

Healthy Eating for Older Adults





Eating well is important at any age, but is it especially important for older adults

What you eat each day can keep you strong and healthy. It can also help decrease your risk of many health problems, such as heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, and some types of cancer.

As you get older your body changes and you may need more of some nutrients, such as vitamin D, calcium, and vitamin B12. You may also need to pay more attention to how much you eat and drink. You may need to eat fewer calories to maintain your weight, choose softer foods if you have dentures or dental problems, or pick high-fiber foods if you have constipation. Other issues can be having a limited budget or struggling to cook for just one person. This booklet will help you make healthier eating choices while meeting some of the special concerns you may have as you age.

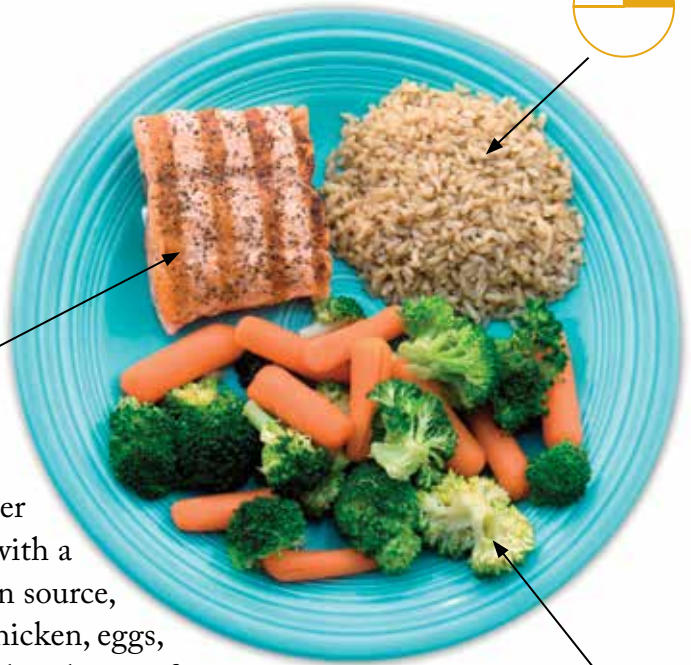
EAT A VARIETY OF FOODS

The **Daily Food Guide** on page 8 shows the food groups and the recommended number of servings to eat daily. Use it to help plan your meals.



USE THE HEALTHY PLATE METHOD AS A GUIDE TO EATING WELL

Fill one-quarter of your plate with whole, unprocessed grains or starches, such as brown rice, whole-wheat pasta, quinoa, bulgur, corn, peas, one slice of whole-grain bread, or one corn or whole-wh



Fill one-quarter of your plate with a healthy protein source, such as fish, chicken, eggs, cooked beans, lentils, or tofu.



Fill half of your plate with nonstarchy vegetables, such as carrots, broccoli, spinach, cabbage, green beans, asparagus, greens, tomatoes, or romaine lettuce.

For good nutrition also choose each day:

- 1 small fruit serving, such as an orange, banana, apple, or 1 cup of berries or melon with each meal.
- 2 to 3 cups of nonfat or low-fat milk or yogurt.
- A small amount of healthy fats, such as olive or canola oil, avocado, nut butters, or a small handful of nuts.

CHOOSE HIGH-FIBER FOODS

Fiber (you may have heard it called “roughage”) helps relieve constipation because it holds water. It softens your stool so you can pass it more easily.

Fiber refers to the part of plant foods that you can’t digest. Some of the best sources of fiber are beans (kidney, garbanzo, or black), lentils, peas, bran cereals, whole oats, flaxseeds, chia seeds, psyllium husk, and raw and cooked fruits and vegetables.

When you add fiber to your diet, it is important to drink more liquids and add it slowly over a few weeks or months to prevent gas and bloating.

DRINK PLENTY OF LIQUIDS

Liquids help your digestion and decrease constipation. They also help your kidneys work better. As you get older, you may need water but not feel thirsty. Because of that, it is important to make an effort to drink water and other non-calorie liquids each day.

