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## Chocolate

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## Summary

- Chocolate is high in sugar and fat and is classified as a ‘discretionary’ food.
- An appropriate serving size of chocolate is about 25 grams – 1/2 a small chocolate bar or a tenth of a family block.
- More evidence is required to clarify the role that chocolate plays in migraines, acne and pimples.
- Fruits, vegetables, and green and black tea are good sources of antioxidants to include in the diet.
- A person with a healthy diet and who is physically active can safely eat small serves of chocolate without fear of weight gain.

Chocolate is high in sugar and fat and is classified as a ‘discretionary’ food. A healthy, balanced diet can include a small amount of chocolate, but too many discretionary foods and drinks can have a negative impact on overall health, such as contributing to weight gain or making it difficult to maintain a healthy weight.

There are components in cocoa beans (used to make chocolate) that may help prevent heart disease, cancer and other degenerative illnesses, but more evidence is needed to support these claims.

## Nutrients and other active components

The nutritional content of chocolate varies according to the recipe. Generally, chocolate contains small amounts of essential nutrients such as protein, vitamin E, calcium, phosphorus, magnesium, iron, copper and antioxidants.

While chocolate may include some healthy things, it is high in fat and added sugar, and because of this it is a ‘discretionary’ food. Eating too many discretionary foods can make it difficult to maintain a healthy weight and can leave less room in the diet for healthy foods. Chocolate should only be enjoyed in small serves of up to 25 grams and only occasionally.

## Chocolate and migraines

Migraines are debilitating headaches caused by spasms of the arteries leading to the brain. The underlying mechanisms remain unclear, but a number of triggers seem to be needed to start the migraine process. Certain foods, including chocolate, are commonly cited as triggers. For most sufferers, however, chocolate can’t start the migraine chain reaction by itself.

Numerous international trials have found that other factors, such as stress (as a result of tiredness, excitement or anger) and hormones need to be present at the same time.

More research is needed to clarify the link between chocolate and migraines.

## Acne and pimples

Chocolate is often believed to contribute to acne. There is no evidence to date to back up this long-held belief. Research has not identified compounds, ingredients or naturally occurring chemicals in chocolate that can either trigger acne or make it worse. However, recent studies suggest that a high glycaemic index (GI) diet, combined with a high intake of refined carbohydrates (sugars, products made with white flour etc.), may be linked to pimples.

## Healthy weight

Having a nutritious, well-balanced diet is important for overall health and for keeping a healthy weight. This means eating a diet that is based on the five food groups in the [Australian Guide to Healthy Eating](#), which are:

- fruit
- vegetables and legumes/bean
- grain (cereal) foods, mostly wholegrain and/or high cereal fibre varieties
- lean meats and poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts and seeds, and legumes/beans, and
- milk, yoghurt, cheese and/or alternatives, mostly reduced fat.

Consuming too many discretionary foods like chocolate and sugar-sweetened drinks, and not being active enough is the main reason people tend to gain weight. Discretionary foods, including chocolate, are readily available in everyday life and larger portions such as ‘king-size’ chocolate bars have changed our perception of what is an appropriate amount of chocolate to eat.

Chocolate is energy dense, which means it contains a lot of kilojoules (or energy) for its weight. An appropriate serving size of chocolate is around 25 grams, which is half a small chocolate bar or one-tenth of a ‘family’ block of chocolate. If you enjoy the taste of chocolate, try a cup of hot chocolate made with low-fat or skim milk as an alternative.

It would be wrong to say that eating chocolate will always lead to weight gain. A person with a healthy diet who is physically active can safely eat small serves of discretionary foods such as chocolate, without fear of weight gain.

## Chocolate and antioxidants

Due to processing to remove bitterness, most chocolate is a poor source of antioxidants. Eating plenty of fruit and vegetables, and including black or green tea in your diet are good ways to increase your antioxidant intake without the additional fat and sugar found in chocolate.

