

## Q&A for Healthy Weight

### **What is the Healthy Weight campaign?**

The Healthy Weight campaign is one of a series of national measures to help prevent overweight in people in their 20s and 30s. The campaign will share information on four healthy habits that help prevent weight gain, supporting people to be and feel healthier.

Our 20's and 30's are a time when we are more at risk of developing overweight and obesity because of changes in life circumstances. Now, therefore, is the moment to act and prevent excess weight, protecting your health now and in the future

The campaign focuses on four pillars: eating well, keeping active, managing stress and sleep.

### **Why is this campaign necessary?**

Today 19% of 15–24-year-olds and 36% of 25–34-year-olds in Ireland are living with overweight and obesity. Overweight and obesity are significant risk factors for many chronic non-communicable diseases.

Research has shown extensively that weight-gain is influenced by multiple factors such as environment, access to healthy and affordable food, physical activity, genetic make-up, and lifestyles.

Supportive environments, including the provision of evidence-based guidance, are fundamental to shaping people's choices, by making the healthier choice the easiest choice.

### **How much support does the Healthy Weight campaign offer?**

The Healthy Weight campaign will share practical, expert information about behaviours that can help prevent weight gain, in order to support adults to be and feel healthier. These behaviours include good nutrition and eating well, managing stress, sleeping well and engaging in regular physical activity.

Science has made important advances in our understanding of overweight and obesity. We now know that many factors influence weight: our genes can play a role, where we live, our access to safe outdoor spaces, the advertising we are exposed to, our access to fresh food like fruit and vegetables at an affordable price, our exposure to junk foods, the amount of stress in our lives, how much we sleep.

In short, weight gain is about so much more than individual control over “eating less and exercising more”

All of Government has a role in addressing overweight and obesity, the underlying causes of which are impacted by national policy and action across a wide range of areas. This includes:

- Developing a healthier physical environment – more access to green spaces, increasing cycle lanes and walk-ways
- Limiting the amount of fat, sugar and salt in our foods
- Implementing a ‘whole of school’ approach to healthy lifestyle programmes (including, but not limited to the curriculum on nutrition, physical activity and exercise, smoking, alcohol and mental wellbeing)
- Restricting the ability of advertisers to market unhealthy foods to children
- Informing and empowering change through communication

This campaign is one part of a series of initiatives by Healthy Ireland to address overweight and obesity in the adult population. This particular campaign is aimed at raising awareness of the heightened risk of developing overweight and obesity in our 20s and early 30s. It also aims to provide practical information around the opportunities which exist at that stage of life to take preventative action.

The tone and message of the campaign has been focus-tested a number of times with the Campaign audience to ensure sensitivity towards obesity stigma and reduce social stereotypes and misconceptions about people living with obesity.

### **What support is available to those who are living with overweight?**

SafeFood have produced a series of meal plans to help those living with overweight. Following these plans, together with taking moderate daily activity, getting enough sleep and managing stress will all help. These daily meal plans are available [here](#).

The HSE also has helpful information on its [website](#).

### **How does the campaign link with existing HI initiatives?**

Healthy Ireland is the national framework for action to improve the health and wellbeing of people in Ireland. The Healthy Weight campaign is part of Ireland's National Obesity Policy and Action Plan (2016-2025), published by Healthy Ireland in 2016. The Plan aims to reverse obesity trends, to prevent health complications and reduce the overall burden for individuals, families, the health system and the wider society and economy.

This particular element aims to raise awareness of the heightened risk of developing overweight and obesity as people move through young adulthood

As such, this campaign is just one in a series of national measures to address overweight and obesity in the adult population.

This campaign being developed in two phases.

- Phase 1 will seek to change knowledge and attitudes about overweight and obesity.
- Phase 2 will introduce the behaviour changes to assist in maintaining a healthy weight (following further behavioural research).

### **Why being active is important?**

Regular physical activity is important for all of our physical and mental health. Experts describe it as the "wonder drug" as it lowers anxiety, stress and improves your mood as well as increasing fitness and strength.

Generally, people need at least 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity at least five days a week. And to break up periods of being sedentary i.e., sitting down, by moving around every hour or so.

For more information about the four pillars and the supports which are available, visit [Gov.ie/HealthyWeight](http://Gov.ie/HealthyWeight).