Drink at least 6 to 8 glasses of liquids daily. Include 2 to 3 glasses of water. Milk, soup, broth, coffee, and tea also count. You can include 4 ounces of juice unless you are overweight or have diabetes.

Regular sodas are linked with health problems such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. It is best to avoid them. There are a lot of unanswered questions about diet sodas. If you drink diet sodas, don’t drink them very often.

Drinks with alcohol don’t count toward the 6 to 8 glasses of fluids you should have a day. They actually cause dehydration.



VITAMIN AND MINERAL SUPPLEMENTS

While taking supplements sounds like a good idea, there is no evidence that taking vitamins can lower your risk of heart disease or cancer. Some research actually shows that certain vitamins and minerals may cause harm. It is better to get both from food. Calcium, vitamin D, and vitamin B12 can be exceptions. The next few sections will talk about these vitamins in more detail.

Calcium

Calcium is important for good health and strong bones.

The recommendation for all adults 50 and older is 1,200 mg of calcium. The best sources of calcium are dairy products. Your goal is 2 to 3 cups of nonfat or 1 percent low-fat dairy products each day. Canned fish with soft, edible bones and green leafy vegetables also have calcium.

If you do not digest milk easily and have cramping, bloating, or diarrhea when you drink it, try a lactose-free milk like Lactaid. You may find it easier to digest cultured dairy products such as yogurt, buttermilk, and cheese. You can also try soy, almond, or rice milk. Look at the label and choose one that has 25 percent of the daily value for calcium.

Because you cannot get 1,200 mg of calcium from 3 cups of milk or milk alternatives, you will need to take a supplement. Calcium citrate is best.

Tip: To eat more dairy products, use 1 percent low-fat or nonfat milk instead of water whenever possible in your cooking.

Vitamin D

Vitamin D is important for bone health, preventing falls, and good health. All adults 50 and older should aim for 1,000 IU of

vitamin D each day. It is very hard to get vitamin D from food. One good source is sockeye salmon, which has about 600 IU in 4 ounces. Other foods have a lot less vitamin D. For example, you would have to eat 50 eggs or drink 10 glasses of milk to get 1,000 IU!

People make vitamin D from sun exposure, but those who stay out of the sun or wear sunscreen may be deficient. You also make less vitamin D as you get older. For all these reasons, taking 1,000 IU of vitamin D₃ as a supplement makes sense for many older adults.

Vitamin B12

Some older adults are also at risk for developing a vitamin B12 deficiency. This is caused by a decrease in the amount of stomach acid produced, which affects your body's ability to absorb B12. If you are a vegan and do not consume animal products, you are also at risk. A deficiency of vitamin B12 may affect balance, memory, and even mood. Good sources include liver, clams, fortified breakfast cereals, salmon, and trout. If you have concerns, talk with your physician.



EAT LESS SATURATED FAT AND AVOID TRANS FAT

Eating less saturated fat and avoiding trans fats helps decrease your risk of heart disease. Trans fats (partially hydrogenated oil) are found in margarine, shortening, processed baked goods, and fried foods (such as fast food apple pie and french fries). Read the ingredients list on products when shopping and avoid those that include partially hydrogenated oil.

Some ways to limit saturated fat:

- Eat nonfat or low-fat dairy foods, including milk and cheese.
- Choose lean meat and trim off fat.
- Bake, broil, roast, or steam foods rather than fry.
- Remove skin from chicken and turkey before you eat it.
- Use less butter, margarine, cream, sour cream, cream cheese, and high-fat salad dressing.
- Try a frozen banana with blueberries blended in a food processor instead of ice cream.

EAT LESS SODIUM

We have known for years that sodium is not good for people with high blood pressure, but a recent study found that it actually increases the risk of heart attack and stroke in all people, even those without high blood pressure. The study also found that by cutting out just 1,000 mg of sodium a day—the amount found in ½ teaspoon of salt—you can decrease your risk of a heart attack or stroke by 25 percent.

