

Healthy Eating and Lifestyle for the Later Years

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This publication provides information to help older adults eat in ways that help maintain good health. Friends, family, and others concerned about older adults also may benefit from this information.

As You Grow Older

Staying healthy as you grow older is important. Maintaining or improving good nutrition helps increase your chances for lasting good health and reduces the risk of some diseases. Living a healthy lifestyle also can reduce health care costs. Everyone ages differently but some aspects of aging are common to most people.

Thirst

As you grow older, it becomes more difficult to tell when you are thirsty. Drinking enough fluids is important for proper body function, temperature regulation, and to relieve constipation. In addition, your level of physical activity and certain types of medications can affect your need for fluids. Even if you don't feel thirsty, plan to drink about six to eight cups of water each day. It's best not to count alcoholic beverages, coffee, or tea as part of your fluid intake. Caffeinated beverages (such as coffee, tea, and soda) and alcoholic beverages act as diuretics (substances that promote the removal of fluid from the body through urination).

Energy needs

Less energy is needed as you grow older, especially if you have low physical activity. While the need for nutrients is the same, the nutritional quality of your diet must be maintained. Focus on nutrient-rich foods such as

fruits, vegetables, low-fat dairy products, lean protein, and whole grains.

Taste

The ability to taste foods changes as people grow older due to a decrease in the number of taste buds. Adding spices and herbs to foods can make them more flavorful. The following spices, herbs, and flavorings could be added to foods to enhance their taste:

- Bay leaf — stews, soups, meat, sauces
- Curry — rice, chicken, casseroles, soups, salad dressings
- Dry mustard — casseroles, meats, salads
- Garlic — soups, spaghetti, mixed dishes, stews, meat and chicken dishes
- Ginger — baked goods, chicken dishes
- Lemon — salads
- Mint — salads, sauces
- Onions — mixed dishes, stews, meat dishes, salads, soups
- Paprika — meats, salads, fish, soups
- Tomatoes — salads, sauces, mixed dishes, meat and chicken dishes, soups
- Parsley — soups, stuffings
- Pepper — salad dressings, meat dishes, stews, soups, sauces
- Rosemary — soups, stews, sausage, stuffings, lamb



Healthy Nutrition Practices

The new food guidance system — MyPlate — is a good place to start planning for good nutrition. MyPlate helps individuals use the Dietary Guidelines to make smart choices from every food group, find balance between food and physical activity, get the most nutrition out of calories, and stay within daily calorie needs. The table below shows the recommended amounts from each food group for older women and men.

Women (age & activity)	Grains	Vegetables	Fruits	Dairy	Protein Foods
Ages 66 and up — less than 30 minutes exercise/day	5 ounces (3 ounces whole grain)	2 cups	1.5 cups	3 cups	5 ounces
Ages 66 and up — 30 to 60 minutes exercise/day	6 ounces (3 ounces whole grain)	2.5 cups	1.5 cups	3 cups	5 ounces
Ages 66 and up — 60+ minutes exercise/day	6 ounces (3 ounces whole grain)	2.5 cups	2 cups	3 cups	5.5 ounces
Men (age & activity)	Grains	Vegetables	Fruits	Dairy	Protein Foods
Ages 66 and up — less than 30 minutes exercise/day	7 ounces (3.5 ounces whole grain)	3 cups	2 cups	3 cups	6 ounces
Ages 66 and up — 30 to 60 minutes exercise/day	8 ounces (4 ounces whole grain)	3 cups	2 cups	3 cups	6.5 ounces
Ages 66-78 — 60+ minutes exercise/day	9 ounces (4.5 ounces whole grain)	3.5 cups	2 cups	3 cups	6.5 ounces
Ages 79 and up — 60+ minutes exercise/day	8 ounces (4 ounces whole grain)	3 cups	2 cups	3 cups	6.5 ounces

Make Nutritious Choices from Each Food Group

Grains	Vegetables	Fruits	Dairy	Protein Foods
<p>Eat whole grains for at least half of all grains. Examples of whole grains are whole wheat, rye, oats, oatmeal, bulgur, brown rice.</p> <p>What counts as an ounce?</p> <p>1 slice bread, 1 cup dry cereal, ½ cup cooked rice, pasta, or cereal</p>	<p>Eat a variety of vegetables, more dark green and orange vegetables.</p> <p>Make half your plate vegetables and fruit.</p> <p>What counts as a cup?</p> <p>1 cup cooked or raw vegetables or vegetable juice, 2 cups raw leafy vegetables, ½ cup dried vegetables reconstituted</p>	<p>Eat a variety of deeply colored fruits.</p> <p>Eat whole fruits more often than juices.</p> <p>Make half your plate fruits and vegetables.</p> <p>What counts as a cup?</p> <p>1 whole medium-sized fruit, 1 cup 100% fruit juice, ½ cup dried fruit</p>	<p>Choose low-fat or fat-free milk and dairy products that retain calcium.</p> <p>Butter, cream, and cream cheese do not retain calcium.</p> <p>What counts as a cup?</p> <p>8 ounces of milk, yogurt, or calcium-fortified soymilk, 1½ ounces natural cheese, 2 ounces processed cheese</p>	<p>Choose foods made from meat, poultry, seafood, beans and peas, eggs, processed soy products, nuts, and seeds.</p> <p>Meat and poultry choices should be lean or low-fat.</p> <p>Include 8 ounces of seafood/week.</p> <p>What counts as an ounce?</p> <p>¼ cup cooked beans, 1 egg, 1 tablespoon peanut butter, ½ ounce nuts or seeds</p> <p>3 ounces of meat, poultry, or fish = the size of a deck of cards</p>

To eat smaller meals more often throughout the day may be an easier way to get the food needed, rather than eating a few large meals. More information about the food groups is available at www.choosemyplate.gov.

