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NUTRITIONAL INFORMATION



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# A Senior's Guide To Good Nutrition

by Suzanne Havala, M.S., R.D.

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## Introduction to Diet and Aging

Relatively little is known about how the nutritional needs of older people differ from those who are younger. Although many people enjoy a generally healthy and vital old age, age-related health problems do increase with advancing years and often have an effect on eating habits.

The science of gerontology, or the study of normal aging, is still quite new, and science is giving us new insights into aspects of aging that in the past have been accepted as "normal." While there is a similar pattern of changes that takes place among all humans as they age, these changes can occur at different rates in different individuals. We do not know how much of this difference is due to genetic make-up, and how much is due to lifestyle factors such as diet.

There is abundant evidence to show that an optimal level of nutrition can extend the lifespan and improve the quality of life. A large body of research examining the health of vegetarians, who typically consume a diet that is lower in calories, saturated fat, and protein, and higher in fiber and phytochemicals than nonvegetarians, shows that vegetarians suffer from less heart disease, obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes, and some forms of cancer. Vegetarians also tend to live longer than nonvegetarians.

Good eating habits throughout life can help to promote physical and mental well-being. For older people, eating right can help to minimize the symptoms of age-related changes that, for some, can cause discomfort or inconvenience. Although the aging process affects some people differently from others, everyone can benefit from eating a well-planned vegetarian diet.

## **Do Seniors Have Special Nutritional Needs?**

Very little is known about how the aging process affects the body's ability to digest, absorb, and retain nutrients such as protein, vitamins, and minerals. Therefore, little is known about how the nutritional needs of older people differ from those of younger adults. Recommended nutrient intakes for seniors are currently extrapolated from those of younger adults.

One point that is generally agreed upon, however, is that older people tend to take in less energy, or calories, than younger people. This may be due, in part, to a natural decline in the rate of metabolism as people age. It may also reflect a decrease in physical activity. If the total intake of food decreases, it follows that intakes of protein, carbohydrate, fat, vitamins, and minerals also decrease. If calorie intake is too low, then intakes of necessary nutrients may also be low.

Many other factors can affect the nutritional needs of older people and how successfully they meet those needs, including their access to food. For instance, some of the changes that take place as people age can affect the kinds of foods they can tolerate, and some can affect their ability to shop for or prepare food. As people age, problems such as high blood pressure or diabetes become more common, necessitating certain dietary modifications. Digestive system problems become more common, and some people may have trouble chewing or swallowing.

Generally, current dietary recommendations for adults also apply to older people. These are summarized in the following chart:

- 1. Limit:**

- sweets
  - regular coffee and tea
  - greasy or fatty foods
  - alcohol
  - oil, margarine, and "junk" foods
  - other added fat
  - salt
2. **Eat plenty of:**
    - fruits
    - whole grain breads and cereals
    - vegetables
  3. **Drink plenty of fluids, especially water**

## **Who Should Be Concerned About Their Diet?**

Young or old, it pays to eat well and understand some nutrition basics. For starters, since food intake usually declines with age, it may be increasingly important for older people to make sure that what they do eat is nutritious. There may be less room in the diet for sweets and other "empty calorie" foods, which provide little in the way of nutrition in exchange for the calories they contribute to the diet. Eat fewer snack chips and commercially made cakes and cookies, and do your best to limit soft drinks, candy, and alcohol.

A sensible program of exercise, such as walking, may also be wise. People who are physically active have an easier time controlling their weight while still taking in more calories than those who are sedentary. The higher the calorie intake, the more likely a person is to obtain all the nutrients he or she needs.

A simple way to assess your own diet is to keep a written log or diary of everything that is eaten over a period of a few days to two weeks. Include some details about how foods were prepared, and be sure to make a note about portion sizes. Then compare the results to the general guidelines above. Write down ideas for improvement in areas that need some attention.

## **Should I Take Supplements?**

With few exceptions, vitamin and mineral supplements are rarely necessary for people who eat a varied diet and enough food to meet their energy needs. In fact, taking large doses of some vitamins and minerals may cause imbalances in body stores of others, and some are toxic at high levels. Your best bet is to get the nutrients you need from whole foods, without the use of a supplement, unless otherwise directed by your dietitian or physician.

## **How Can My Diet Help Me?**

Digestive system problems are the most frequent source of discomfort for older people. Sometimes these problems cause people to avoid foods that would otherwise be a healthy addition to the diet. For instance, flatulence or intestinal gas may prompt some individuals to

forgo certain vegetables such as cabbage or beans, which are good sources of vitamins, minerals, and fiber. In other cases, adding more of certain types of foods can reduce the severity of some problems. Let's take a look at how a well-planned diet can help with a variety of common complaints.

## **Constipation**

Constipation can result from not drinking enough fluids and by eating a diet that is too low in fiber or bulk. Certain medications, including antacids made with aluminum hydroxide or calcium carbonate, can also cause this problem, and it can be made worse by the habitual use of laxatives.

There are several things that people can do to prevent constipation from. Including a liberal amount of whole grain breads and cereals in the diet, as well as plenty of vegetables and fruits, is a start. Eating dried fruits such as prunes or figs, or drinking prune juice, may also help, since they have a natural laxative effect for many people. Drinking plenty of fluids is very important, and water is the best choice. Most people should drink six to eight glasses of water or other fluids each day. Foods that are high in fat, such as many sweets, meats and high fat dairy products, oils and margarine, or fried foods should be limited. These foods are very calorie dense and may displace foods that would otherwise provide needed fiber in the diet. Decreasing the consumption of fatty foods may also lessen the need for antacids. Don't forget, too, that a regular routine of exercise is effective in promoting good muscle tone and preventing constipation.

## **Gas and Heartburn**

Many people experience general abdominal discomfort after eating, which may include belching, intestinal gas or flatulence, bloating, or burning sensations. These complaints have many causes, including overeating, eating too many high-fat foods, alcohol, or carbonated beverages, swallowing too much air when eating, lying down to rest immediately after eating, and taking certain drugs or aspirin. Switching to a diet that is high in fiber may also cause some flatulence at the start, although it usually lessens as the body adapts to the increased fiber intake.

One way to help relieve problems such as these is to eat smaller, more frequent meals over the course of the day instead of eating one or two larger meals. Avoiding fatty foods, alcohol, and carbonated beverages is a good idea, too. It may also be helpful to eat slowly and to chew food thoroughly before swallowing. If heartburn is a problem, avoid reclining immediately after meals, or if you do so, keep the back elevated to at least 30 degrees so that you are not lying flat on your back. Regular exercise can also help to minimize trouble with intestinal gas.

