

Rationing & Health: The Surprising Benefits



FOODS WE CAN TRUST

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Introduction

I recently heard someone say that *'People were the healthiest they ever had been during the Second World War, because of Rationing'*.

Whilst the immediate reaction of some might be, *'No way!' – for no better reason than for many the natural reaction would be to conclude that rationing means having less Food to eat*, I was certainly intrigued.

After all, the suggestion that Rationing could be beneficial in some way would certainly fit with what could happen when the choice to overeat no longer exists.

As I've written about Rationing before and regrettably consider it a real possibility if the UK's **Food Security** should be stretched any further than it is now, I thought it would be a good idea to look at the realities of what people experienced when we had Rationing for a prolonged period.

Is there an up-side to Rationing, as opposed to the default perception that Rationing can only be bad?

What is, or rather was Rationing?

Early in World War 2 (1939-45), the British Government introduced Rationing to overcome shortages of Foods and Commodities.

Rationing was basically an administration system, using coupons and points, that ensured essential basic Foods that included sugar, meats and cheese were shared out fairly. With some small prioritisations made for certain items for groups such as children and expectant mothers when it came to the distribution specific items like tinned Foods and Biscuits.

Fruit and Vegetables were never rationed, and bread wasn't rationed until 1946.

However, with the impact of the War, the final Rationing restrictions weren't lifted until 1954 – That's 9 years after the War ended!

Why did Great Britain have Rationing?

The Wartime Government really had little choice but to introduce Rationing. Because like now, so much of the Food that people were eating, was coming from Overseas.

You may have heard of [The Battle of The Atlantic](#) already. But the truth is that wherever ships were coming from to bring us the things that we needed that we either weren't able to produce, or we weren't producing enough of, the German Navy made a significant impact on our supplies by sinking as many merchant cargo ships as they could. Quite literally with the intent of *'starving us out of the War'*.

Being an Island Nation and with no other way to ship Food and commodities in, Rationing was really a matter of life and death for everyone.

Rationing meant that for at least a few years, minds really did focus on what Food we needed and what we could produce more of ourselves.

Dig for Victory

Although they weren't Rationed, Fruit and Vegetables were certainly in short supply. This meant that **Home Growing** or **Grow Your Own** became a very popular way for people to help themselves and those around them by putting gardens and available open space to work and good use as vegetable gardens and allotments.

Bearing in mind that in the 1940's, there wasn't the access to the equipment like miniature glass houses, grow bags, garden machinery and even hydroponics like there we have today, the [Dig for Victory](#) scheme illustrates what is really possible in times of need when people put their minds to it.

Nutrition and the impact of Rationing on Health

The interesting, beneficial dimensions of Rationing were:

- *Those with diets before Rationing that contained too much of certain Foods that could cause harm, had no choice but to eat less of them and became healthier as a result.*
- *Those with diets before Rationing that didn't contain enough of the right Foods also found themselves eating a more balanced diet and became healthier as a result.*

Yes, these conclusions raise questions such as 'Why would people suddenly eat more of anything when Food is in short supply'.

But that could easily be answered by them not having as much to eat of what they had done previously and then deciding to eat more of the things that were available AND were actually good!

Was Rationed Food FREE?

Rationed Foods weren't Free and had to be bought with money, just like the Food we buy today.

The difference was that the buyer had to be qualified by being able to exchange a coupon for a certain amount of anything that they were then able to buy, and there was also a points system that prioritised some whose dietary needs were considered to be a priority for certain reasons.

How much Food were people able to Eat during Rationing?

From a look through some of the very interesting web pages and blogs that an internet search will find and that are linked to this page, the following list gives an idea of what a typical weekly Ration allowance looked like for an adult:

- Bacon & Ham 4 oz
- Other meat to the value of 1 shilling and 2 pence (Typically 2x Chops)
- Butter 2 oz
- Cheese 2 oz
- Margarine 4 oz
- Cooking Fat 4 oz
- Milk 3 Pints
- Sugar 8 oz
- Preserves 1 lb every 2 months
- Tea 2 oz
- Eggs 1 fresh egg (There was also an allowance of dried egg)
- Sweets 12 oz every 4 weeks

How much is an Ounce (oz) in weight?

An Ounce would be approximately the same weight as a slice of bread.

What would 1 Shilling and 2 Pence be in today's money?

There are different ways that we can look at this question, not least of all because for a long time after Decimalisation, or '[Decimal Day](#)', when the UK currency changed the way our Currency worked, [some pre-Decimalisation coins continued to be used](#) and this meant that we associated (or reattributed) their value to the new system.

This means that in coin terms, a Shilling in today's coins might be considered to be the equivalent of 6p.

However, inflation and how the value of money changes doesn't work like that and in real terms, 1 Shilling and 2 Pence in 1940 would have been the equivalent of £2.30 in 2017.

Whilst researching this post, I found [this great converter from The Royal Mint](#) that is really worth a look if you have time and would like to get an idea about how the value of money has changed!

What could you cook when there was Rationing?

I'm very interested in the topic of making great meals from basic Foods and hope to feature a lot more on this very interesting subject area on Foods We Can Trust.

In so far as cooking great meals under rationing is concerned, I have found some Rationing / Wartime Recipe blogs that you can visit Here:

[200+ Wartime Recipes - The 1940's Experiment](#)

[12 Wartime Ration Recipes You Can Make At Home](#)

[Dan Leopard's World War 2 Rationing Recipes](#)

[Make It Do or Do Without: 1940s Ration Recipes - Retro Housewife Goes Green](#)

(Please note that these links are for information and are not recommendations or endorsements!)

Worth a Look too

Here are some of the other web pages, sources and resources that I visited when I was researching this post on 2 May 2025 using Google:

[Dig for Victory – WW2 Home Front Growing & Food](#)

[Rationing in Britain during World War II – University of Oxford \(Faculty of History\)](#)

[Rationing in World War Two – Historic UK](#)

[Rationing Revisited – Blog Site](#)

[What you need to know about Rationing in the Second World War – Imperial War Museum](#)

(Please note that these links are for information and are not recommendations or endorsements!)

Overview on ‘Is Rationing Good for Us?’

There are some very interesting, but equally challenging messages that come from looking at Rationing in the UK:

- People can make do with a lot less to eat, and with Foods that are a lot more basic and ‘natural’ if they really need to.
- Eating *what we need*, rather than *what we want* is probably a lot better for us in the long run.
- ‘Boring Food’ can be quite exciting when we give it some thought.
- It’s not a great idea to be over reliant upon overseas Food sources when you live on an Island.
- The UK really hasn’t learned its lessons about Food Security!

Further Information

The published blog form of this PDF can be found by visiting www.foodswecantrust.org

If you would like to read more of Adam's work, his website can be found at www.adamtugwell.blog

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PLEASE NOTE

Food Information and Advice

The information shared in this work does not constitute dietary advice.

Foods We Can Trust does not provide a food assurance scheme.

Foods We Can Trust does not endorse or recommend any of the existing food assurance schemes in the UK or elsewhere.

Anyone currently under the dietary advice of a doctor, dietitian or other relevant specialist should not make any changes to dietary plans without consulting those advising them further.