
Healthy Living, Healthy Mind- Healthy Eating

Hormone therapy is the most effective way to reduce the chance of the breast cancer coming back. Being active and having a healthy diet can help too! Why not try to **combine hormone therapy with a healthy lifestyle** to reduce your risk of breast cancer coming back.

In this section you can find suggestions, hints and tips for making changes to your lifestyle or looking after your physical and mental health. These are based on research and conversations with women taking hormone therapy. They may also help with some of the side-effects of hormone therapy that you might experience.

Why should I combine hormone therapy with a healthy lifestyle?

Some people don't like the idea of taking medicines. They may have heard that other methods can be used to manage cancer risk, like special diets, herbal or other alternative treatments, or simply maintaining a healthy lifestyle and positive attitude. It's true that anything you do to maintain a healthy lifestyle - like healthy eating and staying active - can only help. However, in terms of reducing the risk of breast cancer coming back the evidence is strongest for hormone therapy, and it is best if you are able to combine taking HT with a healthy lifestyle. Research shows that hormone therapy works and combining it with a healthy lifestyle is the best way to reduce your risk of breast cancer coming back.

This section includes information on the following topics:

- Why is healthy eating important?
- What is a healthy diet?
- Having a healthy diet following breast cancer
- Changing how you eat
- Goal setting for healthy eating
- Further information

Healthy eating

Even if you already have a healthy diet, you may find there are some simple changes you can make your diet even healthier.

Why is healthy eating important?

The World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF) is the most trustworthy source of information on the role of diet and nutrition in cancer survivors.

The WCRF reports there is now some evidence of links between better survival after breast cancer and:

- being a healthy body weight
- eating a healthy diet
- being active.

Although more research is needed to confirm the effects of diet on cancer recurrence, **a healthy diet can help to reduce the risk of other health conditions such as heart disease and diabetes. It can also improve your energy levels, help you to keep to a healthy body weight, boost your mood and help you feel better in yourself.**

What is a healthy diet?

A healthy diet includes a variety of foods such as:

- lots of fruits and vegetables
- lean meats and oily fish (such as chicken, turkey, salmon and mackerel)
- foods that are high in fibre (such as brown rice, oats, pulses and sweet potatoes)
- foods that are high in calcium to help your bones to be as strong as they can be and to minimise risk of osteoporosis (thinning of the bones), which can be a long-term side effect of taking aromatase inhibitors.

Try to limit the amount of the following foods:

- foods that are high in saturated fats (such as fatty and processed meats, whole milk, cream, butter, chocolate and biscuits)
- foods that are high in salt.

A healthy diet is varied and balanced – you don't need to cut out all of your favourite foods and drinks completely, such as those high in fat, salt and sugar. Instead, try to cut down how often you consume them – e.g., try to eat healthy foods 80% of the time.

Having a healthy diet following breast cancer

You may have some questions about what you should and should not be eating based on what you have heard from other people and read online. **You can find answers to some common questions asked by women with breast cancer below:**

Should I be eating soya?

You may have heard that soya foods (such as soya beans, soya yoghurt, soya milk and tofu) can protect against breast cancer, or alternatively that soya could stop some forms of hormone therapy from working properly. This is a widely debated topic, with some arguing the benefits of soya, and others arguing it could cause harm. However, there is no good evidence that soya foods can prevent breast cancer recurrence or that they reduce how well hormone therapy works. Instead, current evidence suggests that **soya foods are fine to have as part of a healthy balanced diet, but are not essential.**

Should I avoid dairy products?

In short - no. Some women are concerned that eating and drinking dairy products (such as milk, butter, yoghurt, cream and cheese) can increase the risk of breast cancer coming back (recurrence). However, there is no good evidence to support this. **Dairy products, particularly those low in fat (e.g., skimmed or semi-skimmed milk, low fat cheese) are an important part of a balanced and healthy diet**, and provide you with calcium which is important for healthy bones.

Do I need multivitamin and other dietary supplements?

A healthy diet should provide you with all the nutrients you need, so most people do not need to take supplements (like multivitamins, or vitamin C). There is no evidence that taking extra vitamins and minerals as supplements will reduce the chance of cancer coming back. Taking high doses of some supplements may be harmful and have unpleasant side-effects. **If you are thinking about taking nutritional supplements, check with your breast cancer team, GP or pharmacist.**

What about alcohol?

There is no good evidence to suggest cutting out alcohol helps to prevent breast cancer coming back (recurrence). However, **it is recommended by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) that women who have had breast cancer should limit themselves to less than 5 units of alcohol per week.**

Alcohol can contain a lot of hidden calories without any nutritional value. Therefore, if you are trying to lose weight, or maintain a healthy weight, try to drink alcohol in moderation. The table below gives you an idea of the number of units of alcohol and calories in different drinks.

Drink	Units of Alcohol	Calories
Glass of wine 13% (250ml)	3.3	240
Cider (1 pint) 4%	2.3	210
Beer/lager 4% (1 pint)	2.3	170
Glass of wine 13% (175ml)	2.3	170
Champagne (125ml)	1.5	100
Alcopop 5% (275ml)	1.4	200
Port (50ml)	1.0	79
Sherry (50ml)	1.0	58
Gin and slimline tonic (25ml gin)	1.0	50

Changing how you eat

If you would like to make some changes to your diet, **see below for some tips to help with eating more healthily.**

Meal planning

You may find that putting some time aside each week to make a weekly meal plan helps you to eat healthily! Deciding what to eat can be stressful – so knowing what you are going to cook ahead of mealtimes can take away some of this stress. It can also help stop unplanned snacking and impulse buying in the supermarket.

