

Tips for Healthy Eating & Healthy Aging

Following a nutritious diet is one of the best things you can do for your health as you age. Eating well can help prevent many health problems as you age, such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and obesity. It may also keep these conditions from getting worse. For individuals aging with disability, it's important to maintain a healthy diet that also supports any medications you may be taking.

But what is a nutritious diet? Sometimes dietary advice is confusing or overwhelming. These tips may help you evaluate your diet and find healthy changes to make.

Aim for Balance and Variety

Your body needs a variety of nutrients to function at its best, including carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins, and minerals. A healthy diet offers a balance of these nutrients. Each day, try to consume a combination of:

- **A variety of vegetables** including dark leafy greens like spinach, red-orange vegetables like carrots, and beans or peas
- **A variety of fruits** like blueberries, raspberries and apples. Try to choose fresh, whole fruits when you can.

- **Whole grains** such as whole wheat, oats, or brown rice
- **A variety of proteins** including fish, lean meat, poultry, or eggs. You can also find good sources of protein in nuts, beans, quinoa or soy products.
- **Low-fat dairy**, such as low-fat milk, cheese, or yogurt. If you have trouble digesting dairy products, choose soy, rice, or almond substitutes with calcium added.
- **Plant oils** such as grapeseed or olive oil
- **Water** Staying hydrated is an important part of a healthy diet, and your sense of thirst may weaken as you age.

A balanced diet means that you can occasionally enjoy your favorite processed foods or desserts, as long as your overall diet includes a variety of fresh, nutritious foods. When you buy processed foods, read the nutrition labels and try to limit your consumption of:

- **Added sugars** – Ingredients like fructose or corn syrup, which are found in many packaged snack foods. It's recommended that men don't eat more than 9 teaspoons a day of added sugar, and women don't eat more than 6 teaspoons.
- **Trans fats** – Also known as partially hydrogenated oils, which are added to

some processed foods to make them last longer

- **Sodium** – A little salt is okay, but it is recommended not to eat more than 2,300 milligrams of sodium each day (about a teaspoon). Canned foods, frozen dinners, and snacks like potato chips often contain large amounts of sodium.
- **Saturated fats** – It is recommended to limit saturated fats found in meat, cream, and butter. Plant-based fats are better for your heart.

Tips for Making Healthy Changes to Your Diet

Small changes can make a big difference when it comes to healthy eating. Consider making some substitutions to foods you consume often. For example:

- Choose a whole orange instead of orange juice
- Try whole wheat pasta or bread instead of white
- Add chopped vegetables to casseroles, soups, or even baked goods. As you age, you may need to choose softer vegetables that are easier to chew.
- Purchase low-sodium soups and sauces, or make your own to reduce salt
- Choose lean cuts of meat, such as skinless chicken breast or fish for your protein, or try non-meat substitutes, such as soy products, beans, or nuts.

- Replace soft drinks or other sweetened beverages with unsweetened sparkling water, milk, or if herbal teas or if you tolerate caffeine, tea and/or coffee.

Healthy Eating Habits

Making smart food choices is a great way to follow a healthy diet. You can also improve your diet by following some of these habits.

- As you age, foods may lose some of their flavor, and some medicines can change the way food tastes. Adding spices and herbs, instead of salt, can enhance the flavor in your meals to balance this change. You can also find spice blends at the store that do not contain salt.
- Eating a nutritious diet is more enjoyable when you share a meal with others. Consider inviting a friend over for dinner, or take part in a shared meal at your local senior center or place of worship.
- Do your best to prevent food-related illnesses by keeping your food safe. Throw away food that is spoiled, and avoid foods that may be risky, such as unpasteurized dairy foods. Other foods may be harmful if they are undercooked, like chicken, meat, eggs, or fish.
- Be careful when considering dietary supplements. Usually, food is the best way to get the nutrients you need. Your doctor will know if you need extra vitamins, pills, or powders to supplement your diet.

- Staying hydrated is an important part of a healthy diet. Make sure you drink plenty of water, because you may lose some of your sense of thirst as you age.
- Make sure there is color on your plate. Adding colorful vegetables and fruits not only makes your meal more inviting, but usually improves the nutritional value too.

Other Things to Remember

- Talk to your doctor, or a registered dietician (RD), before making any major changes to your diet. Your doctor may suggest particular changes based on your health and the medications you are taking, and can advise you on whether or not to add vitamins or other supplements to your daily diet.
- A nutritious diet is part of a healthy lifestyle, which also includes physical activity. Check out our fact sheet on [How to Stay Physically Active](#).
- Check out your local library, community center, or grocery store to see if there are nutrition classes or seminars you can attend.

Resources & References:

Choose My Plate [Interactive Nutrition Tracker Tools]. Retrieved from: www.choosemyplate.gov

Serving and Portion Sizes: How Much Should I Eat? *National Institute on Aging*. Retrieved from:

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