

# Joint statement in support of the government's Eatwell Guide



**This Consensus statement is supported by 21 leading health, consumer and professional organisations.**

It summarises the purpose of the *Eatwell Guide* and health and sustainability benefits of the revisions made to the latest version, which was adopted in March 2016.

Diet-related diseases place a significant burden on families, the NHS and wider society. For example, one in five children in England and 6 in 10 adults in the UK are overweight or obese.<sup>1</sup> Poor diets account for 69% of the Disability Adjusted Life Years associated with heart disease and 51% of deaths due to stroke in the UK.<sup>2</sup> This is unsurprising, as according to the latest national diet and nutrition survey, the population is a long way off meeting the recommendations in the *Eatwell Guide*. Within the UK:

- 100% of 11-18 year olds and 87% of adults are eating too much sugar
- 85% of children and 66% of adults are eating too much saturated fat
- 84% of children and 74% of adults are failing to meet the 5 a day fruit and vegetable target
- 67% of adults are eating too much salt.
- 57% of men and 32% of women eat too much red and processed meat.<sup>3,4</sup>

The *Eatwell Guide* is the UK's version of a food-based dietary guideline (Figure 1, page 3).<sup>5</sup> Its purpose is to keep people well-informed on how to stay healthy and prevent all forms of malnutrition, which can cause health conditions such as heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, stroke, obesity, common cancers, chronic liver disease and tooth decay. The *Eatwell Guide* provides short, science-based, messages on healthy eating which are in line with the international evidence-base and consistent with recommendations of organisations such as the World Health Organization. **It aims to translate nutrient recommendations into simple information using language that the public can easily understand, and focuses on foods that are commonly consumed.**<sup>6,7</sup> It is based on comprehensive expert reviews of the evidence undertaken by the independent Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) which advises government, and its predecessor, the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy.<sup>8</sup>

The *Eatwell Guide* was most recently updated in March 2016.<sup>9</sup> This **update was initiated by the findings of SACN's most recent evidence review on carbohydrates which considered 600 research papers.** The SACN expert report made recommendations to halve the maximum sugar intake levels we should be consuming and recommended an increase in dietary fibre by eating more fruit, vegetables and wholegrain foods.<sup>10</sup>

The *Eatwell Guide* update also **incorporated emerging sustainability concerns highlighted in the 2015 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.**<sup>11</sup> Meeting the healthy eating recommendations will produce co-benefits for the environment, for example, through reduced greenhouse gas-emissions.<sup>12</sup> A recent report from the Food Climate Research Network and the Food and Agriculture Organization points out that only four countries worldwide have so far included sustainability as an objective of their food-based dietary guidelines: Brazil, Sweden, Qatar and Germany. The UK is one of a handful of others who discuss aspects of sustainability in accompanying supporting information. Two countries (USA and Australia) have seen attempts to incorporate environmental considerations reach an advanced stage but not achieve government endorsement.<sup>13</sup>

Revisions to the *Eatwell Guide* reflect these national and international developments. In order to meet the government recommendations, the size of individual food categories have increased or decreased with an emphasis on choosing foods lower in saturated fat, salt and sugars.<sup>14</sup> The main improvements to support the achievement of current healthy sustainable diet-related population objectives include:

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1. Separate section on “Foods high fat, sugar and salt” (HFSS):
  - HFSS processed foods such as biscuits, crisps and cakes have been removed from the core foods recommended on the plate to a separate section with the text “eat less and in small amounts.”
2. Inclusion of a new section on “Hydration”:
  - Promotes healthier drinks such as water, lower fat milks, sugar free drinks, tea and coffee.
  - Recommends limiting consumption of fruit juices and smoothies to a maximum of 150mls per day due to the high levels of free sugars; also clarifies that these can only count as one portion of fruit or vegetable regardless of how much is consumed or contained in a serving.
3. Section on “Dairy and alternatives”:
  - Changes in line with objective modelling reflect the fact that the main sources of dairy should be lower in saturated fat, salt and sugar. Dairy products which are high in sugar and fat such as sweetened yoghurt, milks and smoothies should not form a core part of the diet.
  - Recommends that lower fat and lower sugar dairy options are chosen.
4. Section on “Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins”:
  - The recommendation to eat more beans and pulses and eat less red and processed meat in recognition of overlapping health and sustainability concerns.
  - Recommends consuming sustainably sourced fish.
5. New strapline:
  - The inclusion of sustainability considerations, *“Use the Eatwell Guide to help you get a balance of healthier and more sustainable food.”*
6. New section on “Nutrition labelling”:
  - Includes the government's recommended front of pack nutrition label which combines colour coding (traffic lights) with percentage reference intakes to help consumers choose packaged foods which are lower in saturated fat, salt and sugar when shopping.

