

Healthy eating: do you have portion distortion?



Drink eight glasses of water a day

Nutritionists Fiona Hunter advises "anything with a high fluid content will keep you hydrated. So how do we find our ideal intake? Your body is the best guide Just look for signs of dehydration - lethargy, low concentration, headaches, dark urine and constipation."

Limit yourself to three cups of coffee a day

Dr Chris Smith of BBC radio series The Naked Scientists states "These drinks don't dehydrate you unless they're very strong. An average coffee hydrates you. Even alcohol has to be more than 10 per cent alcohol by volume to affect your fluid levels adversely."



Take 30 minutes' moderate exercise, three times a week

Fitness trainer Matt Roberts states that "The figure is meaningless," in reference to official health advice. "It assumes people know what 'moderate' exercise is..... On a scale, if one is being asleep and 10 is keeling over exhausted, you need to be hitting a nine by running, training or swimming, until you can't do much more, at least three times a week".

Men should drink no more than 3 or 4 units of alcohol a day (2 to 3 units for women).



How credible are these guidelines? "These numbers err towards caution. But use common sense. If you feel fit and healthy, you probably have your alcohol intake about right" says Mike Shallcross of Men's Health.



Eat five portions of fruit and veg a day

Dr. Sarah Brewer (author of the *Natural Health Guru Guides*) says different countries suggest different quotas and it's "only 5 portions here because so many people in Britain eat none at all".



Sleep eight hours a night



Professor Jim Horne of the Sleep Research Centre at Loughborough University says "that figure is actually dangerous – people who're fine on 6 or 7 hours are told it's not enough, so you create a million more insomniacs seeking treatment. If you're not tired, you're getting enough."

Women need no more than 1,940 calories a day (2,550 for men)

"Focusing on calories is potentially hazardous... the aim should be to live healthier lives all round," says Dr Shrilla Banerjee, consultant cardiologist at University College Hospital.

Get 15 minutes' sunlight a day

Alison Pykkänen from Zest Magazine says "It really depends who you are, how old, dark or fair skin, and so on. "A truer figure would also depend on our use of sunblock....while 15 minutes might give us the bare minimum of vitamin D, you get none if you're covered in SPF50."



Take 20,000 steps a day

How useful is it, health-wise, to know that you're clocking up 20,000 steps a day? "Not very," says Dr Chris Beedie, Triathlete and Development director for Virgin Active health clubs. "It's the level of activity, not number of steps, that's relevant."