### Where to get help

- Dietitians Association of Australia Tel. 1800 812 942
- Your doctor

#### [References](#)

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- Mellor DD, Sathyapalan T, Kilpatrick ES et al. 2010, 'High-cocoa polyphenol-rich chocolate improves HDL cholesterol in Type 2 diabetes patients', *Diabetic Medicine*, vol. 27, pp.1318-1321. [More information here.](#)
- Smith RN, Mann NJ, Braue A et al. 2007, 'The effect of a high-protein, low glycemic-load diet versus a conventional, high glycemic-load diet on biochemical parameters associated with acne vulgaris: a randomized, investigator-masked, controlled trial', *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology*, vol. 57, pp. 247-256. [More information here.](#)

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### Healthy eating

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### Healthy eating basics

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[A kilojoule is a unit of measure of energy, in the same way that kilometres measure distance...](#)

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- [Children's diet - fruit and vegetables](#)

[If you eat and enjoy fruit and vegetables every day, your child may eventually follow your lead...](#)

- [Dairy and dairy alternatives](#)

[Dairy products \(and dairy alternatives\) are packed with calcium, protein and lots of other essential nutrients. Calcium is vital for healthy teeth and bones. It is also important for your muscles...](#)

- [Eggs](#)

[The humble egg is a powerhouse of nutritional goodness. Eggs are full of things your body needs. They are a great source of protein, antioxidants, vitamins and minerals \(such as vitamin A, vitamin D...](#)

- [Energy in food \(kilojoules and calories\)](#)

[A kilojoule is a unit of measure of energy, in the same way that kilometres measure distance...](#)

- [Food Standards Australia New Zealand \(FSANZ\)](#)

[FSANZ's role is to protect the health and safety of people in Australia and New Zealand by maintaining a safe food supply...](#)

- [Getting enough protein](#)

[Protein is an important nutrient that helps your body grow and repair cells. Most Australians eat more than enough protein, but if you are vegetarian or vegan you may not be getting enough protein \(or...](#)

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[It's important for kids to eat a wide variety of foods for a healthy, well-balanced diet and to be physically active. Creating healthy habits during childhood helps to ensure lifelong healthy...](#)

- [Look after your health at harvest time \(slideshow\)](#)

[Farmer health, wellbeing and safety are often neglected when facing the pressures of harvest. Simple safety measures can dramatically reduce the risk of injury and illness...](#)

## Food types

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[The size of a standard drink can vary according to the type of alcohol...](#)

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[Common cereal foods include bread, breakfast cereals and pasta...](#)

- [Dairy and dairy alternatives](#)

[Dairy products \(and dairy alternatives\) are packed with calcium, protein and lots of other essential nutrients. Calcium is vital for healthy teeth and bones. It is also important for your muscles...](#)

- [Fats and oils](#)

[Animal products and processed foods like fried fast food are generally high in saturated fats...](#)

- [Fish](#)

[Eating two or more serves of fish per week can reduce the risk of a range of diseases including dementia, depression and cardiovascular disease...](#)

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[Some of the foods we eat come from animals and others come from plants...](#)

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[Protein is an important nutrient that helps your body grow and repair cells. Most Australians eat more than enough protein, but if you are vegetarian or vegan you may not be getting enough protein \(or...](#)

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[Use herbs to enhance the flavour of virtually any dish, including desserts...](#)

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[Meat and poultry are a great source of protein and lots of other nutrients your body needs. Check your recommended intake of meat and poultry and try to stick with it...](#)

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[Salads are a great way for you achieve your 5 serves of vegies every day...](#)

- [Nuts and seeds](#)

[Nuts are a healthy food and a good source of protein and healthy fats...](#)

- [Organic food](#)

[Organic foods are farmed in a more environmentally sustainable way than conventional foods...](#)

- [Simple ways to cut down on fat \(slideshow\)](#)

[Cutting down on fat is not as hard as you think. Here's how to maintain a healthy weight by consuming the right amount and types of fat...](#)

- [Soft drinks, juice and sweet drinks - children](#)

[Encourage children to drink and enjoy water. Sweet drinks such as juice, cordial and soft drinks may cause health problems for children if consumed in large amounts...](#)

- [Soft drinks, juice and sweet drinks – limit intake](#)

[Consumption of drinks containing added sugar is associated with weight gain, reduced bone strength and tooth erosion and decay...](#)

## **Vitamins and supplements**

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[A balanced UV approach is required to ensure some sun exposure for vitamin D while minimising the risk of skin cancer...](#)

- [Antioxidants](#)

[Antioxidants scavenge free radicals from the body's cells, and prevent or reduce the damage caused by oxidation...](#)

- [Calcium](#)

[If you don't have enough calcium in your diet, your bones will eventually become weak and brittle...](#)