These guidelines provide important clarifications and advice on what the population should be consuming for a healthy future and importantly start to incorporate environmental sustainability. We note that a SACN review of the evidence for the relationship between saturated fats and health is underway.<sup>15</sup>

The government should now put in place a comprehensive range of policies which can support people to meet these new guidelines and commit to revising them regularly in line with new health and sustainability science and research. We warmly welcome their development and remain committed to supporting their achievement.

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Figure 1: The updated *Eatwell Guide*



**List of supporting organisations:**

- Action on Sugar
- Association for Directors of Public Health
- Association for the Study of Obesity
- British Heart Foundation
- Children's Food Campaign
- Compassion in World Farming
- Consensus Action on Salt and Health
- Diabetes UK
- Faculty of Public Health
- Food Ethics Council
- Food Foundation

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Friends of the Earth

Health Equalities Group

Oral Health Foundation

Royal College of Physicians

Royal Society for Public Health

Scottish Cancer Prevention Network

South Asian Health Foundation

UK Health Forum

World Cancer Research Fund

World Wildlife Fund

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<sup>1</sup> Public Health England Obesity: Adult and child UK prevalence and trends. 2016. [http://www.noo.org.uk/NOO\\_about\\_obesity](http://www.noo.org.uk/NOO_about_obesity)

<sup>2</sup> Global Burden of Disease. 2016. United Kingdom, 2013, YLDs attributable to dietary risk. Accessed 18 April 2016: <http://ihmeuw.org/3ssf>

<sup>3</sup> NatCen Social Research, MRC Human Nutrition Research & University College London Medical School, 2015a. National Diet and Nutrition Survey Years 1-4, 2008/09-2011/12. [data collection]. 7th Edition. UK

<sup>4</sup> National Diet and Nutrition Survey: assessment of dietary sodium in adults in England, 2014.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-diet-and-nutrition-survey-assessment-of-dietary-sodium-in-adults-in-england-2014>

<sup>5</sup> Public Health England. 2016. Eatwell Guide <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-eatwell-guide>

<sup>6</sup> Food and Agriculture Organisation. Food Based Dietary Guidelines. <http://www.fao.org/nutrition/education/food-dietary-guidelines/background/en/>

<sup>7</sup> NHS choices comprehensive advice on healthy eating can be accessed here

<http://www.nhs.uk/LiveWell/Goodfood/Pages/goodfoodhome.aspx>

<sup>8</sup> Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition. <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/scientific-advisory-committee-on-nutrition>

<sup>9</sup> Public Health England. 2016. Eatwell Guide. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-eatwell-guide>

<sup>10</sup> SACN. 2015. Carbohydrates and Health report. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sacn-carbohydrates-and-health-report>

<sup>11</sup> UN. 2015. Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

[http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E)

<sup>12</sup> James Milner, Rosemary Green, Alan D Dangour, Andy Haines, Zaid Chalabi, Joseph Spadaro, Anil Markandya, Paul Wilkinson. 2015. Health effects of adopting low greenhouse gas emission diets in the UK. *BMJ Open* 2015;5:e007364

<sup>13</sup> Carlos Gonzalez Fischer & Tara Garnett. 2016. Plates, pyramids, planet. Developments in national healthy and sustainable dietary guidelines: a state of play assessment. Food Research Collaborative Network.

<http://www.oxfordmartin.ox.ac.uk/downloads/academic/plates-pyramids-planets.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> PHE. 2016. The Eatwell Guide. How does it differ to the eatwell plate and why?

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/528201/Eatwell\\_guide\\_whats\\_changed\\_and\\_why.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/528201/Eatwell_guide_whats_changed_and_why.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/scientific-advisory-committee-on-nutrition#saturated-fats-working-group>