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- [Site Navigation](#)
- [Page Content](#)

#### [Menu](#)

[State Government Victoria](#) [Better Health Channel Logo](#)

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- 

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- 

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- 

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[Show search toolbar](#)

[Contrast](#) [Sign Up](#) [Login](#)

Search




Type a minimum of three characters then press UP or DOWN on the keyboard to navigate the autocompleted search results

## Navigation

[Home](#) [Close Menu](#)

- - [Conversation-Going-travelling](#)
- [Conditions and treatments](#)
  - [Conditions and treatments](#)
    - [Allergies](#)
      - [Allergies](#)
        - [Allergic reaction to packaged food](#)
    - [Anxiety](#)
    - [Arthritis](#)
    - [Asthma](#)
    - [Behavioural conditions](#)
    - [Birth defects](#)
    - [Blood and blood vessels](#)
    - [Bones muscles and joints](#)
      - [Bones muscles and joints](#)
        - [Foot care - podiatrists](#)
    - [Brain and nerves](#)
    - [Cancer](#)
    - [Complementary and alternative care](#)
    - [Dementia](#)
  - [Healthy living](#)
    - [Healthy living](#)
      - [Alcohol](#)
      - [Babies and toddlers \(0-3\)](#)
      - [Children \(4-12\)](#)
      - [Drugs and addictive behaviours](#)

- [Environmental health](#)
- [Family Violence](#)
- [Older people in hospital – Get well soon](#)
- [Health checks](#)
- [Healthy Eating](#)
  - [Nutrition for life](#)
- [Healthy mind](#)
- [Healthy pregnancy](#)
- [Immunisation](#)
- [Services and support](#)
  - [Services and support](#)
  - [Aged care services](#)
  - [Alcohol and drug services](#)
  - [LGBTI support](#)
  - [Carers, caring and respite care services](#)
  - [Child, family and relationship services](#)
  - [Disability services](#)
  - [Emergency, crisis and support services](#)
  - [End of life and palliative care services](#)
  - [Hospitals, surgery and procedures](#)
  - [Mental health services](#)
  - [Planning and coordinating healthcare](#)
  - [Pregnancy and birth services](#)
- [A-Z](#)
  - [A-Z](#)
  - [Conditions and treatments](#)
  - [Healthy living](#)
  - [Services and support](#)
  - [Videos](#)
  - [Service profiles](#)
- [Blog](#)
  - [Blog](#)
  - [Blog authors](#)
  - [Topics](#)
- [Podcast](#)
  - [Podcast](#)
  - [Influenza - Dr Brett Sutton & Prof Kanta Subbarao](#)
  - [Trauma - Anne Leadbeater OAM & Dr Rob Gordon](#)
  - [template](#)
- [Other sites](#)
  -  [Health.vic](#)  [DHHS](#)  [Seniors Online](#)
- [Sitemap](#)
- [My Health Life](#)
- [Facebook](#)
- [Googleplus](#)
- [Twitter](#)
- [Youtube](#)
- [Rss](#)
- [Conditions and treatments](#)
- [Healthy living](#)
- [Services and support](#)
- [A-Z](#)
- [Blog](#)
- [Podcast](#)



[Back to Healthy eating](#)

- [Home](#)
- [Healthy living](#)
- [Healthy eating](#)
- Food – use-by and best-before dates

## Food – use-by and best-before dates

- [Share \(show more\)](#)
- [Download PDF](#)
- [Listen \(show more\)](#)
- [Listen](#)
- [More \(show more\)](#)
  - [Email](#)
  - [Print](#)

Tags:

- [Healthy Eating](#)
- [Healthy Eating - Food safety and storage](#)

## Summary

- Check the 'use-by' or 'best before' date when you buy food.
- 'Best-before' dates give you an idea of how long foods will last before they lose quality.
- Most products will last beyond their 'best-before' date if they are stored properly.
- Foods marked with a 'use-by' date must be consumed before or on that date.

Most packaged foods with a shelf life of less than two years must have a 'best before' or 'use-by' date stamped on the box, wrapper or bottle. The best-before date gives you an idea of how long the food will last before it loses quality. A product will remain fresh and of good quality right up to the best-before date (and sometimes beyond), if it is properly stored, both at the store and at your home.

It may still be safe to eat those foods after the 'best before' date, but they may have lost quality and some nutritional value. Foods that should not be consumed after a certain date for health and safety reasons must have a 'use-by' date. Bread is an exception – it can be labelled with a 'baked on' or 'baked for' date if its shelf life is less than seven days.