## **Chewing and Swallowing Problems**

These may occur for a variety of reasons. For people who have trouble chewing foods, it may be helpful to cut food into small pieces and to allow extra time to chew food at a comfortable, unhurried pace. Cooking some fruits and vegetables may also be helpful and necessary for some. Poorly fitting dentures should be checked by a dentist and possibly replaced.

Drinking plenty of fluids can alleviate some swallowing problems if the throat or mouth is dry, which may be caused by certain medications or may simply be related to commonly-occurring changes that accompany the aging process. Lozenges or hard candies may be helpful in keeping the mouth moist. It may be necessary to ask your physician about whether or not a particular medication may be contributing to the problem.

## **What If I Have to Follow a Special Diet?**

The older people get, the more likely it is that they will develop medical problems that require a special, or therapeutic, diet. People who develop diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease, for instance, may have special considerations in meal planning. Most conditions, however, benefit from a diet that is high in fiber from whole grains, fruits, and vegetables, and low in animal products. Well-planned vegetarian diets can help to control blood sugar levels. By limiting fat, salt, and sugar, vegetarian diets can also be useful in controlling high blood pressure, heart disease, and other conditions. However, since individuals vary in their needs, those who must follow a special diet should consult a registered dietitian for more detailed recommendations and help with meal planning.

Many people also wonder if diet can help to treat conditions such as arthritis and osteoporosis. At present, no conclusive evidence exists to recommend one kind of diet over another for the treatment of arthritis. However, a lowfat vegetarian diet may be helpful in promoting normal weight, which, in turn, may help reduce or prevent some symptoms of arthritis.

The risk for osteoporosis is influenced by many factors, including diet. Diets that are excessively high in protein and sodium can accelerate the loss of calcium from bones. Vegetarian diets tend to be moderate in protein content and, when care is taken to avoid processed foods, they can be lower in sodium as well. Including plenty of greens and other vegetables in the diet will help to ensure an adequate intake of calcium.

One of the most common surgical procedures for older people is cataract surgery, and there is a considerable amount of research being conducted presently on the relationships between diet and the incidence of cataracts and macular degeneration.

## **What If I Have No Appetite?**

Depression because of changes in living conditions, loss of companions, certain medications, and complications in preparing meals can all result in a loss of interest in food. Sometimes eating smaller, more frequent "mini-meals" can help. It may also be a good idea to seek out meals in a social context. For instance, local vegetarian societies may have regular organized potluck dinners or restaurant outings that provide an opportunity to make new friends and enjoy a meal in the company of others.

Some common nutrition-related problems that older people encounter, and suggestions for dealing with them, are summarized in the following chart:

## Common Problems and Suggested Solutions

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Flatulence or gas Burning sensation, heartburn	Eat smaller, more frequent meals.
Belching or bloating	Avoid alcohol, carbonated beverages, and high fat foods such as some sweets, meats, oils and margarine, and high-fat dairy foods. Eat slowly and chew foods well. Avoid lying down after meals. If you do, keep head and back elevated at a 30-degree angle.  Consider reducing aspirin intake Ask physician to check medications.
Difficulty chewing	See dentist if problem is poorly fitting dentures. Cut food into small pieces and chew food at a comfortable, unhurried pace.  Cook some vegetables and fruits to soften.
Difficulty swallowing	Ask physician to check medications. Drink plenty of water. Use lozenges or hard candies to keep throat moist.
Constipation	Eat liberal amounts of whole grains as well as vegetables and fruits. Try dried fruits such as prunes or figs, or drink prune juice.  Drink 6 to 8 glasses of fluid, especially water, each day.  Limit greasy or fatty foods such as high-fat dairy foods, oils and margarine, fried foods, high fat sweets and meats.  Limit use of antacids.  Get into a regular routine of exercise, such as walking.
High blood sugar	Limit sweets and alcohol.  See a registered dietitian for help with planning a high-fiber, high-carbohydrate diet.
High blood pressure	Limit salty foods.

See a registered dietitian for help in planning a heart-healthy diet.

Heart disease                      See a registered dietitian for help in planning a diet low in saturated fat.

Loss of appetite                      Eat small, frequent meals or snacks.

Also, see "[Handy Hints for Quick Meals](#)."

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## How Can I Make Preparing Meals a Little Easier?

Some older people may find meal planning is more burdensome if shopping or preparing meals is difficult. Arthritis, for instance, or impaired hearing or poor eyesight may make it hard to drive to the grocery store, to read food labels or package instructions, or to open bottles and handle cooking utensils. It may also be difficult to maintain the motivation to cook for only one or two people.

For all these reasons, it may be necessary for meals to be simple, quick, and convenient to prepare. Ready-to-eat, whole grain breakfast cereals are a nutritious meal or snack anytime, as are quick-cooking hot cereals like oatmeal, which can be cooked in a microwave oven. Fresh fruit is also convenient, but canned fruits, packed in their own juice or water, will keep for months in the cupboard and can also make a simple snack. Whole grain breads, bagels, and lowfat muffins can be kept in the freezer and individual servings taken out as needed. Other good freezer and cupboard staples include bags of mixed, plain frozen vegetables, whole grain crackers, peanut butter, canned beans such as pinto beans or black-eyed peas, and jars of vegetable salads such as three-bean or beet salad.

It also makes sense, for those who are able to do more extensive cooking, to fix enough of a recipe so that some can be frozen in small batches to be reheated at a later date. For example, bean chili, vegetable lasagna, some casseroles, whole grain cookies, lowfat muffins, or pancakes all freeze well and can be stored in small containers that can be reheated in a conventional or microwave oven.

A summary of some handy hints for quick meals follows:

### Handy Hints for Quick Meals

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Cupboard staples	Ready-to-eat, whole grain breakfast cereals; quick-cooking whole grain cereals such as oatmeal; canned fruit packed in own juice; whole-grain crackers; nut butters; canned beans such as pintos or black-eyed peas; jars of vegetable salads such as beets or
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three-bean; low-sodium vegetarian soups; aseptically-packaged (long-life)containers of soy milk; popcorn; dried fruit.

Freezer staples

Frozen fruit pieces such as strawberries or raspberries; whole grain breads or muffins (to take out as needed); bags or boxes of plain, mixed frozen vegetables; fruit juice concentrate.

Make-aheads  
(to be frozen in small batches and reheated at a later date)

Bean chili; vegetable lasagna; vegetable and bean soups; whole grain-and-vegetable casseroles; whole grain cookies, lowfat muffins, or pancakes.

Also keep on hand

Flour tortillas; salsa and chutneys; fresh fruit.

Shopping tips

Split bags of fresh vegetables, such as carrots, celery, and onions, or heads of lettuce, with a friend to reduce the amount of spoiled food that has to be thrown away.

