

Healthy Eating and Lifestyle for the Later Years

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This publication provides information to help older adults eat to maintain good health. Friends, family and others concerned with older people also may benefit from having this information.

Staying healthy as you grow older is important. Maintaining or improving good nutrition helps increase your chances for lasting good health. Living a healthy lifestyle reduces the risk of some diseases that can lower your health care costs.

As You Grow Older

Everyone ages differently but there are some aspects of aging that are common to most people.

Thirst

As people grow older, it becomes more difficult to determine thirst. Drinking enough fluids is important for older adults for many reasons. It relieves constipation that occurs more often with aging. Older adults often take more medications that can also increase the need for fluids. Even if thirst is not obvious, plan to drink some water each day. It is best not to count alcoholic beverages, soda, coffee or tea as part of the fluid intake.

Energy needs

Less energy is needed as people grow older, especially if physical activity is lowered. The

need for nutrients stays the same, however, so the nutritional quality of the diet must be maintained. Pay attention to eating nutrient-rich foods such as fruits, vegetables, low-fat dairy products and whole grains.

Taste

The ability to taste foods changes as people grow older. Adding spices to foods can make them more flavorful. The following spices and flavorings can enhance food 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
- Paprika — meats, salads, fish
- Parsley — soups, stuffings
- Pepper — salad dressings, meat dishes, stews, soups, sauces
- Rosemary — soups, stews, sausage, stuffings, lamb
- Tomatoes — salads, sauces, mixed dishes, meat and chicken dishes

Healthy Nutrition Practices



The new food guidance system — MyPyramid — is a good place to start planning for good nutrition. MyPyramid provides individuals with recommended food amounts based on their age, sex and activity level. The table below shows the recommended amounts from each food group for older women and men.

<i>Women (age and activity)</i>	<i>Grains</i>	<i>Vegetables</i>	<i>Fruits</i>	<i>Milk</i>	<i>Meat and Beans</i>
Ages 66 and up less than 30 minutes exercise/day	5 ounces	2 cups	1.5 cups	3 cups	5 ounces
Ages 66 and up 30-60 minutes exercise/day	6 ounces	2.5 cups	1.5 cups	3 cups	5 ounces
Ages 66 and up 60 + minutes exercise /day	6 ounces	2.5 cups	2 cups	3 cups	5.5 ounces
<i>Men (age and activity)</i>	<i>Grains</i>	<i>Vegetables</i>	<i>Fruits</i>	<i>Milk</i>	<i>Meat and Beans</i>
Ages 66 and up less than 30 minutes exercise/day	6 ounces	2.5 cups	2 cups	3 cups	5.5 ounces
Ages 66 and up 30-60 minutes exercise/day	7 ounces	3 cups	2 cups	3 cups	6 ounces
Ages 66 - 75 60 + minutes exercise /day	9 ounces	3.5 cups	2 cups	3 cups	6.5 ounces
Ages 76 and up 60 + minutes exercise /day	8 ounces	3 cups	2 cups	3 cups	6.5 ounces

Making Nutritious Choices From Each Food Group

<i>Grains</i>	<i>Vegetables</i>	<i>Fruits</i>	<i>Milk</i>	<i>Meat and Beans</i>
Eat whole grains for at least half of all grains. Examples of whole grains are whole wheat, rye, oats, oatmeal, bulgur, brown rice.	Eat more dark green and orange vegetables.	Eat a variety of deeply colored fruits. Eat whole fruit more often than juices.	Go low-fat or fat-free with milk and dairy choices. Lactose-free dairy foods can help those who are bothered by regular milk products.	Choose lean meats and poultry. Prepare meats by baking broiling or grilling. Vary protein sources to include meats, poultry, fish, dry beans, eggs, nuts and seeds.
1 ounce = 1 slice bread 1 cup dry or 1/2 cup cooked cereal				

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

Vitamins and Mineral Supplements

Discuss the need for supplements with your doctor. Older people often need calcium, vitamin B₁₂ and vitamin D supplements because of physical changes in their bodies.

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.

Circle the number in the “yes” column if the statement applies to you. Total the “yes” numbers to get 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 few fruits or vegetables, or milk products.	2
I eat fewer than two meals per day.	3
I have three or more drinks of alcohol almost every day.	2
I have tooth or mouth problems that make it hard for me to eat.	2
I do not always have enough money to buy the food I need.	4
I take three or more prescribed or over-the-counter drugs per day.	1
Without wanting to, I have lost or gained 10 pounds in the last 6 months.	2
I am not always physically able to shop, cook and/or feed myself.	2
I eat alone most of the time.	1
TOTAL	

What Your Nutritional Score Means

- 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 area on aging office, senior meals site, health department or extension office can help.
- 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 with them about any problems you have. Ask for help to improve your nutritional health.

Other Healthy Lifestyle Practices

Hormonal changes

For women: Immediately after menopause, a woman’s estrogen level decreases. Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) often has been prescribed to relieve menopausal symptoms as well as reduce risk of osteoporosis (thinning of bones). However, there are some health concerns associated with HRT. Talk with your primary health care provider to decide if HRT is right for you. Consider personal and family history to 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.

Take up hobbies and activities that interest you

When you are busy with enjoyable, worthwhile activities you have a reason to get up in the morning. If the activities involve other people, some social needs will be met.

Exercise regularly

Appropriate physical activity can be energizing. You will feel more like doing things and appetite will improve. Check with your doctor for an appropriate

exercise routine. Activities, such as walking, stair climbing and bicycle riding will exercise the heart muscle, help keep the calcium in bones and add to a sense of well-being. Weight-lifting improves muscles and strength. Stretching exercises improve flexibility and balance.

Stay socially active

Volunteer work, interest groups and contact with friends and relatives help many older folks maintain their enjoyment in life. Exposure to new learning situations keeps the brain active and alert. If you live alone, try planning ways to enjoy meals with others. For example, senior centers are available in many communities and are places to meet with friends while eating.

References

United States Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture. *Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005*. 6th edition, Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, January 2005

**Index: Foods & Nutrition
Nutrition Special Diets**
Revised November 2005

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