

Healthy Eating and Healthy Aging for Adults

Healthy eating is important for healthy aging for adults. Choosing healthy foods for meals and snacks can help you feel your best every day and prevent some chronic and other illnesses.

As you get older you may need fewer calories, but the same amount of or more nutrients. To maintain a healthy weight, it is important to eat foods that are high in nutrients, but not high in calories.

There are many nutrients in the foods and fluids you enjoy everyday. These include carbohydrates, protein, fat, vitamins, minerals, fibre and water. The daily requirements for calcium, vitamin D, and vitamin B6 are higher for older adults.

What does healthy eating mean?

Healthy eating means choosing foods that meet your daily nutritional needs. Here are some tips:

- Get enough calories to have a healthy weight and to be physically active.
- Eat a variety of foods from *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide*.
- Eat fibre-rich, whole grain products, fruits and vegetables to keep your bowels healthy.
- Drink plenty of fluids, including water.
- Enjoy eating by sharing meals with family and friends.

What are the important nutrients?

Carbohydrates are a main source of the body's energy, despite the myth that carbohydrate-rich foods are fattening. Examples of highly nutritious, carbohydrate foods include whole grains, cooked dried beans, fruits, vegetables, milk and yogurt. Carbohydrate-rich foods are often good sources of fibre, vitamins, and other nutrients. These are important for staying healthy and preventing cardiovascular and other diseases.

Protein is found in meat, fish, poultry, milk products, legumes, and peanut butter.

It is needed for building or repairing muscles, and for maintaining healthy hair, nails and skin. Foods from animal sources are high in protein, as well as zinc, iron and vitamin B12.

Fat is a concentrated source of energy or calories. Reducing the amount of fat in your diet lowers the number of calories. However, it is important to have enough 'healthy fats' in your diet, such as fats from fish, nuts, seeds and vegetable oils.

Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide recommends adding a small amount (30 to 45 mL or 2 to 3 tablespoons) of unsaturated fat, such as cooking oil, salad dressings, margarine and mayonnaise, every day.

It is important to avoid saturated and trans fats or to have these in small amounts only. Saturated fats are found in cheese, ice cream, high fat dairy products, high fat meats, chicken skin, lard, shortening, and coconut and palm kernel oils. Trans fats are found mainly in baked goods, including those made with shortening, partially hydrogenated vegetable oils, and hard margarines.

Calcium needs increase for people over 50 years of age. Calcium is one of the vital nutrients for having healthy bones and preventing osteoporosis. Other benefits may include keeping a healthy weight and blood pressure. Examples of foods with high calcium are low-fat dairy products, canned fish with bones, calcium-fortified soy beverages, and calcium-enriched fruit juices.

Vitamin D is needed to help you balance calcium levels in your body for healthy bones. You need more vitamin D as you get older. Vitamin D is found in milk, fortified soy beverages, egg yolk, and fish. Adults over age 50 should take a daily vitamin D supplement of 400 IU, and follow *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide*.

Vitamin B6 needs also increase as people age. Vitamin B6 is important for protein metabolism and brain function. Food sources of vitamin B6 include fish, beef livers, meat, poultry, whole grains, nuts, dried beans, peas and lentils.

Vitamin B12 absorption decreases with age. Older adults absorb less vitamin B12 from foods and need to take vitamin B12 fortified foods or a supplement. Lack of vitamin B12 over a long time can cause a type of anemia, resulting in tiredness. Other symptoms include forgetfulness, difficulty thinking and concentrating, and possibly numbness or tingling in fingers and/or toes. Good food sources of vitamin B12 are milk products, meat, fish, poultry and eggs.

Folate is one of the B vitamins important for a healthy heart and blood cells. A lack of folate may cause anemia. Foods with folate are dried peas, beans, lentils, orange juice, dark green leafy vegetables and other vegetables, fruits, nuts and seeds.

Fibre is important for your bowels and health. The bowels may become less active as people age, and this may cause constipation. Certain types of fibre can help to lower cholesterol and to keep blood sugar levels normal. Fibre may also help to manage or keep a healthy weight. Foods with fibre include whole grains, legumes, fruits and vegetables.

Fluids are important for good hydration, regular bowel function and good oral health. Seniors may not drink enough or notice thirst. Water, milk, and juice are the best sources of fluids. Moderate amounts of tea and coffee can also be counted as fluids.

Sodium or salt use may increase as people age, possibly due to less sense of taste. Too much sodium in your diet can increase your blood pressure. Try using unsalted herbs, spices and seasonings in cooking instead of adding salt to foods. Limit the use of salty foods, including instant soup, sauce and gravy mixes, soy sauce, salad dressings, and salted meats such as ham, bacon and sausages.

Can I take a multivitamin/mineral supplement?

Taking a multivitamin/mineral supplement once daily may be helpful to seniors to meet their needs for folate and vitamins B6, B12 and D. Although supplements provide vitamins and minerals, these do not provide the protein, carbohydrates, fibre, and other health benefits that you need. Foods also have phytochemicals, which are not found in supplements. Speak with your doctor or a dietitian before taking a supplement.

For More Information

- Senior Friendly™ Fact sheets available on the Dietitians of Canada website at www.dietitians.ca.
- *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide* available on the Health Canada website at www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index_e.html.

For nutrition information, call Dial-A-Dietitian and speak to a registered dietitian at 604-732-9191 in Greater Vancouver or 1-800-667-3438 toll-free in BC.



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