Shop with a list, and keep a list on-going at home.

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## Does Eating Well Have To Be Expensive?

For many elderly people, a limited income or limited access to transportation to a grocery store can complicate meal planning. So, good planning can not only be efficient, it can also be economically helpful as well. Foods prepared from scratch at home are usually less expensive than packaged mixes and frozen entrees, for example, and the cook has more control over what ingredients are used, also. For example, salt or fat in a recipe can be reduced when food is prepared at home, or whole wheat flour can be substituted for refined white flour.

Wise food choices can help save money. Buying in bulk, whether an item is on special or not, can be cheaper than buying small containers of food, although storage space must be available. If a person has access to food outlet stores, substantial savings can be had on things such as baked goods or breads. If freezer space is available, trips to an outlet can be less frequent. Coupon clipping, especially for brands that are usually purchased anyway, can save as much as 10% off food bills. Many stores offer double or triple the face value of the coupon. On the other hand, store brands of certain items can be much cheaper than name brands, even after coupon discounts, and often with little detectable difference in quality. Paper goods, canned goods, jams and jellies, and breakfast cereals are just a few examples of items which may have store brand or generic options.

There are certain food items that tend to be relatively costly and also should be limited for health reasons for most people. Sweets, especially prepared desserts such as cakes, pies, and cookies, and junk foods such as chips and other fried snacks, snack cakes, and some candies can be fairly expensive. High-fat dairy foods such as cheese and ice cream are relatively expensive, and for nonvegetarians, meat is typically the costliest item on the grocery list.

Desserts can be prepared at home, with alterations in the recipe to make them more nutritious, and money can be saved. Junk food snacks can be replaced with less expensive snacks such as air-popped plain popcorn, mixtures of dry cereals, bagels, whole grain muffins, or seasonal fresh fruit. If cheese is eaten, buy small quantities and use it sparingly. Add a sprinkling of grated cheese to salads or on top of a casserole or sandwich, rather than using it as a more prominent ingredient. Meatless meals, incorporating mixtures of vegetables, whole grains, and legumes such as canned or rehydrated beans and lentils, are economical and healthful, not to mention delicious.

## **What Food Assistance Programs are Available for Seniors?**

Food assistance programs, such as food stamps, can increase buying power for people who are eligible. Food delivery programs, such as Meals-on-Wheels, are also available for people who are housebound or have difficulty getting around or preparing meals. Congregate meal programs are available in some areas, where older people can meet in a central location to enjoy a meal in the company of others, and transportation is frequently provided to the meal site.

It is usually necessary to ask if vegetarian meal options can be made available, and the ability of food service personnel to accommodate the vegetarian's needs may vary from site to site or city to city. If there is difficulty in obtaining vegetarian meal options, contact the local vegetarian society. They may be able to refer the problem to a local dietitian-member for assistance. Find out if others are interested in lowfat vegetarian meal options. Quantity recipes are available from the Vegetarian Resource Group and other organizations, and these can be provided to food service directors or dietitians who may be able to incorporate them into menus.

Meal delivery programs may be organized by community nonprofit organizations or health and social service agencies such as hospitals, churches, nursing homes, and visiting nurses associations. To determine who is eligible, call these organizations directly. Otherwise, people can be referred by another family member, a physician, a visiting nurse, or a social worker.

Grocery delivery service is also available at stores in some communities. For people who have trouble finding transportation to the grocery store, or for those with physical limitations, a list can be phoned in to a local grocery store and someone will deliver the purchases to the home.

## **Summing It All Up**

A well-planned vegetarian diet is health-supporting for all ages. While age-related changes affect different people in different ways, a good diet can help to overcome or reduce symptoms of certain problems that may become more common with age.

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## Sample Meal Plan

Breakfast	6 oz. orange juice 1 cup cooked oatmeal with 1/4 cup chopped raisins and dates 6 oz. soymilk
Snack	1 banana 1 slice whole grain toast with 2 teaspoons peanut butter
Lunch	1 cup vegetarian chili * (* see recipe source below) 1/2 fresh green pepper, sliced 1 corn muffin * water
Snack	2 bagel halves with apple butter 6 oz. soymilk
Dinner	1-1/2 cups spinach salad with onions, mushrooms, and cherry tomatoes 2 tablespoons no-oil dressing 1 cup cooked spaghetti topped with 1/2 cup tomato-basil sauce Chunk of Italian bread 2 chilled, canned peach halves water
Snack	3 cups plain popcorn 6 oz. apple juice

14% fat 14% protein 72% carbohydrate 30 grams of fiber

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## Recipe Suggestions

Recipe Suggestions from [Simply Vegan](#) (available for \$13 from The Vegetarian Resource Group, PO Box 1463, Baltimore, MD 21203)

- Blended Delight (p. 18)
- Apple Raisin Spice Muffins (p. 20)\*
- Banana Muffins (p. 21)\*
- Corn Bread (p. 21)\*
- Oatmeal Medley (p. 22)
- Cindy's Light and Fluffy Pancakes (p. 23)\*
- Garbanzo Spread (p. 28)
- Peanut Butter and Fruit (p. 29)

- Popcorn Treat (p. 34)
- Mini Pizzas (p. 34)
- Apple Celery Salad (p. 41)
- Easy Pasta Salad (p. 44)
- Quick Pea Soup (p. 47)\*
- Creamy Lentil Soup (p. 49)\*
- Tomato/Zucchini Stir-Fry (p. 57)
- Vegetable Medley (p. 58)
- Mexican-Style Chickpeas (p. 73)
- Bean Tacos (p. 83)
- Pumpkin Casserole (p. 83)\*
- Hearty Macaroni Dinner (p. 87)
- Broccoli Pasta Dish (p. 88)
- Ginger Cookies (p. 109)\*
- Chocolate Pudding (p. 108)
- Karen's Creamy Rice Pudding (p. 115)

\* indicates items which can be prepared ahead and frozen

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Reprinted from *Meatless Menu Alternatives for Seniors*-The Vegetarian Resource Group.

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## Elderly Nutrition - Healthy Eating Tips

An important aspect of elderly nutrition is healthy eating tips. Eating well balanced meals are important to maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

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This article covers:

- [What is Healthy Eating?](#)
- [Healthy Eating Tips For Everyone](#)
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### What is Healthy Eating?

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Healthy eating – and proper elderly nutrition – is having a balanced diet where a person eats a variety of foods.

Proper elderly nutrition includes eating carbohydrates, protein, fluids and healthy fats. All of these are types of nutrients, or substances that provide the nourishment needed for living.

Seniors often require less calories as their bodies age, usually related to doing less physical activity, but the need for essential nutrients does not change.

