

## Healthy Nutrition for Older People

As you grow older, getting a nutritionally rich diet becomes even more important. Read more about it [here](#).

A healthy eating plan can never be outgrown. No matter at what stage of life you may be in, healthy nutrition is vitally important. However, as far as older adults are concerned, while the basic principles of a balanced diet are the same as at any other age, but individual nutritional requirements usually do need to be modified.

Your overall future health will be affected according to the choices of food you make, whether you are 45 or 75, are homebound or active. Healthy food choices along with lifestyle changes can reduce the chances of getting certain aging related diseases such as osteoporosis, diabetes, and heart disease. Healthy nutrition also aids in the treatment as well as recuperation from illness.

While including healthy nutrition in your diet may not turn the clock back, it is known to make people feel more energetic and healthy longer. Consuming a nutritionally healthy diet involves eating a wide variety of healthy foods every day. After all, food is the source of energy, vitamins, protein, fiber, minerals and fluids you require in order to be healthy.

### **What are the Factors that Suggest High Risk of Poor Nutrition?**

There are various factors that can be indicative of higher risk of inadequate nutrition. In case you experience 3 or more of the factors given below, you need to consult a registered dietician or a physician:

- Prolonged poor health
- Poor dental health
- Unexpected loss or gain in weight
- Inadequate eating habits
- Taking medicines
- Economic inadequacy
- Inadequate social contacts and loneliness
- Being unable to take care of yourself

## **Facts about Nutrition for Older People**

The same types of nutrients are required by older people as are needed by younger people, except that the amounts are different. As one gets older, one requires fewer calories compared to when one is younger. The reason being, that with the decrease of muscle mass and a reduction of physical activity, there is less energy required for the basic processes of the body. Nevertheless, contrary to general misconception, the basic requirements of nutrients do not decrease as well with aging. As a matter of fact, older people require increased amounts of certain nutrients. The challenging aspect is to create a plan for eating that provides lots of nutrients without too much calories. Of course, calorie requirements are dependent not only on age, but also on the activity level.

A nutritional eating plan can be achieved by selecting foods that are high in fiber and low in fat such as cereals and breads made with whole grains, vegetables and fruits, along with healthy fats and oils. Plus, of course, adequate amounts of protein foods such as eggs, fish, poultry, meat, and beans. Also, while foods that are high in calories, fat, and sugar can be indulged in occasionally, it is best to limit their consumption.

**Here are some of the essential elements that you need to keep in mind while devising nutrition rich meals:**

**Calcium:** While this mineral is essential at all ages, however it is particularly important as one grows older. Calcium is necessary for preventing osteoporosis and building strong bones. Many older people simply do not consume adequate amounts of foods that are rich in calcium, plus, the aging body is not as good at the absorption of calcium from food. Also, many older adults do not get enough exercises that are weight bearing, such as walking, which helps to strengthen the bones.

According to nutritionists, those who are 65 and above require 1200 to 1500 mg of calcium in a day. However, since this amount may be hard to consume via food alone, it may be advisable for some people to take a calcium supplement, after consulting your doctor. In case you do choose to include a calcium supplement, it should be taken between meals, since calcium can interfere with iron being absorbed from other foods.

Some of the foods that are good sources of calcium are: cheeses, yogurt, low-fat milk, canned salmon that includes edible bones, leafy green vegetables, tofu made by adding calcium sulfate, and soy milk fortified with calcium.

**Vitamin C:** This helps in the absorption of iron from sources of food that are derived from plants. Low vitamin C levels may occur due to smoking and inadequate eating habits. Low levels of this vitamin can lead to iron deficiency, delay in the healing of wounds, and bleeding gums. Some of the best sources of vitamin C are citrus fruits, tomatoes, melons, berries, green peppers, and so on.

**Potassium:** Although many people are aware of the importance of calcium and vitamin C, very few people know about how important potassium is. It helps to maintain a healthy blood pressure, as well as the proper functioning of muscles and nerves, and an adequate fluid balance. Most foods we eat contain adequate amounts of potassium, and yet people do not get enough of this mineral because they do not consume enough vegetables and fruits. Some of the foods that are good sources of potassium are: bananas, oranges, tomatoes, cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, spinach, tuna, halibut, eggplant, chard, and so on.

**Vitamin B12:** This is very important for the formation of red blood cells, and a lack of it can lead to anemia. Some of the foods that are rich in vitamin B12 are: liver, which is the best source; mutton; beef; chicken; pork; whole egg; fish; yogurt; cheese; and milk. You could also take vitamin B12 supplements, after consulting your doctor, and B12 fortified foods.

**Magnesium:** This is required for a wide range of processes of the body. It strengthens the immune system and bones, while also playing a key role in the functioning of the nerves, muscles, and heart. 420 mg per day is the recommended amount for men, and 320 mg per day for women. Fish; fruits like artichokes, bananas, and dried figs; nuts like Brazil nuts, almonds, pine nuts, and cashew; vegetables like spinach, pumpkin seeds, white beans; and tomato paste.

**Vitamin A:** This is essential for maintaining good vision, the growth of tissues, and for immunity. Some of the best sources of vitamin A are: winter squash, spinach, carrots, and sweet potatoes.

**Vitamin D:** This helps in the absorption of calcium and is a preventive against diseases of the bone. It is produced in the body on exposure to sunlight. However, those who do not go outside much, or always use sunscreen when out in the sun, or have dark skin, do not produce adequate amounts of this vitamin from sunlight. About 20-30 minutes of exposing face or hands to sunlight about 2-3 times per week is enough to get adequate amounts of vitamin D. Some of the sources of food high in vitamin D are: fortified cereals and milk. You could also take vitamin D supplements, after consulting your doctor.

**Vitamin E:** This is a very good antioxidant that helps in protecting you cells from getting damaged. Some of the best sources of this vitamin are: almonds, sunflower seeds, peanut butter, and tomato sauce.

**Fiber:** The importance of fiber for older people can't be over-emphasized. It keeps the bowel working in peak condition, and protects against intestinal problems. A healthy intake of fiber is also thought to help in protecting against some types of cancer, diabetes, and heart disease. Most vegetables, fruits and nuts are high in fiber. The recommended amounts of fiber per day for older people are: 30 gm for men and 21 gm for women.

Usually, there is a deterioration in the ability to taste and smell foods with aging, which results in food being less appetizing. Plus, certain medications can produce a bitter taste, which makes foods taste bad. In order to compensate for this, meals should be created by enhancing the flavor of foods. Flavors can be enhanced by adding spices, herbs and lemon juice. Select foods that have interesting textures and look appetizing.

One of the best ways of incorporating a nutritionally healthy diet is to consume a wide range of foods, with the focus being on vegetables, fruits and whole grains.

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