

## Nutritional Recommendations For Seniors

Numerous benefits of a healthy diet and proper nutrition include: increased mental acuteness; resistance to illness and disease; higher energy levels; a more robust immune system; faster recuperation times, and; better management of chronic health problems.

As we age, our relationship to food changes along with our bodies. When we're younger, we might grab fast food on the run and not think twice about it. In later life, however, eating well can be the key to staying mentally sharp, emotionally balanced and energetic, with a strong immune system and a positive outlook.

Periodic review of your diet is always helpful, particularly if you have specific medical conditions. Your doctor can help you assess your nutritional needs and make suggestions for meeting them.

In general, some important guidelines for seniors include:

- reduce sodium (salt) to help prevent water retention and high blood pressure,
- monitor fat intake in order to maintain healthy cholesterol levels,
- consume more calcium and vitamin D for bone health,
- eat more fiber-rich foods to prevent constipation,
- cut back on sugar and on dry foods,
- make sure you get the recommended amount of important vitamins and minerals,
- increase your water intake, and
- participate in regular physical activity.

Additionally, because of lifestyle changes and a lower metabolism, it is important to consider how you eat as well as what you eat. To manage your weight and maintain optimum health, focus on eating efficiently. This means choosing foods that maximize nutritional value, not calories.

The first step to eating well is to learn what your body needs right now. Knowing what to eat, and how much or little, is key to achieving and maintaining nutritional health. Begin by familiarizing yourself with the general dietary guidelines and recommendations. It may also be wise to consult your health care professional, who can evaluate your specific nutritional needs based on your medical history and current health profile, assess whether you need to follow a special diet, and recommend any necessary supplements.

Commit to making dietary choices that are:

- nutrient-dense: low in fat and sodium, high in fiber and calcium, with a moderate calorie content;
- flavorful, so you'll look forward to mealtimes;
- easy to chew, swallow and digest;
- simple to prepare;
- appealing to the eye as well as the palate.

Sound like a tall order? Eating well as you age is easier than you think. Here's how:

**Focus on good carbs.** Opt for whole grain nutrition (brown rice, whole wheat bread, rolled oats, barley, millet), not refined "white" products, such as white bread, white rice, or products made with white flour.

**Raw equals roughage!** Aim to eat at least one daily serving of your fruits and vegetables raw. This not only preserves their nutritional value, it's an easy way to eliminate constipation. Raw fruits and veggies are loaded with fiber, vitamins, minerals, and enzymes to aid digestion. Plus, there's no preparation involved. If you have difficulty biting or chewing, cut your apple or carrot into bite-sized pieces. Or try a green salad with grated zucchini.

**Steaming is the best way to cook vegetables;** it preserves nutrients. Light sautéing is next. Boiling leeches nutrients—but you can use the leftover cooking water as soup stock!

**Go lean on protein.** Fish, poultry, eggs, beans, peas, nuts and tofu all count as protein, so it's easy to vary your healthy protein choices. Try skinless turkey or chicken, or fish, baked, broiled, grilled, steamed or poached, and you'll savor the flavor while adding healthy, low-fat, low cholesterol nutrition to your diet. Go easy on red meats, which contain saturated fat, and on salty meats such as bacon or ham.

**Bone up on calcium.** All dairy products are not created equal. Milk, cheese and yogurt retain their calcium content; cream cheese, cream and butter do not. As part of a healthy senior diet, choose fat-free or low fat dairy products. If you're lactose-intolerant, consider lactose-free and lower-lactose products, such as hard cheeses and yogurt. Or, a calcium supplement might be a better way for you to meet your calcium requirement.

**Choose first-rate fats.** Get your "good" fats from oils such as olive oil and sunflower oil, avocados and avocado oil, nuts and seeds.

**Keep it moist.** In addition to drinking enough water each day, aim to consume foods with a high water content. Staying properly hydrated flushes toxins from your body, relieves constipation, helps keep your joints flexible and your mind clear. High water content foods include melons, grapes, cucumbers, onions, apples, cabbage, and, of course, soup!

All of your hard work will pay off. Maintaining a healthy diet can yield numerous benefits, including increased energy, good mental health and mental abilities, resistance to disease, faster recovery from illness, accident, or surgery, better medication effectiveness, and improved management of chronic health problems. The overall result of an emphasis on good nutrition will be an improvement in your quality of life, mobility, and independence.

**Courtesy:**

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