food essentials**

- All meat should come from farms which satisfy UK animal welfare standards.
- All fish should meet Marine Conservation Society guidelines.
- All eggs should be from free-range hens.
- Fair Trade tea and coffee.
- Fair trade bananas.
- Organic milk.
- Organic porridge.
Not everyone makes healthy food choices. Managers have considered how to balance the introduction of organisational standards with issues relating to choice and consent. They have concluded that teams can offer advice on a well-balanced diet and healthy food choices. Where people opt to eat less healthy meals, staff can still support them to prepare their food choices in the most healthy way possible.

Milestones Trust is also exploring the relationship between food and good mental health. During Mental Health Awareness Week, they held food-based events entitled Food 4 Mood. Staff and the people they support have produced a booklet about food and mental health which they have sold through a stall at a local food market.

Cooking and eating good food together is a way of connecting people to each other and promoting both physical and emotional wellbeing. The long-term partnership between Milestones Trust and The Square Food Foundation is successfully shifting organisational culture to one where food is valued for the wider benefits it can bring to people’s lives.

THE NEXT STEP

Changing staff practice and individual behaviour in relation to food and drink requires a long-term, organisational commitment. Sustained change involves addressing organisational culture and personal attitudes and embedding a focus on supporting people to eat high quality food. This is equally relevant to both social care services and how we live our lives.

Service providers have a responsibility to encourage people to make healthy choices which promote their wellbeing and contribute to a good overall quality of life.

As individuals, adopting a nutritious diet and being active will help us live healthily, avoid those diseases linked to obesity or poor nutrition and act as a role model to the people we support.

Small changes, both organisationally and personally, can add up to a big difference in terms of the associated health benefits. We can all make a difference. What will you do today?
INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

- **British Nutrition Foundation** publishes research and advice about nutrition: www.nutrition.org.uk/healthyliving/healthydiet/healthylifestyle.html
- **Change4life** offers practical resources on maintaining a healthy diet, including a food barcode scanner app. While aimed at children and families, it provides advice that is widely relevant in a straightforward way: www.nhs.uk/change4life
- **DSActive** helps people with Down’s syndrome and their parents or carers to make positive changes to their lifestyle through healthier eating and activity tracking, whilst also improving their digital skills and capabilities: www.dactive.org.uk/healthy-living/11991-2/
- **Epilepsy Research UK** provides information on research into ketogenic diet therapies: www.epilepsyresearch.org.uk/ketogenic-diet-therapies-in-adults/
- **Foodzilla** is a nutrition tracker which measures a person’s nutritional intake from photographs of food: foodzilla.io/?home
- **Mental Health Foundation** provides information about diet and mental health: www.mental-health.org.uk/a-to-z/d/diet-and-mental-health
- **Myfitnesspal** is one of the most widely used nutrition and exercise tracker: www.myfitnesspal.com/
- **NHS South of England** provides a range of easy-read resources on diet and nutrition: www.apictureofhealth.southwest.nhs.uk/healthy-lifestyle/diet/
- **Public Health England** makes recommendations on eating healthily and achieving a balanced diet: www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-eatwell-guide
- **Square Food Foundation** teaches people from all walks of life to cook good food from scratch: www.squarefoodfoundation.co.uk/
- **Voluntary Organisations Disability Group** has worked with Public Health England to develop the health charter for learning disability providers which offers principles and guidance for improving the health and well-being of people with learning disabilities: www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-healthcare-access-for-people-with-learning-disabilities
PRACTICE NOTES: IDEAS AND ACTIONS