Seniors may even need more of some nutrients such as vitamin D, vitamin B6, folate and calcium. Because of this, proper elderly nutrition becomes more important to get all the nutrients needed without extra calories and weight gain.

The first part of the series is called [Elderly Nutrition](#)

### Healthy Eating Tips For Everyone

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In general:

- Eat a wide variety of foods
- Eat in moderation, portion size is important

Eat More:

- Vegetables
- Fruits
- Whole grains (whole grain bread, whole grain pasta, brown rice, oatmeal)
- Fish
- Legumes (dried beans, peas, lentils)

- Foods rich in calcium (low-fat milk products, yogurt, cheese)
- Lean poultry and meat
- Unsaturated fats (vegetables oils, nuts, seeds, avocado)

Eat Less:

- Saturated fats (butter, lard, deli meats, bacon, sausages)
- Trans fats (processed foods, cookies, cakes, deep fried foods)
- Salt and sugar (includes drinks with a lot of sugar as well as jam, candy, baked goods)
- Refined and enriched grains

An important part of elderly nutrition is to eat some of each of the four food groups (see below for suggested portion sizes):

- Vegetables and fruits
- Grain products (includes pasta, bread, cereals)
- Milk products and alternatives (cheese, yogurt, fortified soy beverages)
- Meat – poultry, fish, shellfish, lean meat – and alternatives (lentils, beans, eggs, tofu, nuts)

## Healthy Eating Tips For Seniors

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For optimal elderly nutrition, seniors need more:

- Fibre: metabolism slows with age and fibre is needed to keep bowels regular
- Vitamins and minerals: for energy and strong bones
- Protein: often seniors need more protein, particularly if an elderly person suffers from chronic illness or has had a recent surgery
- Most elderly men need to eat more fruit, vegetables or milk products
- Most senior women need to eat more grains, fruit, vegetables, milk products and meat products

## Carbohydrates

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Carbohydrates are the part of elderly nutrition that give your body the fuel to keep your heart, lungs and organs functioning.

Everyone thinks of carbohydrates (carbs) as breads and potatoes, but there are many other types of healthy carbs including fruits, vegetables, low-fat dairy and whole grains.

They include minerals and vitamins and increase energy to walk downtown to visit loved ones.

Fibre is also an important part of elderly nutrition and it can be found in many carbs.

Some carbohydrates are unhealthy. These are usually the carbs that are digested quickly which raises blood sugar. Unhealthy carbs include white bread, white rice, cakes and cookies.

## Fibre

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Most seniors only get about half of the fibre needed each day for proper elderly nutrition.

Fibre is needed to keep bowels healthy and regular. It is also great for lowering cholesterol, controlling blood sugar levels and prevent high blood pressure.

Fibre also has the added benefit of making people feel full for longer which can help to control weight.

If your loved one has bowel or intestinal disease, they should consult with their doctor or dietician.

High fibre (4 to six grams or more per serving) can be found in some grain and grain products. A high fibre cereal can help keep hunger at bay all day.

Some great sources of fibre are:

- Fruits and vegetables
- Whole wheat toast
- Beans, chickpeas and lentils

- Whole wheat pasta with tomato sauce
- Low fat yogurt with fruit and bran sprinkled on top

Other tips for eating foods high in fibre:

- Look for foods that have 4 ÷ 6 grams or more of fibre per serving
- As always, eat lots of fruits and vegetables
- Drink lots of fluids to help fibre work properly. If one eats lots of fibre and doesn't drink plenty of fluids to help the fibre move through their system, it can result in constipation.
- Women should drink at least nine 8 ounce-glasses
- Men should drink at least twelve 8 ounce-glasses
- Bread products should be made of whole wheat, wheat bran, mixed grains, dark rye or pumpernickel flours to look for higher fibre options. Whole grain should be the first ingredient on the label.
- Enriched Wheat flour and Unbleached flour are both refined white flour and have less fibre, vitamins and iron than whole grain flour.
- If eating more fibre is new, introduce it slowly to avoid difficulties with gas or cramps and make sure to accompany it with lots of fluids

## Protein

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Protein is needed to repair muscles, nails and skin. It can help with healing if your loved one has been sick or has had surgery.

The best sources of protein are fish, poultry, meat, milk, low fat cheese, eggs, legumes (dried beans, lentils peas), soy products (tofu or soy drinks), nuts and seeds.

Whole grains, vegetables and fruit can also provide small portions of protein.

Some easy ways to add protein to senior's diets:

- Drink milk instead of water at one or more meals
- Cut a hard boiled egg into salads or have as a side
- Add a slice of cheese to sandwiches
- Eat a handful of unsalted soy nuts
- Add beans or chickpeas to stirfry or pasta sauce
- Sprinkle nuts and seeds on salad, cereal or stirfry
- Have peanut butter on a piece of whole wheat toast (PB and banana, yum!)

Some great ways to get protein plus some nutrients such as iron, calcium and B vitamins into meals:

For breakfast:

- Have an egg with a slice of whole wheat toast and a banana
- Make oatmeal with an egg and milk or unsweetened soy drink

For lunch:

- Add chicken to salads or brown rice
- Have a slice of cheese and bowl of lentil or bean soup

For snacks:

- Handful of mixed nuts
- Bowl of low-fat yogurt
- Glass of milk or unsweetened fortified soy drink

For dinner:

- Have fish with half a cup of brown rice (or basmati), half a cup of broccoli or another vegetable and a mixed salad

## Fluids

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Although fluids are not immediately thought of as elderly nutrition, no one can go very long without fluids. Not only do they keep you alive, they help people think clearly and keep body temperature even.



Fluids are important for bowel health (you need fluids if you eat a diet high in fibre to avoid constipation).

Seniors may have more difficulty feeling when they are thirsty. On top of this, when you feel thirsty, you are already dehydrated.

Dehydration is when a person has lost too much water and might start feeling fatigue, hot, flushed, confused and even nauseous.

Seniors should drink fluids regularly, whether they feel thirsty or not.

- Women should drink at least nine 8 ounce-glasses
- Men should drink at least twelve 8 ounce-glasses

If your loved one has heart disease, adrenal or thyroid disease, kidney or liver disease, they might need to drink less.

Elderly nutrition and fluids affect the health of seniors. Check with their doctor for the correct amount of fluids. Also talk to the doctor if your loved one is suddenly feeling very thirsty or has to urinate more often than usual. This might indicate a bladder infection.

Seniors should drink more when it is hot, after exercise or physical activity or if they have experienced vomiting or diarrhea.

Their fluid intake is likely fine if a colourless or light yellow coloured urine is produced and they feel good.

