

## Information Sheet 3

### **What are calories?**

Whatever your reasons for wanting to lose weight, one overwhelming reason may be that it will improve your health and decrease the risk of developing a wide range of diseases. In short, it will give you a healthier lifestyle. So, how have you fared on your first weeks journey towards this healthier lifestyle?

- are you still nibbling sugary snacks?
- are you skipping meals?
- what about alcohol?
- are you still taking sugar?
- are you having breakfast?

### **Calories**

Most seasoned dieters will know that calories are the enemy's front-line troops. But what exactly is a calorie?

It is not a protein, carbohydrate, fat, vitamin or mineral. It is simply a measurement. We use it to recognise those foods that contain energy. But it is easy to consume foods whose calories are so called empty calories, such as Mars bars. These types of food do not contain nutrient rich calories and therefore do not supply us with the goodness our bodies require. We should use our calorie knowledge to help us to choose foods that are essential to a healthy lifestyle i.e. foods that provide us with protein, vitamins, minerals and fibre. We should avoid foods that are high in fat or sugar content and are also high in calories. So, we should attempt to reduce our calorie intake by trying to follow these simple rules:

#### **1) Reduce the amount of fat we are taking in. This can be done in the following ways:**

- grill instead of fry
- use skimmed milk instead of full fat milk
- be aware of hidden sources of fat e.g...pies, pastry etc.
- remove all visible fat/skin from meat and poultry
- try to use low fat cheese and spreads
- eat less beef, lamb and pork which are high in fat

#### **2) Reduce the amount of sugar we consume**

About half the amount of sugar we take in is bought in bags and added to our food and drink. The rest is put into our food by manufacturers. So look out for other words for sugar, which are:

- glucose
- glucose syrup
- dextrose
- fructose
- galactose
- sucrose
- invert sugar
- matlodextin

As well as reducing our calorie intake in the ways mentioned above, we should also aim to increase the amount of fibre we are taking in. This can be done in the following ways:

- eat more bread (especially wholemeal bread)
- eat more whole fibre cereals e.g...weetabix, porridge, muesli
- eat more pulses e.g... beans and sweetcorn
- eat more fresh fruit and vegetables

There is much more to food than just its calorie content. We require a well-balanced and broad range of foods to maintain energy, interest and above all, health.