- [Folate for pregnant women](#)

[Even women who aren't planning to have a baby should increase their folate intake in case of unplanned pregnancy...](#)

- [Iodine](#)

[Good sources of iodine include fortified bread and any type of seafood, including seaweed...](#)

- [Iron](#)

[Iron is important for transporting oxygen in the blood...](#)

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[Taking vitamin supplements is no substitute for a healthy diet...](#)

- [Vitamin B](#)

[The eight B-group vitamins are essential for various functions within the body...](#)

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[A balanced approach to sunlight exposure will help you get enough vitamin D while protecting against skin cancer...](#)

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[Vitamin D is important for healthy bones, muscles and the nervous system...](#)

- [Vitamins - common misconceptions](#)

[There is no evidence that any one vitamin can slow ageing, restore sex drive or cure infertility...](#)

## **Health conditions and food**

- [Arthritis and diet](#)

[No special diet or 'miracle food' can cure arthritis, but some conditions may be helped by avoiding or including certain foods...](#)

- [Asthma and food allergies](#)

[It is important to identify any foods or food chemicals that may trigger your asthma, but this must be done under strict medical supervision...](#)

- [Cancer and food](#)

[Diet can influence your risk of developing some cancers, but there is no evidence that specific foods can cause or cure cancer...](#)

- [Cholesterol - healthy eating tips](#)

[Replacing foods that contain saturated fats with foods that contain polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats will help to lower your cholesterol...](#)

- [Coeliac disease and gluten sensitivity](#)

[Coeliac disease is an immune disease caused by gluten...](#)

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- [Have you had an allergic reaction to packaged food?](#)

[The Food Standards Code requires that certain foods must be listed on the package of a food, or made known to the customer upon request. If you experience an allergic reaction to a known allergen not...](#)

- [Health check](#)

[This health assessment questionnaire will identify which zones of your lifestyle are contributing to your personal health risk and provide actions you can take to make positive change...](#)

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[Weight loss is often associated with Huntington's disease, but it doesn't appear to be a direct result of diet...](#)

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[Chemicals such as pesticides, antibiotics and hormones are used to boost food production and ensure adequate food supply...](#)

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- [Tips to keep our snacks on track \(slideshow\)](#)  
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- [Weight loss and fad diets](#)  
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- [Weight management services](#)  
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- [Women's nutrition for life](#)  
['Nutrition for life' identifies a woman's four main life stages and how to eat healthily for each of them. Following this information can lead to better health at any stage of your life...](#)

#### **Nutritional needs throughout life**

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[Childcare centres should provide healthy meals for your children...](#)
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- [Disability - managing underweight](#)  
[There are a number of ways that a person with a disability can successfully avoid unwanted weight loss...](#)
- [Eating tips for babies](#)  
[First foods for babies can be prepared easily and cheaply at home without salt, seasonings and sweeteners...](#)

- [Eating tips for children \(3\) - older toddlers](#)  
[Offer children the same foods as the family, with a variety of textures and flavours for balanced nutrition...](#)
- [Eating tips for preschoolers](#)  
[Children are able to decide how much food they need for activity and growth if allowed to eat according to their appetite...](#)
- [Eating tips for school children](#)  
[Snacks are an important part of a healthy diet for active children, so offer nutritious as well as high energy snacks...](#)
- [Eating tips for young toddlers](#)  
[Children have a natural ability to sense when they are hungry and when they are full...](#)
- [Eggs](#)  
[The humble egg is a powerhouse of nutritional goodness. Eggs are full of things your body needs. They are a great source of protein, antioxidants, vitamins and minerals \(such as vitamin A, vitamin D...](#)
- [Food and your life stages](#)  
[The nutritional requirements of the human body change as we move through different life stages...](#)
- [Food for babies - tucker talk tips](#)  
[Before six months, breastmilk or formula is the only food and drink that your baby needs...](#)
- [Getting enough protein](#)  
[Protein is an important nutrient that helps your body grow and repair cells. Most Australians eat more than enough protein, but if you are vegetarian or vegan you may not be getting enough protein \(or...](#)
- [Good food for Elders - tucker talk tips](#)  
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- [Soybeans](#)

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- [Foods from plants and animals](#)

Some of the foods we eat come from animals and others come from plants...

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### Related information on other websites

- [Australian Dietary Guidelines 2013](#)

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