## Reliability of use-by and best-before dates

Manufacturers usually choose a best-before date well before the time when the food would be expected to deteriorate and spoil. A conservative best-before date is designed to encourage you to eat the product while it is fresh and at its best, so you should consider best-before dates as a guide only. Frozen and canned products, in particular, tend to keep their quality for some time after the best-before date.

Within reason, provided the food looks and smells as you would expect, it should be safe to eat, even if the best-before date has passed. Keep an eye on the 'use-by' or 'best before' dates on the food in your cupboards. Don't eat any food that is past its 'use-by' date, even if it looks and smells okay.

## Foods need proper storage

Whether or not a product keeps fresh and edible right up to the use-by or best-before date depends on how it is stored. Many foods need to be kept at certain temperatures, either in the fridge or freezer. For instance, fresh milk needs to be refrigerated. If a carton of milk is left out on the kitchen bench, it will quickly sour, regardless of its best-before date.

## Check the packaging

Foods can become spoiled well before their use-by or best-before date, either because their packaging has been damaged or they weren't transported or stored properly before sale. When you buy food, check for dents, leaks and tears in the packaging. If you can see any sign of damage, don't buy the product, as it might be contaminated with bacteria. Many products, such as dairy foods, need to be kept at a low temperature to avoid spoilage.

Don't buy any foods that need to be chilled or frozen if they are sitting on unrefrigerated shelves, or stacked in overfilled fridges.

## Collect cold and frozen foods last

When shopping, collect your cold and frozen foods last of all. These foods could spoil before their best-before date if they are allowed to get warm. It is often best to keep them in a cooler bag while travelling home. As soon as you arrive home with your groceries, put away your cold and frozen foods first.

## Where to get help

- Food Standards Australia New Zealand Tel. (02) 6271 2222
- Australian Consumers' Association Tel. (02) 9577 3333
- Food Safety Information Council Tel. 0407 626 688

## Things to remember

- Best-before dates give you an idea of how long foods will last before they lose quality.
- Most products will last beyond their best-before date if they are stored properly.
- Foods marked with a use-by date must be consumed before that date.

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## Healthy eating

The following content is displayed as Tabs. Once you have activated a link navigate to the end of the list to view its associated content. The activated link is defined as Active Tab

- [Healthy eating basics](#)
- [Food types](#)
- [Vitamins and supplements](#)
- [Health conditions and food](#)
- [Food science and technology](#)
- [Planning shopping and cooking](#)
- [Food safety and storage](#)
- [Dieting and diets](#)
- [Nutritional needs throughout life](#)

### Healthy eating basics

- [Balancing energy in and energy out](#)

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

- [Body mass index \(BMI\)](#)

[Body mass index or BMI is an approximate measure of your total body fat...](#)

- [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...](#)

- [Healthy eating tips](#)

[A good balance between exercise and food intake is important to maintain a healthy body weight...](#)

- [How to cut down on salt \(slideshow\)](#)

[Even if you are careful about the salt you consume, you may be surprised that some of the food you eat contains hidden salt that you're not even aware of. Learn how to cut down on salt...](#)

- [Kids and energy needs](#)

[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

- [Alcohol explained](#)

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

- [Cereals and wholegrain foods](#)

[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...](#)

- [Foods from plants and animals](#)

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

- [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...](#)

- [Herbs](#)

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

- [Lunch at work](#)

[Did you know lunch is just as important as breakfast? In other words, don't skip lunch: you need it every day! A nutritious lunch will give you the energy to get through an afternoon of work...](#)

- [Meat and poultry](#)

[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...](#)

- [Nutrition – Summer fruit and vegetables \(video\)](#)

[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**

- [10 tips for getting enough vitamin D](#)

[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...](#)

- [Vitamin and mineral supplements](#)

[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...](#)

- [Vitamin D](#)

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

- [Vitamin D - maintaining levels in winter \(video\)](#)

[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...](#)

- [Diabetes and healthy eating](#)

[Healthy eating for people with diabetes is no different than for everyone else...](#)

- [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 allergy and intolerance](#)

[Food allergy is an immune response, while food intolerance is a chemical reaction...](#)

- [Food poisoning - prevention](#)

[You can minimise the risk of food poisoning by taking simple precautions...](#)

- [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...](#)

- [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...](#)

- [Heart disease and food](#)