The average American eats around 3,500 to 5,000 mg of sodium a day. Your goal is no more than 2,400 mg per day. Sodium is everywhere. It is in pizza, cheese, apple pie, hot dogs, and even chocolate pudding. A whopping 80 percent of the sodium we

get is from eating out and processed foods, such as frozen foods and snacks, and not the salt shaker.

Key Points for Reducing Sodium

- Limit sodium to no more than 2,400 mg per day.
- Do not use salt. Use lemon juice, herbs, and spices instead.
- Eat out less often. Aim for 1 day a week.
- Eat fewer processed, packaged, and canned foods. Look at the “Nutrition Facts” section on the labels of foods you commonly eat to see how much sodium you are getting.
- Sodium is found in not only salt but also seasoning salts, lemon pepper, soy sauce, fish sauce, teriyaki sauce, bacon, salt pork, sausage, hot dogs, lunch meat, cheese, processed foods, canned or packaged soups, olives, pickles, and salted snacks such as chips, crackers, pretzels, and nuts.
- Instead of processed, fast, and restaurant foods, eat fresh foods such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans, peas, lentils, fish, chicken, and meats prepared without salt.

What are you willing to do? Think about what you currently eat. Are there any high-sodium foods that you could easily cut out of your diet? Remember that even a small decrease in sodium can have a big effect on your risk of a heart attack or stroke.



DAILY FOOD GUIDE

Food Group (Key Nutrients Supplied)	Recommended Servings per Day	Example of 1 Serving
Bread, Cereal, Rice, & Pasta (B Vitamins, Iron, Fiber)	6 to 8	1 slice bread or 1 tortilla ½ cup hot cereal ¾ cup dry cereal ½ cup cooked rice, noodles, or pasta
Fruits (Fiber, Vitamin C, Vitamin A)	2 to 3	1 cup cubed melon 1 medium apple or banana ½ cup chopped, cooked, or canned fruit
Vegetables (Fiber, Vitamin C, Vitamin A)	5 or more	1 cup raw vegetables ½ cup cooked vegetables
Meat, Poultry, Fish, Eggs, Dry Beans, Peas, or Lentils, & Nuts (Protein, Iron, B Vitamins)	2 to 3	2 ounces lean meat, fish, or poultry 1 egg ½ cup tuna ½ cup nuts or seeds ½ cup cooked dry beans, peas, or lentils
Milk, Yogurt, & Cheese (Calcium, Vitamin A, Vitamin D)	2 to 3	1 cup nonfat or low-fat milk or plain yogurt 1½ ounces cheese ½ cup cottage cheese
Fats (Vitamin A, Vitamin E, and Vitamin K)	3 to 5	1 teaspoon oil or margarine 1½ teaspoons nut butter ⅛ avocado

Other Foods: Some foods, such as cake, cookies, jelly, and alcohol are high in calories and contain no nutrients or are low in most nutrients. Eat fewer of these foods.

Tips for Healthy Food Choices

- Choose whole-grain products.
- Avoid cereals high in sugar.

- Choose fresh fruits or fruits packed in fruit juice or water.
- Choose a food high in vitamin C daily (such as oranges, tomato juice, or cantaloupe).

- Choose dark green or orange vegetables (such as carrots, spinach, or broccoli) as a vitamin A source daily.
- Avoid vegetables in rich cream or cheese sauces.

- Choose fish, poultry, beans, peas, lentils, nuts, and seeds more often than red meat (beef, pork, or lamb).
- Most bacon, hot dogs, and lunch meats are high in calories, saturated fat, and sodium.
- Both red meat and processed meat increase your risk of colon cancer.
- Eat plenty of the healthy choices in this food group if you have been told you have malnutrition.

- Choose nonfat or low-fat dairy products.

- Use extra virgin olive oil or canola oil more often.
- Include fat from whole foods such as nuts and avocados.

