



What are lifestyle choices?

Lifestyle choices are decisions individuals make that can prevent or control risks and promote their health and well-being. These choices relate to areas such as diet, physical activity, smoking and substance misuse.

It is important to remember that other factors can influence these choices, such as income, where you live, peer pressure and family habits.

Smoking and substance misuse as lifestyle choices

These choices have a significant negative impact on health.

- **Smoking:** Inhaling tobacco from cigarettes.
- **Substance misuse:** The continued misuse of any mind-altering substance that negatively affects health. This includes:
 - **Alcohol misuse:** Binge drinking, regular excessive drinking or alcohol dependence.
 - **Drug misuse:** Excessive use of illegal drugs (e.g. cocaine) or legal drugs (e.g. painkillers).

Influences on smoking and substance misuse

- **Family/carers:** Copying the habits seen in the household.
- **Poverty:** People in deprived areas are more likely to smoke.
- **Peer pressure:** Being influenced by friends.
- **Health:** Using substances to cope with physical or emotional pain.

Positive effects of quitting smoking	Negative effects of drug misuse
Growth: Promotes healthy growth of a baby if a mother quits during pregnancy.	Growth: Can restrict the growth of an unborn child and cause health problems at birth.
Development: Improves heart and lung function, slows brain ageing, reduces stress, and improves mood.	Development: Can cause organ damage, confusion, poor decision-making and relationship problems.
Health: Reduces the risk of over 50 serious health conditions, including cancer and stroke, and promotes overall well-being.	Health: Increases the risk of serious illness and disease. Leads to poor physical, mental and social well-being.

Diet as a lifestyle choice

A diet can be *balanced* or *unbalanced* on a particular day, week or for longer.

- **Balanced diet:** Provides all the essential nutrients your body needs. The NHS Eatwell Guide shows the recommended balance across five main food groups (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5bbb790de5274a22415d7fee/Eatwell_guide_colour_edition.pdf):
 - Fruit and vegetables (at least five portions a day)
 - Carbohydrates (potatoes, bread, rice, pasta)
 - Dairy and alternatives
 - Proteins (beans, fish, eggs, meat)
 - Oils and spreads (in small amounts)
- **Unbalanced diet:** Lacks the right amount of nutrients. It might be too high in fat, salt, sugar or carbohydrates.

Influences on diet choices

- **Beliefs and values:** Such as being vegetarian, vegan or following religious dietary rules.
- **Family/carers:** Influence on portion sizes, cooking skills and food habits.
- **Social media and role models:** Adverts and influencers can affect food choices.
- **Peer pressure:** Being encouraged to eat certain foods, like takeaways, with friends.
- **Health:** Allergies or illnesses can restrict diets.

Positive effects of a balanced diet	Negative effects of an unbalanced diet
Growth: Supports healthy height and weight.	Growth: Can lead to inadequate growth due to lack of nutrients.
Development: Supports physical (e.g. regular periods), intellectual (e.g. memory) and emotional development.	Development: Can cause poor bone/muscle strength, inability to focus, and lack of energy for socialising.
Health: Strengthens the immune system and reduces the risk of diseases like cardiovascular disease. Promotes well-being.	Health: Increases the risk of illness and diseases like type 2 diabetes and stroke. Can lead to poor mental and social well-being.

Activities as a lifestyle choice

Being active is a key lifestyle choice.

- **Guidelines:** Children and young people (5–18) should aim for at least **60 minutes** of activity per day.
- **Types of activity:**
 - **Physical:** Aerobic activities (swimming, running) and muscle/bone strengthening (gymnastics, sit-ups).
 - **Mental and social:** Team sports, hobbies, and socialising promote mental well-being.
 - **Community:** Voluntary work like litter-picking can improve well-being and social connection.

Influences on activity choices

- **Family/carers:** An active family can encourage an active lifestyle.
- **Peer pressure:** Friends might encourage either sports or more sedentary activities like gaming.
- **Health:** A GP might refer someone for exercise to improve a health condition.
- **Role models:** Celebrities or fitness experts can inspire people to be more active.

Positive effects of being active	Negative effects of being inactive
Growth: Leads to stronger bones and muscles.	Growth: Can result in reduced bone and muscle strength.
Development: Improves heart function, concentration, self-esteem and mood.	Development: Can lead to poor balance, coordination and difficulty managing stress.
Health: Reduces the risk of diseases like osteoarthritis and depression. Improves sleep and boosts the immune system.	Health: Increases the risk of diseases like dementia and bowel cancer. Leads to poor physical, mental and social well-being.