Ideas to increase fluid intake:

- Avoid drinking sugary drinks (pop, sweetened fruit juice, iced tea)
- You can drink unsweetened fruit or vegetable drinks
- Start lunch or dinner with low-salt veggie soup
- Low fat milk or buttermilk
- Unsweetened fortified soy drinks
- Decaffeinated coffee and tea (black, green, herbal and chai teas)
- Low fat yogurt drinks

## Fats

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Fats is a tricky subject for elderly nutrition. They have often been thought of as something to avoid altogether.

Now it is shown that fats are an essential part of the diet and elderly nutrition – but the TYPE of fat is very important to consider.

Healthy fats supply your body with energy and give a protective coating to your cells. Fat consumed has to be 'healthy' fat and still must be eaten in moderation.

All fat, even the healthy kind, is high in calories. Too much fat will result in weight gain and increase risk of clogged arteries, heart disease, diabetes and cancer.

Trans and saturated fats are unhealthy fats. Trans fats are found mostly in vegetable oils that have been solidified through a process called hydrogenation.

Saturated fats come mostly from foods coming from animals. They are also found in coconut or palm oils.

Unhealthy fats are found in the following foods:

- Butter
- Hard margarines
- Ghee
- Lard
- Vegetable shortening
- Whole milk including coconut milk
- Cream, sour cream and ice cream
- Cheese and paneer
- Fatty red meat (pork hock, sausage, bacon, preserved meats)
- Palm and coconut oils
- Partially hydrogenated vegetable oils
- Baked items (cookies, pies, cakes, pastries)

Healthy fats are polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats. Omega 3 fatty acid is one type of polyunsaturated fat that decreases the likelihood of developing blood clots. This type of fat helps lower triglycerides which reduces risk of stroke and heart disease.

Healthy fats are found in the following foods (still to be eaten in moderation):

- Fish such as salmon, sardines, rainbow trout, anchovies, mackerel, eulachon, char and herring
- Flaxseed or walnut oils (these oils are only to be used cold, not to be heated)
- Nuts and seeds (almonds, walnuts, peanuts, cashews, ground flaxseed)
- Vegetable oils (olive, canola, soybean, peanut, sesame oil)
- Soft tub margarine made from the oils above that say "Non-hydrogenated" on the label
- Avocado
- Wheat germ
- Omega 3 fortified foods such as eggs, yogurt, soy drinks

To eat the proper portions of fat, start by choosing foods naturally low in fat and then add only two or three tablespoons (30–40 grams) of healthy, unsaturated fats to your daily intake. This includes salad dressings, oil used for cooking, mayonnaise and margarine.

Read food labels and look for "low fat" meaning there is less than three grams of fat per serving or "fat free" indicating less than 0.5 grams of fat per serving.

Choose your fats carefully and don't waste your choices on cookies or cakes. Choose foods that provide lots of good nutrition along with fats, such as avocado, salmon, nuts and seeds and low-fat cheese.

Some low fat snacks suggestions:

- Fruits and veggies
- Gingersnaps
- Fig cookies
- Melba toast
- Whole wheat crackers with less than three grams of fat per serving
- Low fat yogurt

Other ways to reduce bad fats and increase good fats:

- Eat fish twice a week
- Choose lean meat and trim off fat
- Grill, roast or broil meat to allow the fat to drain off
- Remove skin from chicken and turkey
- Cook with low-fat dairy products made with skim or 1% milk or yogurt
- Have legumes instead of meat at least once a week. You can make a meal with lentils, baked beans, chickpeas or cook something like chili with a lot of beans in it
- Use low fat milk in coffee or tea
- Choose low fat salad dressing
- Use whole wheat flour in baking as able
- Instead of butter or margarine, use small amounts of mustard, ketchup, relish, cranberry sauce or peanut butter on sandwiches or other meals

Reduce fat in favourite recipes by:

- Use 1/4 less shortening, butter or other oils than the recipe calls for
- Cut liquid fat called for in recipes by 1/3
- Use skim milk instead of whole milk
- Use two egg whites for one egg to reduce cholesterol and saturated fat
- Use canned evaporated milk instead of whipping cream or regular evaporated milk
- Use low fat yogurt, sour cream, cheese and mayonnaise instead of regular
- Use buttermilk, low-fat cottage cheese or yogurt instead of sour cream
- Replace fat in baking recipes with the same amount of applesauce, pureed prunes, mashed bananas, grated zucchini or pureed pumpkin. A bit of water or skim milk may have to be added for all of these
- Substitutions other than applesauce.
- Have boiled or steamed rice instead of fried rice
- Choose lean meats and trim off extra fat, remove skin from turkey and chicken

## An Easy Way To Get All The Nutrients

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Eat from all four food groups:

- Vegetables and fruits
- Grain products (includes whole grain pasta, rice, bread, cereals)
- Milk products and alternatives (low-fat cheese, yogurt, fortified soy beverages)
- Meat (poultry, fish, shellfish, lean meat) and alternatives (lentils, beans, eggs, tofu, nuts and nut butters)

Recommendations for elderly nutrition for senior women:

- 7 servings of vegetables and fruits each day
- 3 servings of milk products and alternatives
- 2 servings of meat and meat alternatives
- 6 servings of grain products

Recommendations for elderly nutrition for senior men:

- 7 servings of vegetables and fruits each day
- 3 servings of milk products and alternatives
- 3 servings of meat and meat alternatives
- 7 servings of grain products

## What Is A Serving Size?

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In addition to eating a variety of foods, the size of the serving is also an important part of elderly nutrition.

Vegetables and Fruits

- 1 apple, orange, banana
- half a cup of 100% fruit juice
- half a cup of fresh, frozen or canned vegetables
- 1 cup raw leafy vegetables or salad

Grain Products

- 1 slice of whole wheat bread
- half a bagel, pita or tortilla
- half a cup of cooked pasta, rice, couscous, quinoa or bulgur
- 3/4 of a cup of hot cereal or one ounce (30 g) of cold cereal

Milk Products and Alternatives

- one cup of milk or soy drink
- half cup of evaporated milk
- 1 1/2 ounces of cheese
- 3/4 cup yogurt

Meat and Alternatives

- 2 1/2 ounces of fish, shellfish, lean meat or poultry
- 3/4 cup of meat alternatives
- 150 grams of tofu or legumes
- 2 eggs
- 2 tablespoons peanut buttermilk
- 1/2 of a cup shelled nuts or seeds

What portions should a healthy plate have?