Vitamin and mineral supplements

Discuss your need for supplements with your doctor. Older adults often need calcium, vitamin B₁₂ and vitamin D supplements because of physical changes in their bodies such as digestive problems, decreased absorption, or use of some medicines.

Check up on your nutritional health

The following checklist was developed by the Nutrition Screening Initiative Project sponsored by the American Academy of Family Physicians, the American Dietetic Association, and the National Council on Aging, Inc. Find out if you are at nutritional risk. Read the statements below. Circle the number in the “yes” column for those that apply to you (or someone you know). For each “yes” answer, score the number in the box. Total your nutritional score.

	YES
I have an illness or condition that made me change the kind and/or amount of food I eat.	2
I eat fewer than two meals per day.	3
I eat few fruits or vegetables, or milk products.	2
I have three or more drinks of beer, liquor, or wine almost every day.	2
I have tooth or mouth problems that make it hard for me to eat.	2
I don't always have enough money to buy the food I need.	4
I eat alone most of the time.	1
I take three or more different prescribed or over-the-counter drugs a day.	1
Without wanting to, I have lost or gained 10 pounds in the last six months.	2
I am not always physically able to shop, cook, and/or feed myself.	2
TOTAL	

What Your Nutritional Score Means. If it's:

- 0-2 Good!** Recheck your nutritional score in six months.
- 3-5 You are at moderate nutritional risk.** See what can be done to improve your eating habits and lifestyle. A local office on aging, congregate meal sites, health department, senior citizens center, or extension office can help. Recheck your nutritional score in three months.
- 6 or more You are at high nutritional risk.** Take this checklist with you the next time you see your doctor, dietitian, or other health or social service professional. Talk about any problems you may have. Ask for help to improve your nutritional health. **Remember that warning signs suggest risk, but do not represent diagnosis of any condition.**

Other Healthy Lifestyle Practices

Hormonal changes

Immediately after menopause, a woman's estrogen level decreases. Estrogen helps reduce the risk of heart disease and retains calcium in the bones, reducing risk of osteoporosis (brittle bone disease). If you're a woman, talk with your primary health care provider to decide whether hormone replacement therapy is right for you. Consider your personal and family health history as you make a decision.

Live in a smoke-free environment

If you smoke or live with someone who does, explore classes to stop smoking. You will reduce your health risks in several ways when you stop smoking. Foods will taste better, too. Check out <http://www.smokefree.gov/> for resources on quitting.

Take up hobbies and activities that interest you

Research indicates that to engage in social and productive activities you enjoy also may help maintain your well-being. A number of early studies found that people who are involved in hobbies and other social and leisure pursuits may be at lower risk for (and less likely to develop) some health problems, including dementia. They might even live longer. The following are some examples of social and productive activities:

- Volunteering at a library, hospital, or other community health facility
- Joining a senior center
- Playing cards and other games with your friends
- Going to the theater, a movie, or a sporting event
- Traveling with a group of older adults, perhaps a retiree group
- Visiting friends and family
- Trying a different restaurant
- Gardening in your backyard or at a community park
- Organizing a park cleanup through your local recreation center
- Taking a cooking class
- Singing in a choral group
- Joining a local theater troupe
- Forming or joining a book club
- Going dancing
- Taking a group exercise class
- Playing a musical instrument, learning a new instrument
- Joining a group interested in a hobby like knitting or wood carving
- Getting a part-time job

Be physically active

As an older adult, regular physical activity is one of the most important things you can do for your health. It may prevent many of the health issues that can develop with age. It also helps muscles grow stronger so day-to-day activities can be maintained without becoming dependent on others. Not being physically active can be harmful, no matter what your age or health condition. Keep in mind that some physical activity is better than none. The more physically active you are, the greater the health benefits. Remember to always check with your doctor for an exercise routine that is right for you. **If you're 65 years of age or older, are generally fit, and have no limiting health conditions, consider the following guidelines established for your age group.**

Older adults need at least:

- ✓ 2 hours and 30 minutes (150 minutes) of moderate-intensity aerobic activity (e.g., brisk walking) every week **and**
- ✓ muscle-strengthening activities on two or more days a week that work all major muscle groups (legs, hips, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders, and arms).

OR

- ✓ 1 hour and 15 minutes (75 minutes) of vigorous-intensity aerobic activity (e.g., jogging or running) every week **and**
- ✓ muscle-strengthening activities on two or more days a week that work all major muscle groups (legs, hips, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders, and arms).

OR

- ✓ An equivalent mix of moderate- and vigorous-intensity aerobic activity **and**
- ✓ muscle-strengthening activities on two or more days a week that work all major muscle groups (legs, hips, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders, and arms).

Summary

Now is the time to take stock of your eating and healthy living habits. Do something to improve those habits you can control. Make one or two improvements at a time and develop a plan for following through.

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Resources

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**Index: Foods & Nutrition
Nutrition**

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