Resources for healthy recipes

If you want a little help getting inspired, these resources contain links to healthy recipes:

- To go to the World Cancer Research Fund, type this weblink into your browser: <https://www.wcrf-uk.org/healthy-eating/recipes/>
- To go to NHS Better Health App, type this weblink into your browser: <https://www.nhs.uk/better-health/lose-weight/>
- To go to Change4Life, type this weblink into your browser: <https://www.nhs.uk/healthier-families/recipes/>

Bulk cooking

On days you have more energy, try making extra portions and freeze them so that you have quick and healthy meals available when you need them!

Making simple swaps

Introducing lots of changes to your diet in one go can be difficult and makes it harder to stick to. Introducing a few simple swaps at a time can be a helpful way to manage this.

Here are a few examples of simple healthier food swaps you can make:

- white pasta to wholewheat pasta
- white rice to brown rice
- white bread to brown or wholegrain bread
- whole milk to semi-skimmed, 1% fat or skimmed milk
- sugar on cereal to fresh fruit on cereal
- cream-based sauces to tomato or vegetable-based sauces
- fatty meats (e.g., streaky bacon) to leaner meats (e.g., back bacon)
- fruit squash to no added sugar fruit squash.

You may find it more challenging to make swaps if your family don't wish to make these changes. It may be that you need to compromise and find a balance with your family.

Dieting

Before starting a diet, you should speak with your breast cancer team or GP to make sure that you diet safely and are not restricting your body from the important nutrients it needs.

Lots of books and online articles claim that intermittent fasting or low-calorie diets can reduce the chances of cancer recurrence or reduce the side effects of cancer treatments. However, although this topic has been researched for many years, there is little agreement as to the benefits and harms of these diets, especially for women taking hormone therapy.

However, in terms of weight loss, there is good evidence that intermittent fasting can be an effective tool. One example of an effective diet for weight loss is the 2-Day diet, which was developed by Dr Michelle Harvie, Manchester University Hospital Foundation NHS Trust, a dietician with a special interest in breast cancer. You can find more information on this by typing this weblink into your browser:
https://preventbreastcancer.org.uk/2_day_diet/

You can find more tips and resources on managing your weight in the Weight Changes section of the HT&Me website, which can be found in Dealing with Side-Effects.

Goal setting for healthy eating

How goal setting can help you to eat more healthily

Setting a goal is a great way to either start eating more healthily, or to help you keep going with healthy eating. Here you can set some healthy eating goals.

Think about what your current diet looks like. There may be small and simple changes you can make to help make your diet healthier. On the next page you can turn these into goals.

You can either pick a goal from the list or write in your own goal (e.g., use my meal plan to write a shopping list).

By fitting these activities into your current lifestyle, you'll start to eat more healthily without even thinking about it!

You might wonder whether goal setting will really work. **Yes – research shows that setting short-term achievable goals is a great way to help you eat more healthily.**

One study summarised research from 48 studies. The results showed that people who set goals were more likely to eat healthily both in the short-term and long-term. Setting a goal helped them to focus on what they wanted to achieve and how exactly they wanted to do it.

Set a new goal

You can set a new goal in the HT&Me website by going to **My Goals and Plans** and receive personalised feedback on your goal.

Or, you can set one here.

First, choose an activity from the list below, or write your own:

- Make a meal plan
- Use a meal plan to write a weekly shopping list
- Bulk-cook some healthy meals
- Choose a low-calories alcoholic drink
- Have 5 portions of fruit and vegetables in a day
- Add an extra portion of vegetables with dinner
- Swap a sugary cereal for breakfast for a fruit smoothie with oats
- Swap a snack of crisps for carrot sticks with hummus
- Make a fake-away at home instead of ordering a take-away

Now, think about how many days are you going to plan to do this activity?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Now, try writing this out in the boxes below:

My activity:	
How many days:	

You can come back in one week and review this goal – for example, have you managed to achieve your goal? Or do you need to revise your goal?

It may be a good idea to stick up a reminder of your goal somewhere in your house.

Find out more

Here are some useful links to other websites where you can find ideas and advice on how to eat more healthily. To take a look, type the following weblinks into your browser:

- To read more about diet for women living with and beyond breast cancer: <https://www.wcrf.org/diet-activity-and-cancer/global-cancer-update-programme/cancer-survivors/>
- If you are unsure how healthy your diet is, and to take a look at The Eatwell Guide: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/food-guidelines-and-food-labels/the-eatwell-guide/>
- To find the scale that can give you an indication of the quality of your diet: https://www.bbc.co.uk/food/articles/uk_healthy_eating_scale
- To read more about alcohol recommendations from NICE: <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng101/chapter/Recommendations>
- If you would like to read more about the effectiveness of intermittent fasting on weight loss in women and read the original research paper by Dr Michelle Harvie: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/23591120/>
- To go to Breast Cancer Now information about diet and breast cancer: <https://breastcancernow.org/information-support/facing-breast-cancer/living-beyond-breast-cancer/life-after-breast-cancer-treatment/diet-breast-cancer-why-balanced-diet-important>
- To go to Macmillan Cancer Support information about eating during cancer: https://www.macmillan.org.uk/_images/ENGLISH_Healthy_eating_for_%20translation_tcm9-275863.pdf
- To go to World Cancer Research Foundation: <https://www.wcrf-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Eat-well-during-cancer-2019-WEB.pdf>

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