

The need for nutritional supplements

As we get older, certain vitamins and nutrients can be more easily depleted. These include vitamin B12, Vitamin D, Vitamin B6 and calcium, all which are essential to continued wellbeing. Consequently, a basic daily vitamin and mineral supplement, formulated specifically for older adults, can be beneficial.

A word about alcohol and tobacco

Despite the supposed health benefits of a daily glass of wine, as we get older, many common health problems may be negatively impacted by alcohol consumption. Check with your doctor, especially if you are on prescription medications, as alcohol may counteract or even have dangerous interactions with certain prescription drugs.

If you smoke, it's never too late to quit. No matter what your age, quitting can undo much of the damage done to your circulation and lungs, cut your risk of heart disease by half, and significantly reduce your risk of stroke, lung disease and cancer. Together with a healthy eating program and regular exercise, quitting smoking could help you live significantly longer!

Important nutrients for older adults

Nutrient	What it does
Calcium	Maintains bone health and prevents osteoporosis.
Vitamin D	Helps the absorption of calcium and helps to prevent colorectal cancer.
Phytochemicals (found in fruits and vegetables)	Prevents cell damage; slows tissue weakening, aging and cancer development.
Vitamin B6 and B12	May help reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke. May also delay the age-related decline of brain activities like reasoning, concentration and memory.
Fiber (found in whole grains and vegetables)	May contribute to a reduced risk for colon cancer, cardiovascular disease, stroke and diabetes.



Making mealtimes enjoyable

- Invite a friend. Cook together, so you won't eat alone.
- Try out new recipes, or new variations on old standards.
- Keep plenty of frozen foods handy. Today, there are many health food stores that carry a variety of health-conscious frozen entrees that can be prepared in just minutes.
- Pamper yourself. Set your table with candles and use your good china.
- Take a cooking class and learn to make some exciting new recipes.

Additional resources

There are many valuable resources you can use to learn more about nutrition and related topics of particular interest to older adults. Here are just a few:

U.S. Food and Drug Administration

1-888-463-6332
<http://www.fda.gov/oc/seniors/>

Administration on Aging

1-800-677-1116
www.aoa.dhhs.gov

American Dietetic Association Consumer Nutrition Information Line

1-800-366-1655, ext. 5000
www.eatright.org/public

National Council on the Aging

1-202-479-1200
www.ncoa.org

American Heart Association

1-800-424-8721
www.americanheart.org

The Healthy Aging Campaign

1-610-793-0979
www.heathyaging.net

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Nutrition: An important part of healthy aging

Thanks to advances in health care and health awareness, Americans are living longer and enjoying life more than ever. However, in order to maintain optimum vitality and health well into our 80s and 90s, good nutrition and choosing foods wisely is increasingly important.

Research has shown that certain foods contribute to our wellbeing, while others may actually cause disease and chronic health problems if consumed on a regular basis. In addition, certain foods will help “hold back the clock” and keep us looking and feeling younger, longer. Others may rob us of our vitality, lead to obesity, interfere with our digestion and generally inhibit our ability to live life to the fullest.

Foods to avoid

Because diet-related health problems like obesity, diabetes, high cholesterol and heart disease may take many decades to develop, it's easy to understand why people may not think much about the risks they pose until later in life. The biggest contributors to this dilemma are fried foods, red meats, salt, sugar, processed foods and chemical preservatives. The long-term effects of their use can include clogged arteries, high blood sugar, high blood pressure, high body fat and a host of other potentially deadly conditions. What most people don't realize is that simple changes in their food choices can make a big difference in the way they look, feel, and enjoy life.

Foods to embrace

Research has long shown that fruits, vegetables and whole grains are the healthiest foods we can eat. Not only are they high in nutritional value, but they are low on empty calories and will keep us feeling satisfied far longer than high density, processed, and fried foods. A good rule of thumb is to fill two thirds of your plate with fruits and vegetables, and only a third with meats and/or starchy foods like potatoes, pasta or rice.

In addition to being good for you, vegetables offer a relatively low-cost alternative to expensive meats and packaged foods.



Some easy ways to add fruits and vegetables to your diet

- Add berries to your morning cereal or mix into a smoothie.
- Instead of coffee, try drinking a glass of orange or other fruit juice.
- Keep chilled vegetables like carrot sticks, celery or broccoli on hand for easy snacks.
- When packing snacks to go, consider dried fruits or even fruit canned in its own juice.
- Add more vegetables to everyday meals. Add fresh tomatoes, zucchini or mushrooms to pasta sauce, or top a baked potato with a fresh vegetable salsa. In dishes like lasagna and pizza, try cutting back on the cheese and doubling the amount of vegetables.
- Add fruit to your dessert. Top low-fat frozen yogurt with sliced strawberries. Slice ripe peaches onto graham crackers, or enjoy a baked apple sprinkled with cinnamon.
- Experiment with new varieties of fruits and vegetables. You might find some you really like. Try new salad combinations, or even mix fruits and vegetables together for a unique tasting treat.
- For convenience, use frozen and canned fruits and vegetables. Most contain nutrient levels comparable to fresh produce, and they can cut your cooking time in half.

Holding back the clock

Many people don't realize that we have a veritable “fountain of youth” available in our local farmer's market. That's because substances found in vegetables and fruits can prevent cell damage that, over time, can lead to weakening of the skin, organs and blood vessels. We also have easy access to a variety of dietary supplements that can help make up for substances we may be lacking in our diet. For example, certain B vitamins can help slow the decline of brain functions like concentration, reasoning and memory. The addition of calcium or vitamin D to the diet can also help prevent osteoporosis, the leading cause of bone fractures in the elderly.

Fighting back against serious illness

Not only can the right foods help keep us feeling fit, some can actually help prevent serious health threats, including cancer, diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease. Again, plant-based foods top the list of sources of beneficial nutrients. Conversely, fats and other chemicals found in animal-based foods, like fish, poultry and red meat, can lead to a variety of potentially serious health issues.

Drink to your health

As we age, it becomes more important than ever to drink plenty of water. Aging, prescription drugs, and disease may actually reduce your sense of thirst. As a result, older adults should make a conscious effort to drink at least 8-12 cups of water a day. Water helps us absorb nutrients and flush out toxins. Lack of water can produce everything from constipation, dehydration and dental disease, to kidney stones, urinary-tract infections and even certain kinds of cancer.

The importance of whole grains

Many of us were raised on bread, potatoes, rice and pastas, which makes eliminating these less-than-ideal food from our diets all the more difficult. Why not try following: First, cut back on portions and, second, whenever possible, use whole grain varieties of breads, cereals, and pastas, and substitute brown rice for white.

Not only are whole grain products more flavorful than their refined counterparts, they provide the grain's full complement of protein, antioxidants, fatty acids and a host of phytochemicals. Importantly, the fiber content of whole grains can also be as much as four times that of refined grains, contributing to better digestion and prevention of a host of intestinal problems.



Adding flavor without adding salt

Many older Americans are encouraged to limit their intake of salt due to heart-related health concerns. But getting rid of salt doesn't mean you have to sacrifice flavor, as well. There are dozens of herbs and spices available in your local super-market that can bring out the best in just about any meal. Familiarize yourself with the spices that best complement your favorite meat, vegetable or seafood dishes.

Dietary Tips for Cancer Prevention

1. Choose a diet rich in a variety of plant-based foods.
2. Eat plenty of vegetables and fruits.
3. Maintain a healthy weight and be physically active.
4. Drink alcohol only in moderation, if at all.
5. Select foods low in fat and salt.
6. Prepare and store food safely.
7. Do not use tobacco in any form.

Source: The American Institute for Cancer Research