

Eating and Activity Guidelines for New Zealand Adults

What's changed?

The *Eating and Activity Guidelines for New Zealand Adults* (Ministry of Health 2015) replace the *Food and Nutrition Guidelines for Adults* (Ministry of Health 2003) and *Movement = Health* (SPARC and Ministry of Health 2007) physical activity guidelines. The following are key changes from the old to the new advice.

General changes

The Eating and Activity Statements are now together in one document

Both healthy eating and appropriate levels of physical activity form the basis of a healthy lifestyle.

The Statements better reflect the current international evidence for nutrition and physical activity

The evidence underpinning the statements comes from the international systematic reviews that support current:

- recommendations from the World Health Organization and World Cancer Research Fund
- dietary guidelines for Australia, the United States of America (USA) and Nordic nations
- physical activity guidelines for Australian adults.

Body Weight Statement



The Body Weight Statement is more detailed

- In 2013/14, 35 percent of New Zealand adults are overweight and a further 30 percent are obese. Therefore, more emphasis on the importance of achieving and/or maintaining a healthy body weight is needed.
- This Statement acknowledges the role of both diet and activity levels in maintaining a healthy body weight.

Eating Statements



The Eating Statements give more emphasis to choosing better-quality grain foods (breads and cereals)

- Diets high in whole grains and high-fibre grain foods, rather than refined grain foods, can reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and bowel cancer and help to maintain a healthy body weight.
- Most New Zealand adults do not eat enough fibre and generally choose more refined grain foods. For example, most of the bread consumed in New Zealand is either white or 'light-grain' bread while 'heavy-grain' breads are the closest to whole grain.



The meat and plant protein food group has been renamed to reflect the stronger evidence for eating plant-, fish- and seafood-based protein foods

- This food group is now known as 'Legumes, nuts, seeds, fish and other seafood, eggs, poultry (eg, chicken) or red meat with the fat removed'.
- Red meat, in moderation, remains a useful addition to the diet, especially as it is an excellent source of iron and zinc.



Including fat in the diet is less about the amount eaten and more about the quality or type used

- The emphasis is on reducing saturated fat in the diet and replacing it with unsaturated fat, particularly polyunsaturated. For example, choose a plant-based spread instead of butter on bread.
- Since the 1970s, New Zealand adults have gradually decreased their total fat intake, and the average intake is now within the recommended range. However, they have replaced some of the fat with foods high in refined carbohydrate (eg, sugar). Saturated fat intakes remain higher than recommended.
- It is still important to be aware that fat, whether saturated or unsaturated, is the most concentrated form of energy (kilojoules) in the diet. Therefore large intakes of fat can push overall energy intake beyond energy requirements, resulting in weight gain.



New advice is to choose mostly 'whole' and less processed foods

- Dietary patterns high in vegetables, fruit, whole grains, legumes, nuts, milk and milk products (including low-fat options) and seafood are linked with better health and lower rates of disease. These dietary patterns are low in processed meat, refined grains, saturated fat, sugar-sweetened foods and drinks, and salt/sodium.
- Due to advances in processing technology, the food supply is safer, easier to use and much more varied than in earlier times. However, advances have also increased the availability of products that are high in energy, fat, salt and sugar but low in beneficial nutrients.

Activity Statements



A new Statement recommends people reduce sitting time

- Growing evidence suggests sitting for long periods is associated with weight gain and a higher risk of poor general health and type 2 diabetes.
- Prolonged sitting should be broken up by standing or short bursts of light activity for at least a few minutes every hour, preferably more frequently. This light activity should be in addition to 2½ hours of moderate physical activity each week.
- Limiting the time spent sitting gives more time for physical activity.



Activity Statements recommend weekly instead of daily activity

- While it is important to spread activity throughout the week, the evidence is strongest for the benefits of a total weekly amount of activity rather than a daily amount.
- A total recommended time for the week allows more options for spreading the activity throughout the week in a way that will best suit each individual.
- The previous recommendation for at least 30 minutes per day, five days a week is one way to achieve the recommendation.



Activity Statements recognise the benefits of doing higher-intensity activity

- Higher-intensity activities are associated with improvements in fitness levels, greater energy expenditure and improved aerobic/anaerobic capacity.
- Including time-related recommendations for different intensity levels of activity gives more options for people, especially those who do not have much time for activity. Ideally, the extra time available should be filled with other activity rather than sitting.



Activity Statements recognise the benefits of doing activity for longer

- Doing at least 2½ hours of moderate physical activity (or the equivalent of vigorous activity) spread throughout the week is associated with health benefits such as a reduced risk of type 2 diabetes (whether you lose weight or not), colon, endometrial and postmenopausal breast cancer, anxiety, depression and stress.
- Doubling that amount can have additional health benefits such as improved weight control and a greater reduction in the risk of colon cancer and postmenopausal breast cancer.



A new Statement recommends doing muscle-strengthening activities

- Muscle-strengthening activities help reduce the risk of injury as well as keeping the body strong and agile for doing everyday activities such as walking, hanging the washing out, gardening and carrying the shopping.

References

Ministry of Health. 2003. *Food and Nutrition Guidelines for Adults*. Wellington: Ministry of Health.

Ministry of Health. 2015. *Eating and Activity Guidelines for New Zealand Adults*. Wellington: Ministry of Health.

SPARC and Ministry of Health. 2007. *Movement = Health*. Wellington: Sport and Recreation New Zealand and Ministry of Health.