EAT REGULAR MEALS

Skipping meals can reduce the nutrients you get, lower your immune system, and increase your chance of illness. Aim for three meals a day. Smaller, more frequent meals are OK too.

If you have a poor appetite, try protein drinks (such as Ensure) or protein bars between meals.



EATING WELL UNDER SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Chewing Problems

If you have tooth or mouth problems that make it hard for you to eat, try some of the following foods:

- Soft, protein-rich foods, such as fish, low-fat yogurt, cottage cheese, peanut butter, tofu, eggs, and beans
- Casseroles made with ground or finely chopped poultry, fish, or grated low-fat cheese
- Finely chopped or mashed vegetables
- Chopped or puréed vegetables in soups
- Cooked cereals, such as oatmeal
- Canned or cooked fruit, or very ripe fresh fruit such as bananas or peaches

Eating Alone

Having to eat alone may cause you to skip meals, eat the same thing all the time, or not eat enough. Try these ideas to make your meal times special:

- Set an attractive table.
- Eat by a window.
- Listen to the radio.
- Eat outdoors on a nice day.
- Dine out every now and then.
- Share a meal with a friend, family member, or group.
- Go to senior meal programs in your community.
- If you have trouble shopping for yourself, ask a local market to deliver groceries to your home.
- Look into programs that can deliver prepared food to your home, such as Meals on Wheels.



Limited Income

If stretching the budget is a concern for you, here are some tips for getting the best value at the grocery store:

- Look for weekly specials in your local newspaper.
- Cut out and save coupons. Use coupons on food items that are already on sale.
- Make a shopping list and stick to it.
- Buy store brands or generic brands.
- Shop at dollar stores or discount stores and share large purchases with others.
- Shop at local farmers markets, where you may get a better price on fresh fruits and vegetables.



- Most staples, such as brown rice, can be stored for a while. Buy them in bulk when they are on sale.
- Grow your own vegetables at home. Tomatoes and Swiss chard are both easy to grow and offer nutrients that support health.
- You may be able to get food stamps. For information, call your local Department of Social Services.
- Look into programs that can deliver prepared food to your home, such as Meals on Wheels.

EXERCISE

Eating a healthy diet is important to maintain your good health but exercise also plays an important role. Regular exercise helps you feel better and lowers your risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, cancer, and weight gain. It can also decrease constipation, increase your appetite, improve sleep, and help with depression and stress.

Talk to your physician before starting a new exercise program, and then start with 10 minutes of daily activity. Work up to at least 30 minutes of exercise on most days of the week. Try:

- Walking
- Swimming
- Dancing

Slow down and rest if you feel tired or short of breath.



GETTING READY TO CHANGE

It will help you to change if you know why it is important.

Why is eating healthier important to *you*?

What benefits might you get if you eat healthier?

You have taken the first step toward improving your diet by reading this booklet and identifying why it's important to you. Now, let's create an action plan!



MY PERSONAL ACTION PLAN

Action plans are short-term plans to help you reach a larger goal, like eating a healthier diet. They can greatly improve your chances of success. An action plan must include a specific action or behavior that you *want* to do and *know* that you will be able to accomplish.

Your plan must answer these questions:

- What?
- How much?
- When?
- How many days a week?



Examples:

This week I will eat 3 servings of vegetables with dinner on five days.

What: eat vegetables

When: with dinner

How much: 3 servings

How many days: five

This week I will eat $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of beans or lentils with dinner on five days.

What: eat beans or lentils

When: with dinner

How much: $\frac{1}{2}$ cup

How many days: five

What will you do?

How confident are you that you will succeed with your action plan?



0 = not confident at all

10 = totally confident

Your confidence level should be 7 or higher to be successful. If it is not, rework your action plan.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO IT ALONE

Kaiser Permanente has many resources available to help you get started. We offer programs to help you:

- Manage your diabetes or blood pressure
- Lower your risk of heart disease
- Increase your physical activity

Contact your local Health Education Department for videos, pamphlets, books, and information on classes and programs, or go online to **kp.org/nutrition**.