- 1/2 colourful veggies
- 1/4 meat, poultry, fish, tofu or legumes
- 1/4 whole grain products
- Side of fruit or low-fat yogurt as a replacement for sweet desserts

## Extra Tips

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Extra tips to make sure your loved one is getting the elderly nutrition they need:

- Include at least one orange and one dark green vegetable each day for proper elderly nutrition (eg. Carrots, sweet potatoes, squash, broccoli, romaine lettuce, spinach)
- Canned, frozen and dried vegetables and fruit are good choices as well; just make sure the canned fruit is packaged in water or juice & not syrup & and veggies are packaged with little or no salt
- Eat vegetables and fruit more often than juice
- Eat fish twice a week (choose salmon, char, herring, mackerel, sardines, trout)
- Have meat alternatives like tofu, lentils and other beans often
- Select lean meats and alternatives prepared with little or no added fat or salt.
- Drink skim or 1 & 2 % milk everyday. If you don't drink milk, drink fortified soy beverage.
- Choose lower fat milk alternatives
- Try to make half, if not all, your grain products whole grain (eg. Barley, brown rice, oats, quinoa, wild or brown rice)
- For proper elderly nutrition, choose products lower in salt, sugar and fat

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FEATURE TOPIC: Eating and Nutrition

## **Enhancing Nutrition and Eating Skills in Long-Term Care**

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### **Abstract**

Age-associated impairments, internal and external stressors, and various elements of the food served in long-term care compromise nutrition. Persons in the mid-stage of Alzheimer's disease demonstrate mealtime behaviors that further interfere with self-feeding. The current study asked expert clinical nurses to identify interventions for 33 common mealtime behaviors. These nurses also identified structural changes needed in the dining room that are important for quality care. This assessment and intervention research served as the basis for the educational program and video *Dealing with Problem Mealtime Behaviors*. Staff trained in two nursing homes demonstrated a mean score gain on pretest and posttest scores as a result of the training.

Proper nutrition is central to well-being. When nutrition is compromised, individuals can experience weight loss, increased confusion, skin breakdown, incontinence, weakness, and an increase in the number of infections and falls. Weight loss in particular can lead to poorly fitting dentures and an inhibition of chewing and swallowing.<sup>1</sup> The lack of physical activity coupled with poor nutrition can further diminish appetite and affect the ability to perform daily living activities.<sup>2</sup> Depression and confusion add to the list of interacting conditions leading to failure to thrive.<sup>3-5</sup>

Malnutrition affects 30% to 85% of nursing home residents.<sup>6</sup> Physically and cognitively impaired residents are at the highest risk. Also at risk are non-English speaking residents and residents with no family to visit and assist at mealtime.<sup>1</sup>

Ensuring adequate nutrition is a complex and not fully understood problem among family caregivers, nursing home staff, and clinicians. Addressing the failure to self-feed seems easy enough from the outside. One might ask, Why not just hand feed these residents? There are several reasons why this is not a sufficient answer. First, many residents in the middle stage of Alzheimer's disease resist staff attempts to physically assist with food transport. Second, hand feeding those who could feed themselves is an insult to their dignity and results in excess disability. Third, hand feeding may be perceived as a threat by the resident and could trigger aggressive/protective behavior.<sup>7</sup>

Techniques to increase self-feeding in this population, and thus to prevent the morbidity and mortality associated with compromised nutritional status, present a significant challenge to nursing home staff. The ability to self-feed is dependent on a number of interrelated factors that include age-associated impairments, external stressors, internal stressors, and various aspects of the food that is served.

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# Healthy Eating For Seniors

## The Aging Adult

As you get older, you go through a number of cellular, physiological, and psychological changes. While many elderly individuals exhibit a decline in organ function and in metabolic activities, a number of them show no decline in functional status with age. This distinction has led to distinguishing "successful" aging from "usual" aging. The "usual aging" may reflect a lifetime of poor health habits, including poor dietary patterns, smoking, drinking, limited exercise, and other stress related factors rather than aging alone. In other words, you can help yourself age "successfully" if you look after a number of things.

As you grow older, your body becomes less forgiving, and you will have to make more of an effort to eat well and stay fit. Ideally, you've been practicing healthy eating habits throughout your life. But most of us don't live in an ideal world, and often we don't pay attention to our health until we reach middle age and beyond. But middle age is still a good time to start thinking about how to stay healthy in your later years. Your nutritional needs are pretty much the same at 40, 50, 60 and beyond as they were when you were younger--with some minor variations.

## Dietary Requirements

A 10-year study of the elderly indicated that current weight, rather than age, determined energy intake in both men & women. Intake of protein, as well as fat, carbohydrate and cholesterol, decreased slightly but not significantly with age. The study suggests that changes in lifestyle over time, rather than age per se, resulted in the dietary changes observed in this healthy elderly population.

Thus, as you age you need fewer calories, but exactly how much you should eat still depends on how active you are. Since you are eating less food to maintain a healthy weight, you have to be more careful about choosing low-fat and *nutrient-rich* foods. As the years pass and you lose lean body mass (muscle), your metabolic rate slows down and you burn calories more slowly. [Exercise](#) is the best way to maintain lean body mass and speed up your metabolic rate.

As for vitamin and mineral requirement, even healthy elderly people may exhibit deficiencies for vitamin B6--resulting from lower intake and higher requirements; vitamin B12 and folate -- due to low intakes and malabsorption; vitamin D -- as a result of reduced exposure to sunlight, low intakes, age related decreased synthesis; and zinc -- resulting from low intake associated with low energy intakes.

## Eat more fibre and calcium

Fibre is more important than ever to prevent constipation and gastrointestinal diseases such as diverticulosis (formation of pouches in the lining of the large intestine that can cause spasm or cramping).

At around age 40, calcium and other minerals start to move out of bones faster than they can be replaced. In women at menopause, the drop in estrogen (which helps bones hold on to calcium) causes greater bone loss than in men. The Ministry of Health suggest that menopausal women take 1200 mg of calcium daily and if you already have osteoporosis, the amount should be increased to 1500 mg. The National Institute of Health in the United States recommends a daily calcium intake for post-menopausal women of 1500 mg, regardless of onset of osteoporosis. To help counter the loss, women and men too--should make sure to get plenty of [calcium](#) in their diet every day. Calcium may also help to keep blood pressure low and play a role in preventing colon cancer. Calcium supplements up to 1,000 milligrams a day are recommended for people who is not getting enough of the mineral from their diet. If you take supplements, calcium carbonate and calcium citrate are the ones experts frequently recommend. Supplements derived from bone meal oyster shells, dolomite or other natural sources may contain large quantities of lead and are not recommended. Ensure that you are getting enough

vitamin D (synthesized by the body when exposed to sunlight although this ability is diminished in the elderly) to aid the absorption of calcium.

