

Why do we Eat Unhealthily?

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Uncovering the Problem

This is the first problem to address. What is it about all those bad choices we make that make them seem okay at the time? Why do we fit nourishing ourselves in around other commitments? Why do we accept something as okay just because we've been doing it for so long? Habit is a curious thing; it disguises the problem in normality.

Finding the Time

Let's start with breakfast. You've just woken up, and your body is low on reserves; the fact is that you won't function to your full ability without replenishing. You may also be heading out first thing, but breakfast doesn't have to take long and is hardly the most expensive meal of the day- unless you make it expensive.

Some people are tempted to exchange a breakfast for a snack, for something instant they can have on the go. The cereal bars that are advertised as a nutritious alternative to breakfast are actually not that good for you. [Which?](#), among numerous others I'm sure, have released some damning information on many of these bars; high in added sugars and fats, and of course many targeted towards children.

It's also not a cheap alternative to a healthy breakfast. Porridge costs so little (which you can sweeten yourself, add fruits to, and really monitor what you take in), as do other cereals, although some popular cereals can be just as high in sugar.

The NHS *change 4 life* initiative has some great resources and information for absolutely everyone, and of course they provide some fantastic guides for planning meals; including [breakfast](#).

You may also find that you run into some of the same issues for lunch. You may find yourself tempted to grab something on the go, to buy a sandwich or a small selection of cut up fruits. These are of course a lot more

expensive than preparing these very simple things yourself.

It's important to really look at what you're eating throughout the day. If you had a lot of starchy foods and carbohydrates at breakfast, maybe a sandwich or a pasta salad at lunch isn't the best option. People look too long at the traffic lights nutrition wheel on packaging, which are often based on unrealistic serving sizes for processed foods.

The best way to take control of what you eat is to make it yourself. The [Food Standards Agency](#) has a great visual food wheel, with the portions of foods we should be aiming to have.

For lunch and especially for dinner, it is so important to put some time aside to prepare your food. If you are eating readily prepared meals, then the biggest change you can make is to cut down on them, and there are three great reasons why:

1. The salt and fat content in many of these meals is far more than the body needs
2. The cost of these meals is far in excess of what it would cost to make at home
3. It simply does not taste as good as a freshly made version

Learning to Cook (or just Finding Great Alternatives)

I'm going to take one of the most common, easy meals and show how it can be made cheaply, and more healthily; the pizza. Now, let's not even talk about ordering a take-out pizza, because we all know that it is far too expensive, incredibly unhealthy, and we probably (hopefully) aren't eating it that often. This type of meal is a once in a while thing.

Let's address the store bought pizza. Frankly, it's disappointing, and can cost anywhere from £1.50 to £6 in most supermarkets. The [NHS](#) once more provides some great information on salt levels in these meals. A great



place to start, if you really don't want to make dough is to buy just the base (but the dough can be so easy to make), and then add a homemade sauce and whatever cheese you like.

A basic sauce is so easy and cheap to make. Fry an onion in a small amount of oil (and whatever other vegetables you may like to add or have) until soft, add a can of tomatoes (which normally averages out at around 30p), add seasoning (pepper and herbs, dried or fresh), and let it simmer and reduce for about 20-30 minutes. Layer the sauce over the base and add some cheese. This can be the most expensive part of the meal depending on what you like and how much, but of course, the more you have, the greater the fat content.

If you like anymore toppings, now's the time to add them. This is a great meal for leftovers (say a chicken, or any other meat you may have had) or if you've some vegetables that may not last much longer. Pesto can be a great addition and you only need to use a few small teaspoons to add so much flavour.

Try this a couple times and experiment with flavours. If you think making dough is difficult or takes too much time, please make this base:

2 cups Flour

Wholegrain is of course the healthiest, but white and all purpose will work

2 tsp Baking Powder

$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp salt

$\frac{2}{3}$ cup Milk

Whatever you like, soy milk does work just as well

5 tbsp Olive Oil

This is for the flavour and consistency, but many healthier alternatives can work just as well

Mix the dry ingredients

Stir in the milk, and then the oil

Knead the dough and make a ball

Roll it all out on to a baking sheet and season with pepper and herbs

Bake it for 10 minutes at 180°C or until just firming up

Take it out and add the sauce and toppings and cook for a further 20 minutes (or until crispy)

The great thing is that you can just leave the sauce cooking on a low heat while you make the dough, and it will only improve as it thickens. This version is so much cheaper than the store bought and so much healthier. Now, no one is going to defend this as the healthiest meal, but if you look at the difference in salt intake (as well as the exclusion of additives and preservatives) then it is clear we are making some great changes- and so easily.