[A diet low in saturated fats and high in fibre and plant foods can substantially reduce your risk of developing heart disease...](#)

- [Huntington's disease and diet issues](#)

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

- [Lunch at work](#)

[Did you know lunch is just as important as breakfast? In other words, don't skip lunch: you need it every day! A nutritious lunch will give you the energy to get through an afternoon of work...](#)

- [Mood and food](#)

[Your mood can affect your food choices, and your food choices may affect your mood...](#)

- [Pregnancy and diet](#)

[Good nutrition during pregnancy can help to keep you and your developing baby healthy...](#)

- [Scurvy](#)

[Scurvy is uncommon in Australia but anyone whose diet is inadequate in vitamin C is at risk...](#)

- [Type 2 diabetes - healthy eating and exercise \(video\)](#)

[People with type 2 diabetes talk about positive lifestyle changes that improve their quality of life...](#)

## **Food science and technology**

- [Carbohydrates and the glycaemic index](#)

[The glycaemic index \(GI\) can be a useful tool to control blood sugar levels...](#)

- [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...](#)

- [Fats and oils](#)

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

- [Fibre in food](#)

[A diet high in fibre keeps the digestive system healthy...](#)

- [Food additives](#)

[The long-term effects of consuming a combination of different additives in our food are currently unknown...](#)

- [Food - genetically modified \(GM\)](#)

[Some foods include ingredients that have been genetically modified \(GM\), or are made using ingredients derived from GM organisms...](#)

- [Food irradiation](#)

[Food irradiation can kill insects, moulds and bacteria, but it cannot kill viruses...](#)

- [Food labels](#)

[Food labels carry useful information to help you make good choices about food...](#)

- [Food - pesticides and other chemicals](#)

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

- [Food processing and nutrition](#)

[Careful cooking and storage will help retain the nutrients in your food...](#)

- [Meat and poultry](#)

[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...](#)

- [Mercury in fish](#)

[Pregnant women and young children should limit consumption of fish that contain high levels of mercury...](#)

- [Protein](#)

[The human body can't store protein, so it must be supplied daily from the foods we eat...](#)



- [Salt](#)

[Too much sodium \(salt\) can cause high blood pressure and many other health conditions...](#)

- [Sugar](#)

[Too much sugar in the diet can contribute to health problems, so limit foods and drinks with high amounts of added sugar...](#)

## **Planning shopping and cooking**

- [10 tips for healthy shopping](#)

[Make a shopping list for healthier food choices ... 10 tips for healthy shopping...](#)

- [Breakfast](#)

[Children who skip breakfast may lack sufficient vitamins and minerals including iron, calcium, zinc and vitamin B2...](#)

- [Celebrations - Christmas Day the healthy way \(video\)](#)

[Victorian State Public Health Nutritionist, Veronica Graham shows us how to cook a light and healthy Christmas meal without overindulging. Whatever way you celebrate, there are ways to eat healthily...](#)

- [Celebrations - healthy birthday parties \(video\)](#)

[Birthday parties can be healthy as well as fun. Flip Shelton reports on some great ideas for healthy and tasty treats for your child's next birthday...](#)

- [Cooking healthy alternatives \(video\)](#)

[Chef Andrew Blake shows people how to cook healthy fish and chips, spring rolls and pancakes...](#)

- [Cooking tips for busy people](#)

[If you lack the time or motivation to cook, try these tips...](#)

- [Eating out – healthy food from different cultures \(video\)](#)

[Nutritionist Shane Bilsborough takes us on a tour of Melbourne's restaurants. Some popular food from different cultures is high in fat and kilojoules. There are, however, some healthy alternatives...](#)

- [Food labels](#)

[Food labels carry useful information to help you make good choices about food...](#)

- [Food shopping - a family's healthy market shop \(video\)](#)

- [Food shopping - fresh produce choices at local markets \(video\)](#)

[Reporter Flip Shelton takes us on a tour and shows us what fresh produce is available at a local market...](#)

- [Food to have sometimes](#)

[Junk food should be kept to a minimum. It usually contains a lot of fat, salt or sugar...](#)

- [Food variety and a healthy diet](#)

[If you eat a variety of good food, your diet will provide you with adequate nutrition...](#)

- [Healthy budget - tucker talk tips](#)

[You can buy more food if you spend most of your money on basic healthy foods like bread, cereals, fruit and vegies...](#)

- [Healthy cooking tips](#)