Antioxidant vitamins E, C and beta carotene (a form of vitamin A) have prompted considerable discussion about their health-promoting benefits. The oxidation of lipoproteins play an important role in the development of atherosclerosis. There is some evidence that vitamin E, and possibly the other two vitamins, can retard the process. The position of the American Heart Association is to not recommend these vitamins as supplements until their value has been demonstrated in clinical studies. They currently suggest that individuals eat a variety of foods that will provide a rich natural source of these [vitamins](#).

### **Causes of Nutritional Problems**

Many things contribute to the risk of malnutrition in older adults. For example, chronic diseases may lead to physical limitations, as from arthritis, or to cognitive limitations, as from Alzheimer's disease. Such conditions can make shopping for, preparing, and consuming food difficult without assistance. Dental problems may incline some seniors to avoid eating foods that must be chewed well—skin on fruits and certain meats, for example. Changes in the senses of smell and taste—which can result from aging itself or from drug therapy—can cause decreases in food consumption or disinterest in, even aversion to, formerly preferred foods. By age 75, people have only half as many taste buds as they did at 30. In addition, loneliness, depression and the financial restrictions of living on a fixed income can interfere with an older person's ability to buy and prepare good food. Since food is often associated with family and social events, preparing food and eating alone can be difficult for older people who have reached a stage in life where many of their loved ones have either died or moved away. For many, a loss of appetite follows the loss of companionship. Older men who have lost their wives (who did the cooking) may be at special risk.

Taking medicine also affect nutritional status in other ways. The gastrointestinal side effects of some medications can interfere with the desire to eat. Anti-inflammatory drugs used in the treatment of arthritis, for instance, can cause stomach upset. Some medicines also affect the absorption or metabolism of certain nutrients: laxatives that contain mineral oil can decrease the absorption of certain vitamins, for example. Senior citizens are the most frequent users of both prescription and over-the-counter medicine, and many of them take at least several medicine daily. Medication-related nutritional problems are thus more likely among senior citizens than among younger persons.

The following tips may help provide better meals for an elderly person:

- Obtain dental care as soon as possible. Lack of teeth and dental decay make chewing difficult, contribute to poor nutrition and also give food an abnormal taste. Bone loss makes dentures hard to fit, and many elderly people who have dentures do not wear them because they are uncomfortable.
- If chewing is a problem, try softer foods that are well-cooked or chopped.
- Four or five smaller meals might be easier for an older person to handle than three larger ones.
- Add a little more spice or sugar to foods to enhance their flavor.
- Due to the importance of getting enough calcium, ensure that you focus on high calcium foods. If milk is unacceptable, try fish with bones like ikan bilis or sardines, tofu, cooked beans or even low-fat ice cream. Take a supplement if you know you are not consuming enough calcium.

The Ministry of Community Development list public and private programs which offer meals for people 60 years of age and older at senior centers throughout the island. These programs provide social interactions that may be just as beneficial to an elderly person as the meals. For more information, visit: [www.gov.sg/mclds](http://www.gov.sg/mclds).

One way for seniors to pack a lot of good nutrition into a little meal is to have it in a drink such as milo, horlicks or ovaltine. Add a couple of spoonfuls of milk powder to boost the protein, calcium and calorie content. Have 3-4 wholewheat crackers and a



piece of fruit like papaya, mango or banana to round off the mini meal.

Adequate hydration is a chronic problem for many seniors. Decreased thirst sensation is common with aging, and some medications affect a body's ability to regulate fluid balance. Dehydration worsens symptoms of kidney dysfunction and constipation. To combat this problem, seniors are advised to drink at least 8 glasses of fluids a day.

### Common Problems and Suggested Solutions

Flatulence or gas Burning sensation, heartburn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Eat smaller, more frequent meals.</li></ul>
Belching or bloating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Avoid alcohol, carbonated beverages and high fat foods such as some sweets, meats, oils and margarine, and coconut milk. Eat slowly and chew foods well. Avoid lying down after meals. If you do, keep head and back elevated at a 30-degree angle.</li><li>• Consider reducing aspirin intake. Ask physician to check medications.</li></ul>
Difficulty chewing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• See dentist if problem is poorly fitting dentures. Cut food into small pieces and chew food at a comfortable, unhurried pace.</li><li>• Cook some vegetables and fruits to soften.</li></ul>
Difficulty swallowing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ask physician to check medications.</li><li>• Drink plenty of water. Use lozenges or hard candies to keep throat moist.</li></ul>
Constipation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Eat liberal amounts of whole grains as well as vegetables &amp; fruits. Try dried fruits such as prunes or figs, or drink prune juice.</li><li>• Drink 6 to 8 glasses of fluid, especially water, each day.</li><li>• Limit greasy or fatty foods such as oils and margarine, fried foods, high fat sweets and meats. Limit use of antacids.</li><li>• Get into a regular routine of exercise, such as walking.</li></ul>
High blood sugar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Limit sweets and alcohol.</li><li>• See a registered dietitian for help with planning a high-fibre, low sugar diet.</li></ul>
High blood pressure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Limit salty foods.</li><li>• See a registered dietitian for help in planning a heart-healthy diet.</li></ul>
Heart disease	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• See a registered dietitian for help in planning a diet low in saturated fat.</li></ul>
Loss of appetite	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Eat small, frequent meals or snacks.</li></ul>

### Sample Meal Plan

Breakfast	1 cup cooked oatmeal with 1 tbsp. wheat germ 1 banana
Snack	1 bowl bean curd w/syrup 6 oz pure fruit juice
Lunch	1 bowl chicken mushroom noodle soup ½ cup stir-fried spinach Glass of water
Snack	1 sardine bun Tea
Dinner	3 oz steamed fish ½ bowl of watercress soup (includes ½ cup of watercress) 1 bowl of rice

Water

Snack      3-4 whole wheat crackers  
              Cup of milo/horlicks/ovaltine with added milk powder

**Nutritional analysis:**

1880 calories, 18% protein, 25% fat, 59% carbohydrate, 25 grams fibre

## Nutrition and the Elderly

### *Are the Seniors in Your Life Eating Well?*

-- By Leanne Beattie, Health Writer & Nicole Nichols, Health Educator

Eating well is important at any age. But health issues and physical limitations sometimes make it difficult for seniors, the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. population, to get the nutrients they need for a balanced diet. Poor nutrition and malnutrition occur in 15 to 50 percent of the elderly population. But the symptoms of malnutrition (weight loss, disorientation, lightheadedness, lethargy and loss of appetite) can easily be mistaken for illness or disease. **If you are a full- or part-time caretaker for an elderly parent or grandparent, there are plenty of steps you can take to help your loved ones maintain good nutrition as they age.**

Whether it's because of physical limitations or financial hardship, many seniors don't eat as well as they should. Arthritis can make cooking difficult, while certain medications can reduce appetite, making meals unappealing. A 1990 survey by Ross Laboratories found that 30 percent of seniors skip at least one meal a day, while another study found that 16 percent of seniors consume fewer than 1000 calories a day, which is insufficient to maintain adequate nutrition. There are many reasons why a senior may skip a meal, from forgetfulness to financial burden, depression to dental problems, and loneliness to frailty.

