

Food in prison

What food will I get in prison?

You will be provided with 3 meals a day; normally breakfast, lunch and dinner.

You should always have access to drinking water. You should also be provided with the facilities to prepare a minimum of four hot drinks a day.

Speak to catering staff (staff who work in the kitchen) if you have concerns about the food.

Do I get a choice of food?

Before meals, you will be able to choose the food you want to eat from a weekly menu.

There must be a minimum of five choices for the lunchtime or evening meal, including a minimum of one substantial hot meal choice per day.

Menus cycles must cover a minimum of 4 weeks and must not repeat dishes within those 4 weeks.

Will my dietary needs be met?

The menu should include options to cater for a variety of diets including for religious reasons or health reasons, and special diets such as vegan and vegetarian.

The Food in Prison Policy Framework states the following:

'The menu of food made available to people in prison shall reflect the diverse needs of the prison's population, taking into account the religious and belief-based dietary needs, cultural norms and any specific medical requirements of the people in prison.'

The guidance manual includes more detail as to how different diets should be catered for.

Religious and belief-based diets

The guidance manual contains more detail about religious and belief-based diets, in Appendix 10 including an outline of diets and religious festivals of various recognised faiths.

Vegan and vegetarian diets

There must be at least one food option which is suitable for prisoners who are vegetarian or vegan at each mealtime.

The guidance manual recognises the protections of veganism under Human Rights and Equality law and gives catering staff further guidance on how to cater for vegan diets.

Diets for health reasons

If you require a particular diet as part of a medical condition you should ask to see someone from Healthcare. Healthcare staff can prescribe treatment and advise catering staff in the prison about your dietary needs.

The following appendixes also include requirements for specific health needs:

- Appendix 7 – Requirements of Prisoners with Diabetes
- Appendix 8 – Requirements of Prisoners with Hypoglycaemia
- Appendix 9 – Requirements of Prisoners who are Neurodivergent

Nutrition

Prison Rule 24 says that *'food provided shall be wholesome, nutritious, well prepared and served, reasonably varied and sufficient in quantity'*

All menus must be nutritionally analysed by a qualified professional.

Catering managers must adhere to a nutritional standards including the Eatwell Guide, which is the UK Government guide to the range of different food groups needed for a healthy, balanced diet.

To adhere to the Eatwell Guide, catering managers should:

- provide at least five portions of fruit and vegetables daily
- base main meals on potatoes, bread, rice, pasta or other starchy carbohydrates, choosing wholegrain or higher-fibre versions where possible
- ensure that a source of protein, such as beans, pulses, fish, eggs and meat, is included as part of all main meals
- offer at least two portions (2 x 140g) of fish every week, one of which should be an oily fish
- include no more than 70g/day of red and processed meat, on average across the week
- minimise the use of ultra-processed ingredients
- use beans and pulses in a range of dishes, not just those aimed at vegetarians and vegans

- use sparingly foods which are high in fat (particularly saturated fat), salt and/or sugar
- ensure that half of desserts available contain at least 50% of their weight as fruit
- ensure drinking water is made available to prisoners in cells and in places of work and education. Where running water is not available bottled water should then be provided.

Breakfast

The guidance manual goes into detail about breakfast. As a minimum, you should be offered the following at breakfast:

- lower-sugar and higher fibre breakfast cereal or porridge
- lower-fat milk (i.e. semi-skimmed, skimmed or 1% fat)
- a portion of fruit (minimum 80g fresh / frozen / tinned, or 30g dried fruit)
- wholegrain or higher fibre bread
- lower-fat spread, if provided
- a hot beverage

Breakfast should also be complemented with additional items, such as:

- lower-fat yoghurt
- boiled egg
- slice of cheese or reduced fat cheese spread
- cereal bar
- 100% unsweetened fruit juice

Where it is necessary to use breakfast packs, they should be distributed the evening before rather than multiple days in advance.

Mealtimes

Meals shall be served at appropriate times of the day. The guidance says they should be between the following hours:

- Breakfast: 07:30-09:00
- Lunch: 12:00-14:00
- Evening: 17:00-19:00

There should also be a minimum of four and a half hours between the beginning of lunch service and the beginning of evening meal service.

Fourteen hours is the maximum time period you should have to go without food.

Food Temperature

Hot food should be served 'hot', which means at a temperature above 63°C.

Cold food should be served at or below 5°C.

Further information

The following may be of interest to you. If you are unable to access them, elsewhere feel free to contact our Advice and Information Service and we will be happy to send you a copy.

Useful policy documents (these should be available in the library):

Food in Prisons Policy Framework

Annex 'A' of Food in Prisons Policy Framework– Guidance Manual

Other

The Prison Rules (1999)

HMIP paper Life in prison: Food

Guide for Vegan Prisoners (produced by VPSG and The Vegan Society)

Contact our Advice and Information Service

We are a small service which provides information and advice for people in prison. We are independent of the prison service.

Our freephone information line is **0808 802 0060**.

This number is **free** and you do not need to put it on your PIN.

This number is open:

Monday	3:00pm – 5:00pm
Wednesday	10:30am – 12:30pm
Thursday	10:30am – 12:30pm

When we are not taking calls you can still leave a short voicemail. Please give your name, prison number, the prison you are in and what information you are looking for. Voicemails will be checked during working hours Monday to Friday and we will respond as soon as possible by post or email a prisoner.

You can write to us at:

Prison Reform Trust
FREEPOST ND 6125
London
EC1B 1PN

You do not need to use a stamp.