

Healthy Lifestyles for Older Adults

Americans are living longer, enjoying energetic and active lifestyles well into their 80s and 90s. Study after study confirms eating well and being active can make a dramatic difference in the quality of life for older adults. **You are never too old to enjoy the benefits of improved nutrition and fitness!** With nutrient-rich foods and activities with friends, you can feel an immediate difference in your energy levels and enjoyment of life. In fact, as we get older, our food and activity choices are as important as ever to our health.

Focus on Nutrient Density

As adults age, they need fewer total calories, but higher amounts of certain nutrients, especially calcium and vitamin D. In terms of nutrition, you need to focus on quality, not quantity. For both optimal physical and mental health, older adults truly need to make every calorie count. For a healthy eating plan, choose a variety of foods from all the MyPlate food groups regularly.

Aim for a Healthy Weight

The golden years are not the time for fad diets or drastic weight loss. Your goal should be to eat better while staying within your calorie needs. Fad diets frequently eliminate entire food groups, which can lead to serious nutrient gaps. Rapid weight loss often leads to a loss of lean body mass, exactly the opposite of what older people need for good health. Aim for a stable weight as you get older. If you want to lose a few pounds, talk to your health care provider or a registered dietitian about the best plan for you. The right balance of food and activities can help you maintain strong muscles and bones.

Enjoy the Power of Protein

People of all ages need protein for strong, healthy bodies. Some older adults do not get the protein they need to maintain muscle mass, fight infection and recover from an accident or surgery. Chewing protein foods such as meat can be a problem for some older adults. Here are a few tasty tips to pump up your protein intake, without upsetting your food budget or energy balance.

- **Enjoy More Beans.** Add canned beans to salads, soups, rice dishes and casseroles.
- **Make Your Crackers Count.** Spread peanut butter on whole-grain crackers and eat them as snacks or alongside soup, chili or salad.
- **Amp Up Your Eggs.** Mix grated, low-fat cheese or extra egg whites into scrambled eggs.
- **Cook with Milk.** Use fat-free or low-fat milk or fortified soy milk, rather than water, to make creamy soups or oatmeal.
- **Use Dry Milk Powder.** Mix a spoonful of dry milk into fluid milk, cream soups and mashed potatoes.

Reference: American Dietetic Association, www.eatright.org

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