

Rationing in WW2

Why was food rationed in Britain in World War II?

Before the Second World War started Britain imported about 55 million tons of food a year from other countries. After war was declared in September 1939, the British government had to cut down on the amount of food it brought in from abroad as German submarines started attacking British supply ships. There was a worry that this would lead to shortages of food supplies in the shops so the British government decided to introduce a system of rationing.

Rationing made sure that people got an equal amount of food every week. The government was worried that as food became scarcer, prices would rise and poorer people might not be able to afford to eat. There was also a danger that some people might hoard food, leaving none for others.

Ration Books

What were ration books?

They were books which contained coupons that shopkeepers cut out or signed when people bought food and other items. (People still paid for the goods with money.) The colour of your ration book was very important as it made sure you got the right amount and types of food needed for your health.

Buff-coloured ration books - Most adults had this colour

Green ration books - Pregnant women, nursing mothers and children under 5. They had first choice of fruit, a daily pint of milk and a double supply of eggs.

Blue ration books - Children between 5 and 16 years of age. It was felt important that children had fruit, the full meat ration and half a pint of milk a day.

Rationing was introduced to make sure that everyone had a fair share of the items that were hard to get hold of during the war. The government was worried that as food and other items became scarcer, prices would rise and poorer people might not be able to afford things. There was also a danger that some people might hoard items, leaving none for others. Rationing was introduced in 1940.



On 8 January 1940, bacon, butter and sugar were rationed. These were the first items to be rationed. Afterwards, the following items were added to the list:

Meat (Mar 1940) Jam (Mar 1941) Biscuits (Aug 1942), Fish & tea (Jul 1940) Cooking fat (Jul 1940) Breakfast cereals, Cheese (May 1941) Eggs (June 1941) Milk, Tinned tomatoes (Feb. 1942) Peas (Feb. 1942) Dried fruit (Jan 1942) Rice (Jan 1942) Canned fruit

Some foods such as potatoes, fruit and fish were not rationed.

How much food was one person allowed to buy per week during the war?

The weekly ration varied from month to month as foods became more or less plentiful. A typical ration for one adult per week was:

Butter: 50g (2oz) Bacon and ham: 100g (4oz) Margarine: 100g (4oz)
Sugar: 225g (8oz). Meat: To the value of 1s.2d (one shilling and sixpence per week. That is about 6p today) Milk: 3 pints (1800ml) occasionally dropping to 2 pints (1200ml).
Cheese: 2oz (50g) Eggs: 1 fresh egg a week. Tea: 50g (2oz).
Jam: 450g (1lb) every two months. Dried eggs 1 packet every four weeks. Sweets: 350g (12oz) every four weeks

In addition to the above food, everyone was allowed 16 points per month to use on what ever food items they wished.

How did the government make sure people had enough food?

People were encouraged to provide their own food at home. The 'Dig for Victory' campaign started in October 1939 and called for every man and woman to keep an allotment. Lawns and flower-beds were turned into vegetable gardens. Chickens, rabbits, goats and pigs were reared in town parks and gardens.