[Eating healthy food doesn't mean giving up your favourite foods and switching to eating only salads...](#)

- [Healthy eating tips](#)

[A good balance between exercise and food intake is important to maintain a healthy body weight...](#)

- [How to cut down on salt \(slideshow\)](#)

[Even if you are careful about the salt you consume, you may be surprised that some of the food you eat contains hidden salt that you're not even aware of. Learn how to cut down on salt...](#)

- [Lunch at work](#)

[Did you know lunch is just as important as breakfast? In other words, don't skip lunch: you need it every day! A nutritious lunch will give you the energy to get through an afternoon of work...](#)

- [Lunch - avoid the fast food fix \(video\)](#)

[Nutritionist Shane Bilsborough shows us how much energy it takes to burn off a fast food lunch. Join tradies, Corky and Danny as they find out how to maintain a healthy weight...](#)

- [Lunch boxes - healthy shopping ideas \(video\)](#)

[Victorian State Public Health Nutritionist Veronica Graham takes us shopping for the right foods to include in your child's lunchbox...](#)

- [Lunch boxes - how to make them healthy \(video\)](#)

[Victorian State Public Health Nutritionist Veronica Graham shares three healthy and delicious lunchbox examples for the kids and provides some great food preparation tips to save you time throughout...](#)

- [Reading food labels - tucker talk tips](#)

[Labels on packaged food can give you useful information about the nutrition, ingredients, storage and weight of the food. Add full stop to pull quote...](#)

- [Shopping at fresh food markets \(video\)](#)

[Victorian State Nutritionist, Veronica Graham talks about the benefits of shopping at fresh produce markets...](#)

- [Tips to keep our snacks on track \(slideshow\)](#)

[Most of us are prone to the odd snack or two. Check out these simple tips to keep your snacks on track...](#)

## **Food safety and storage**

- [Avoid food poisoning - Cook Safe \(video\)](#)

[Learn how to prepare and cook food safely at home...](#)

- [Avoid food poisoning - Shop Safe \(video\)](#)

[Learn how to keep your hot and cold foods separate and shop safely for food...](#)

- [Avoid food poisoning - Store Safe \(video\)](#)

[Learn how to store food safely in your fridge at home...](#)

- [Be savvy with food this summer \(slideshow\)](#)

[How to keep food fresh and safe in warmer weather...](#)

- [Cockroaches](#)

[Cockroaches prefer to live in kitchens and other food preparation areas, so they can feed off food spills...](#)

- [Don't let food poisoning ruin your summer \(slideshow\)](#)

[How to avoid food poisoning this summer...](#)

- [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...](#)

- [Emergencies - coping without gas or electricity](#)

[In a gas or electricity blackout you may have to think laterally to come up with ways to continue bathing, eating and keeping warm...](#)

- [Fishing - eat your catch with care](#)

[People who fish in the Lower Yarra and Maribymong rivers need to be careful about eating their catch because of the risk of chemical exposure...](#)

- [Food poisoning - listeria](#)

[Listeria infection is uncommon but very dangerous for the elderly, people whose immune systems are not working properly and pregnant women and their unborn babies...](#)

- [Food poisoning - prevention](#)

[You can minimise the risk of food poisoning by taking simple precautions...](#)

- [Food safety and storage](#)

[High-risk food should be kept at 5 °C or below, and above 60 °C to avoid the temperature danger zone and food poisoning...](#)

- [Food safety - eggs](#)

[To enjoy eggs safely - buy clean, keep cool and cook well...](#)

- [Food safety for summer celebrations \(video\)](#)

[In the hot weather there is a higher risk of food poisoning but if you follow some simple rules when you prepare, handle and store food it will significantly reduce your risk of getting sick...](#)

- [Food safety outdoors](#)

[Food poisoning is a real risk when taking food outside the home, especially in warmer weather...](#)

- [Food safety when cooking](#)

[Most foods should be cooked to at least 75 °C to minimise the risk of food poisoning...](#)

- [Food safety when eating out](#)

[If you have any doubt about the safety of food when you're out, don't eat it...](#)

- [Food safety when shopping](#)

[When you shop, choose, pack and transport food carefully...](#)

- [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...](#)

- [Food – use-by and best-before dates](#)

[Check the 'use-by' or 'best before' date when you buy food...](#)

## **DiETING AND DIETS**

- [10 tips on how to eat more calcium](#)

[Reduce your intake of coffee, alcohol and soft drinks... 10 tips on how to eat more calcium...](#)