### **Why is healthy eating important?**

Eating a healthy and varied diet is important, to help maintain overall good health and physical and mental wellbeing.

Start by making some simple easy changes, which can lead to big benefits:

- Add more fruit and vegetables to your diet. When you are buying fruit and vegetables, try to include a range of colours (think of a rainbow) as the different coloured options contain different vitamins. Moved up
- Try to eat 5 to 7 servings of fruit, vegetables and salad each day. At mealtimes, aim for half of your plate to be vegetables or salad. Include fruit as snacks.
- Different foods have different nutrients - try to eat a variety of meals throughout the week.
- Replace sugary drinks with water. Drinking plenty of water is so important to help keep you hydrated.
- Choose wholemeal and wholegrain breads, cereals, pasta and brown rice where possible. These foods are high in fibre which help to maintain a healthy heart. Drinking plenty of water is important to allow fibre to work properly.
- Aim to have 3 meals and 2-3 snacks a day
- Use healthier cooking methods such as grilling or baking, rather than frying or roasting with oil or fat
- Treat foods tend to be high in sugar, fat and salt. Limit them to small amounts once or twice a week.
- Get to know your portions and proportions. Find out how much of each type of food you need at [Gov.ie/EatingWell](http://Gov.ie/EatingWell)
- When food shopping makes a list and stick to it. SafeFood have some great tips on buying a healthy and balanced food shop here

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### **Why is sleep important?**

Sleep is important for your wellbeing, mental health and metabolism. It helps reset and recharge your brain and body.

The ideal amount of sleep is 8 hours, but this can be different for everyone.

The key to continued good sleep is to build up a healthy sleep routine, to get your body into the right space for sleep.

- Being physically active during the day can help promote good sleep, although try not to exercise too close to bedtime.
- Aim to wind down over the course of the evening, or try some relaxation techniques before bedtime, such as meditation or gentle yoga. Reading or listening to gentle music can also help your mind to relax.
- Avoid anything that is mentally demanding within 90 minutes of bedtime
- Go to bed at the same time each night and get up at the same time each morning. This will help your body know when it is time to sleep.
- Limit food, sugar, and cigarettes before bedtime
- Watch your alcohol intake. Alcohol disrupts your sleep.
- Have some screen-free time before you go to bed. The “blue light” from phones and tablets can over stimulate the brain and disrupt normal sleeping patterns
- Ensure your bedroom is not too warm or cold, is quiet, restful and dark.

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## What can help when I'm feeling stressed?

It's not possible to completely remove stress from your life. However, it is possible to better manage stress.

- Take time out to care for ourselves- life is busy and it is easy to get overwhelmed. Having some designated time to relax or practising some breathing or relaxation techniques can help to keep us focused.
- Get outside – getting outside for a walk/run/cycle in the fresh air can help reduce stress.
- read a book or listen to a story – Your local library has a huge range of books for you to read, or you can join online at [libraries.ie](http://libraries.ie) and download e-books to read on your own device. They also have a huge variety of magazines that can be downloaded digitally through their Libby app
- Talk to someone – talking it out with someone, a friend, family member, or health professional can really help with feelings of stress and anxiety. Sometimes a different perspective on things can really help.
- Do something creative – There is a strong connection between being creative and improved mental wellbeing. Doing something creative can not only help you to develop new skills but can also improve your mood and social connections. There are so many ways to be creative, cooking, baking, playing music, arts and crafts. Explore some options and find your passion
- Spend time in nature- Being outdoors and spending quality time in nature can help to reduce anxiety and improve your mood.
- Break down goals – if we are overwhelmed by a looming project, breaking the work down into realistic and manageable goals can help put things in perspective and feel much less daunting.
- Think positively - This can be hard to do sometimes, but really helps! No matter what the situation try and think positively. Keeping a gratitude journal is a good way to do this, and the more you practice the easier it gets.
- Try some deep breathing exercises – ‘in for the count of 4 and out for the count of 6’ will help- repeat this 3 times. You can find some other examples [here](#)
- Music – playing or listening to music can help reduce feelings of anxiety and stress.
- Turn off – too much time on social media and news sites can lead to increased anxiety and stress. Decide on Have a certain time every day to check your social media and the latest news and stick to it

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