

Tips for Cutting Calories

Cutting calories can be difficult: eating habits are hard to change, and calorie-dense foods aren't always obvious. Simple strategies can help you understand what you eat, track portions and make healthier choices to support sustainable weight loss.

Why Cut Calories?

Reducing calorie intake or increasing calorie burn is key for weight loss.

These behaviours create a calorie deficit* needed to burn fat stores and gradually reduce body weight.

*A calorie deficit is when you consume fewer calories than you burn, so your body uses stored energy (fat) for fuel, leading to weight loss.

Track Your Calories

Understanding your current habits can help. A food diary or app can help you:

- Estimate how many calories you consume
- Spot hidden and high-calorie items
- Recognise unhelpful eating habits
- Improve portion control
- Stay on track with healthier changes

Used short term, a tracker (e.g., MyFitnessPal) can help you balance your intake.

Feeling Full for Longer

Prioritise filling foods to reduce cravings and make it easier to eat fewer calories and maintain a deficit. These foods tend to offer strong 'fullness per calorie' value:

- Lean proteins (chicken, fish, tofu, Greek yogurt)
- High volume veggies (broccoli, spinach, peppers)
- Whole fruits (berries, apples, oranges)
- Whole grains (oats, brown rice, quinoa)
- Beans and lentils

Avoid Empty Calories

Empty calories are foods and drinks with little nutritional value. Often high in sugar or unhealthy fats, they add calories without useful vitamins, minerals or fibre.

Cutting these can make a calorie deficit easier to maintain and support weight loss.

Tips for Cutting Calories

Watch out for:

- **Sugary drinks:** (fizzy juice, energy drinks, sugary/milky coffees, milkshakes, alcohol, sweetened fruit juice) add calories without filling you up. Choose water, tea or black coffee.
- **Snacks:** (sweets, biscuits, crisps, sugary cereals, ice cream, cereal/snack bars) are often high in fat and sugar and won't keep you full. Try water and a piece of fruit instead.
- **Sauces:** reducing or skipping sauces can significantly lower calorie intake. Fill up on protein and fibre instead.



Thirst or Hunger?

We often mistake thirst for hunger because dehydration and hunger can feel similar (e.g., stomach discomfort, cravings or fatigue). This can lead to eating when you need water.

If you're unsure, try:

- Drink a glass of water and wait 15 minutes.
- Look for dehydration signs: dry mouth, headache, fatigue, dark urine or infrequent urination.
- Drink regularly, not just when thirsty.
- Consider when you last ate; if it was recent, it may be thirst.

If you still feel hungry, choose a balanced snack (fruit, yoghurt or nuts) and review your meals to see if changes could help you feel fuller for longer.

- Mealtimes

Building a few mealtime habits can help you manage calories and develop healthier patterns. Try:

- Control portion size: use smaller plates to reduce overeating and feel satisfied with less. See Step Change in Safety – Portion Sizes: Small Changes, Big Impact.
- Eat slowly: chew and taste your food to help you notice when you're full.
- Plan "calorie anchors": keep one or two meals consistent (e.g., breakfast or lunch) to reduce decision fatigue and steady your baseline. See NHS [Healthy meal ideas](#)
- Satisfaction: listen to your body – stop when you feel satisfied, not stuffed.

Support

More information on weight loss, meal planning and healthy choices:

- [Lose weight – Better Health – NHS](#)
- [Healthy eating when trying to lose weight – Better Health – NHS](#)
- [Weight Watchers](#)
- [NHS England Weight Management Program » How to access the programme](#)
- [Weight loss | NHS inform](#)

