



Healthy Eating and Healthy Aging for Adults

Healthy eating is important for healthy aging for adults over age 50. Choosing healthy foods for meals and snacks can help you feel your best every day.

Healthy eating also helps prevent some chronic and other illnesses.

You need fewer calories and more nutrients as you get older. To maintain a healthy weight, eat foods with more nutrients and not too many foods with high calories. Eat foods that contain fibre such as whole grain products, legumes, vegetables and fruit, and plenty of fluids to keep your bowels healthy.

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](#)
- 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 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, tofu, soy beverage, and peanut butter. Foods from animal sources are high in protein, as well as zinc, iron and vitamin B12.

You need protein for building or repairing muscles, and for maintaining healthy hair, nails and skin.

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 eat enough 'healthy fats', 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 every day, such as cooking oil, salad dressings, mayonnaise and margarine.

By eating less trans and saturated fat, you make the most important dietary change for improving your heart health. 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. Calcium may also help you keep a healthy blood pressure. Examples of foods with high calcium are lower fat milk and alternatives, including calcium fortified soy beverages, canned fish with bones, 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 50 years of age should take a daily vitamin D supplement containing 400 IU of vitamin D, and follow [Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide](#).

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

Vitamin B12 is found naturally in foods such as milk and alternatives, meat, fish, poultry and eggs. As you get older, it is harder for your body to absorb vitamin B12 from these foods. Your body can absorb vitamin B12 from fortified foods and supplements more easily, so if you are over age 50, it is recommended that you get vitamin B12 from fortified foods or a supplement every day. Not absorbing vitamin B12 over a long time can cause a type of anemia. Foods that are fortified with vitamin B12 include vegetarian food sources such as vitamin B12 fortified meatless deli slices, soy burgers and soy beverages.

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 for heart health. Your bowels may become less active as you age, causing constipation. Certain types of fibre can help to lower cholesterol and to keep blood sugar levels normal. Fibre may also help you achieve or keep a healthy weight. Foods with fibre include whole grains, legumes, vegetables and fruit.

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

Sodium or salt use may increase as you get older, possibly due to less sense of taste. Too much sodium in your diet can increase your blood pressure, leading to heart disease or stroke. 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 supplement?

Taking a multivitamin/mineral supplement once daily may help you get enough folate and vitamins B6, B12 and D. Although supplements provide vitamins and minerals, they do not provide the protein, carbohydrates, fibre, and other nutrients that you need. Foods also have phytochemicals, which are naturally occurring compounds with health benefits. Speak with your doctor or a dietitian before taking additional supplements.

For More Information

- Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide
- Senior Friendly™ Fact Sheets www.dietitians.ca
- Healthy Eating for Seniors handbook www.actnowbc.ca/EN/seniors/healthy_eating_f_or_seniors

For more HealthLink BC File topics, visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles/index.stm or your local public health unit.

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