- [Body image and diets](#)

[Some people diet because they have a poor body image, not because they want to be a healthy weight...](#)

- [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...](#)

- [Food allergy and intolerance](#)

[Food allergy is an immune response, while food intolerance is a chemical reaction...](#)

- [Food for sport - tucker talk tips](#)

[Carbohydrate is the most important nutrient for athletes...](#)

- [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...](#)

- [Gluten-free diet](#)

[Gluten sensitivity can be managed with a gluten-free diet...](#)

- [Heart disease and food](#)

[A diet low in saturated fats and high in fibre and plant foods can substantially reduce your risk of developing heart disease...](#)

- [How to cut down on salt \(slideshow\)](#)

[Even if you are careful about the salt you consume, you may be surprised that some of the food you eat contains hidden salt that you're not even aware of. Learn how to cut down on salt...](#)

- [Mood and food](#)

[Your mood can affect your food choices, and your food choices may affect your mood...](#)

- [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...](#)

- [Sporting performance and food](#)

[Good nutrition and a healthy diet are essential to improving your sports performance...](#)

- [Tips to keep our snacks on track \(slideshow\)](#)

[Most of us are prone to the odd snack or two. Check out these simple tips to keep your snacks on track...](#)

- [Vegetarian and vegan eating](#)

[A well-planned vegetarian or vegan diet can meet nutritional needs during all stages of life...](#)

- [Vegetarian diets and children](#)

[Children can eat a vegetarian diet and stay healthy as long as their extra nutritional needs are met...](#)

- [Weight loss and fad diets](#)

[With a balanced eating plan, it's what you leave in that makes all the difference...](#)

- [Weight management services](#)

[Always consult with your doctor before choosing any weight management service...](#)

- [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**

- [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...](#)

- [Bottle feeding - nutrition and safety](#)

[Breastmilk or commercial infant formula is necessary for all babies less than 12 months...](#)

- [Breastfeeding and your diet](#)

[Breastfeeding women need to eat regularly and include a wide variety of healthy foods in their diet...](#)

- [Childcare and healthy eating](#)

[Childcare centres should provide healthy meals for your children...](#)

- [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...](#)

- [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](#)

[Good nutrition, a healthy diet and physical activity can help Elders prevent or manage health problems...](#)

- [Healthy active Koori kids - tucker talk tips](#)

[Good nutrition and physical exercise help to keep Koori kids healthy and avoid diseases when they get older...](#)

- [Healthy budget - tucker talk tips](#)

[You can buy more food if you spend most of your money on basic healthy foods like bread, cereals, fruit and vegies...](#)

- [Healthy eating during pregnancy - tucker talk tips](#)

[Some foods should be avoided during pregnancy as they carry bacteria that could harm your unborn baby...](#)

- [Healthy eating for adolescent girls](#)

[Eating healthy food is important at any age, but it's especially important for teenagers...](#)

- [Healthy eating for women in midlife](#)

[As you get older you need fewer calories, but your need for other nutrients remains unchanged. Healthy...](#)

- [Healthy eating for women in their later years](#)

[Being well nourished improves women's mental and physical health and quality of life at all life stages...](#)

- [Healthy eating for young women](#)

[Good nutrition is especially important during this stage of your life when there is so much happening: independent living, career development, travel, establishing relationships, babies and families...](#)

- [Lunch at work](#)

[Did you know lunch is just as important as breakfast? In other words, don't skip lunch: you need it every day! A nutritious lunch will give you the energy to get through an afternoon of work...](#)

- [Nutrition needs when you're over 65](#)

[Nutrition needs vary with age and gender. Now you're older, the foods and drinks that make up a healthy diet may need to be slightly different from when you were younger. In general, you&...](#)

## Related Information

- [Nutrition Week](#)

[Nutrition Week...](#)

- [Food safety when shopping](#)

[When you shop, choose, pack and transport food carefully...](#)

- [Food safety outdoors](#)

[Food poisoning is a real risk when taking food outside the home, especially in warmer weather...](#)

- [Food safety when eating out](#)

[If you have any doubt about the safety of food when you're out, don't eat it...](#)

- [Food safety and storage](#)

[High-risk food should be kept at 5 °C or below, and above 60 °C to avoid the temperature danger zone and food poisoning...](#)

[Home](#)

## Related information on other websites

- [Storage life of foods, CSIRO.](#)
- [Use-by and best before dates – Food Standards Australia New Zealand.](#)

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