#### **Possible Causes of Poor Nutrition**

The best ways to find out why your loved one isn't eating well are to pay attention, look for clues and ask questions. Encourage him to talk openly and honestly, and reassure him that he is not a burden to you or anyone else. Some of the most common reasons for poor nutrition in the elderly include:

- **Decrease in sensitivity.** The aging process itself is a barrier to good nutrition since it is common for appetites to diminish as a person ages. A decline in the senses of smell and taste also affect a person's ability to taste and enjoy food. If a meal isn't appetizing, a senior is less likely to eat as much as he should.
- **Side effects of medication.** Certain medications (whether over-the-counter or prescription) can reduce appetite, cause nausea, or make food taste differently. If a senior doesn't feel hungry due to medication side effects, she is less likely to eat even though her body does need food and calories.
- **Poor dental health.** Seniors are more likely to suffer from dental problems. Ill-fitting dentures, jaw pain, mouth sores and missing teeth can make chewing painful. All of these factors make it increasingly difficult for the elderly to eat healthy foods.
- **Financial burden.** Many seniors are on fixed or limited incomes. If he is worried about money, a senior may cut back on grocery expenses or buy cheaper and less-nutritious foods to stretch his budget. Lacking money to pay for adequate foods can result in a host of nutrition problems.
- **Lack of transportation.** Shopping today is also more difficult with many food stores located in large shopping malls and on crowded streets. In order to go grocery shopping, a

senior must drive to the store, navigate through heavy traffic and park far away from the door. Add snow and ice to the mix and you have a very treacherous situation for the elderly.

- **Physical difficulty.** Seniors can become frail as they age, especially when dealing with debilitating conditions like fibromyalgia, arthritis, vertigo (dizziness) and disability. Physical pain and poor strength can make even simple tasks (opening a can, peeling fruit, and standing long enough to cook a meal) too challenging.
- **Forgetfulness.** Dementia, [Alzheimer's disease](#), and poor memory can hurt a senior's ability to eat a variety of foods on a regular schedule and remember what to buy at the store. One may keep eating the same foods over and over without realizing it, or skip meals entirely because she doesn't know the last time that she ate.
- **Depression.** As people age, life can become more difficult. Their loved ones may be gone (or far away), their body may be failing them, even if their mind is sharp, and loneliness can take its toll. Feeling blue or depressed can decrease one's appetite, or make him feel apathetic about caring for his health. Depression is a manageable disease when treated correctly, but left untreated it can lead to many other nutrition and health problems.

If you are concerned about the diet of an elderly person in your life, here are some practical tips to ensure he or she is getting proper nutrition:

**Offer nutritionally-dense foods.** Since many seniors aren't eating as much as they should, the food they do eat must be as nutritious as possible. Encourage whole, unprocessed foods that are high in calories and nutrients for their size. Some examples include: healthy fats (nut butters, nuts, seeds and olive oil), whole grains (brown rice, whole wheat bread, oats and whole grain cereals), fresh fruits and vegetables (canned and frozen are also good choices), and protein-rich beans, legumes and meat and dairy products. This will help ensure that they are getting all the vitamins and minerals needed to maintain proper health.

**Enhance aromas and flavors.** Appealing foods may help stimulate appetite, especially in someone whose senses of taste and smell aren't what they used to be. Seniors can intensify flavors with herbs, marinades, dressings and sauces. Switching between a variety of foods during one meal can also keep the meal interesting. Try combining textures, such as yogurt with granola, to make foods seem more appetizing.

**Make eating a social event.** Many seniors who live alone or suffer from depression may stop cooking meals, lose their appetites, and depend on convenience foods. If you are worried that your parent or grandparent isn't eating properly, make meals a family occasion. Bring a hot meal over to her home or invite her to your house on a regular basis. She may become more interested in food when other people are around.

**Encourage healthy snacking.** Many seniors don't like to eat large meals or don't feel hungry enough to eat three full meals a day. One solution is to encourage or plan for several mini-meals throughout the day. If this is the case, make sure each mini-meal is nutritionally-dense with plenty of fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Whole grains and fortified cereals are a good source of folate, zinc, calcium, Vitamin E and Vitamin B12, which are often lacking in a senior's diet. Cut back on prepared meats, which are high in sodium and saturated fat.

**Take care of dental problems.** Maintaining proper oral health can enhance nutrition and appetite. Make sure dentures fit properly and problems like cavities and jaw pain are being properly managed. Insurance plans, including Medicare, cover certain dental procedures.

**Consider government assistance.** Home-delivered meals, adult daycare, nutrition education, door-to-door transportation, and financial assistance programs are available to people over the age of 60 who need help. For more information, visit the U.S. Administration on Aging website at [www.AOA.gov](http://www.AOA.gov).

**Take them to the store.** If lack of transportation is an issue, take your loved one to the grocery yourself. You can also hire a helper or neighbor to do this if you aren't available. Another option is to order his groceries for him, either from local grocers that make home deliveries (for an additional fee) or from an online grocery website. Many seniors might not be savvy enough to order food from the internet, but you could schedule a regular order for them so that groceries will be delivered right to their doorsteps. Check out the following sites: [www.NetGrocer.com](http://www.NetGrocer.com), [www.Groceries-Express.com](http://www.Groceries-Express.com), and [wwwDrugStore.com](http://wwwDrugStore.com).

**Give reminders.** If poor memory is interfering with good nutrition, schedule meals at the same time each day and give visual and verbal reminders about when it's time to eat.

**Maintain food storage.** Keep extra food on-hand in case of an emergency. Elderly people who live alone should keep some canned and non-perishable foods in the cupboard in case weather or health problems make it difficult to go shopping.

**Use supplements carefully.** While it's tempting to take vitamin supplements to make up for nutritional shortfalls, be careful about toxicity. The elderly do not process Vitamin A as quickly as younger people do, making them susceptible to Vitamin A toxicity, for example. Certain vitamins can also interact with medications, so make sure you or your loved ones discuss the idea of supplements with their health care provider.

“Seven Diet Sins”

<http://www.medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=10192>

“Senior Nutrition – The Joy of Eating Well and Aging Well”

[http://helpguide.org/life/senior\\_nutrition.htm](http://helpguide.org/life/senior_nutrition.htm)