

Healthy Eating & Physical Activity Across Your Lifespan

Young at Heart



WIN

Weight-control Information Network

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Introduction

Healthy eating and regular physical activity are keys to good health at any age. They may lower your risk for obesity, type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease, cancer, and other chronic diseases. They may even help ward off depression and keep your mind sharp as you age. This brochure offers tips and tools to help people aged 65 and over eat healthfully and be physically active. Talk to your health care provider for more specific advice if you have health problems or concerns. Remember, it is never too late to make healthy changes in your life.



What is healthy eating?

A healthy eating plan for older adults includes a variety of nutrient-rich foods. In January 2005, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Agriculture jointly released the 2005 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. These new guidelines outline recommendations to promote health and reduce the risk of chronic disease through nutritious eating and physical activity. The recommendations include some of the nutritional needs of older adults. For more information about food groups and nutrition values, visit <http://www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines>.



Tips for Healthy Eating

To help you stay on track with your healthy eating plan, follow these tips:

- ✓ Do not skip meals. Skipping meals may cause your metabolism to slow down or lead you to eat more high-calorie, high-fat foods at your next meal or snack.
- ✓ Select high-fiber foods like whole-grain breads and cereals, beans, vegetables, and fruits. They may help keep you regular and lower your risk for chronic diseases, such as coronary heart disease and type 2 diabetes.
- ✓ Choose lean beef, turkey breast, fish, or chicken with the skin removed to lower the amount of fat and calories in your meals. As you age, your body needs fewer calories, especially if you are not very active.
- ✓ Have three servings of vitamin D-fortified low-fat/fat-free milk, yogurt, or cheese every day. Milk products are high in calcium and vitamin D and help keep your bones strong as you age. If you have trouble digesting or do not like milk products, try reduced-lactose milk products, or soy-based beverages, or tofu. You can also talk to your health care provider about taking a calcium and vitamin D supplement.

- ✓ Choose foods fortified with vitamin B12. Many adults over the age of 50 have difficulty absorbing adequate amounts of this vitamin. Therefore, they should get this nutrient through fortified foods, such as breakfast cereals, or from a dietary supplement. Talk with your health care provider to ensure that you are consuming enough vitamin B12.
- ✓ Keep nutrient-rich snacks like dried apricots, whole-wheat crackers, peanut butter, low-fat cheese, and low-sodium soup on hand. Eat only small amounts of such foods as dried apricots and peanut butter because they are high in calories. Limit how often you have high-fat and high-sugar snacks like cake, candy, chips, and soda.
- ✓ Drink plenty of water or water-based fluids. You may notice that you feel less thirsty as you get older, but your body still needs water to stay healthy. Examples of water-based fluids are caffeine-free tea and coffee, soup, and low-fat or skim milk.



Planning and Preparing Your Meals

It is easier to eat well when you plan for your meals and make them enjoyable. Try these tips:

- Grocery shop with a friend. It is pleasant and can save money if you share items that you can only use half of, such as a bag of potatoes or head of cabbage.
- Cook ahead and freeze portions to have healthy and easy meals on hand for days when you do not feel like cooking.
- Keep frozen or canned vegetables, beans, and fruits on hand for quick and healthy additions to meals. Rinse canned vegetables and beans under cold running water to lower their salt content. If fruit is canned in 100-percent fruit juice, drain the juice to avoid added calories.
- Try new recipes or different herbs and spices to spark your interest in food. Set the table with a nice cloth and even a flower in a vase to make mealtime special.
- Eat regularly with someone whose company you enjoy.



- If you are unable to cook for yourself, find out about a community program in your area that serves meals or delivers “Meals on Wheels.” Call the Eldercare Locator at 1–800–677–1116 for information on the program nearest you.



Check with your health care provider.

If you have a problem eating well, such as difficulty chewing or not wanting to eat, talk to your health care provider or a registered dietitian. They can give you specific advice on following a healthy eating plan that addresses these barriers to healthful eating. Check with your dentist about caring for your teeth or dentures and your gums.

The death of a loved one or moving from your home of many years may affect your desire to eat. Talk to your health care provider if events in your life are keeping you from eating well. Sometimes talking to a friend or family member can help. You can also check with your church or local Department of Social Services to see if there are support services available in your area.

Many medications may alter the taste of food. If you have difficulty eating because many foods taste bad, speak with your health care provider about other options and medications.

Ask your health care provider if you should take a daily multi-vitamin/mineral supplement. No pills have been proven to “stop aging” or “improve your memory.” Taking a “one-a-day” type, however, may help you meet the nutrient needs of your body every day.



What is a healthy weight?

Maintaining a healthy weight may reduce the risk of many chronic diseases. It may also help you move better and stay mentally sharp. If you are underweight, overweight, or obese, you are at risk for certain health problems. Ask your health care provider about a healthy weight for you. If you start to gain or lose weight and do not know why, your health care provider can tell you if this change is healthy for you.

Health Risks of Being Underweight

- poor memory
- decreased immunity
- osteoporosis (bone loss)
- decreased muscle strength
- hypothermia (lowered body temperature)
- constipation

If you are underweight, you may not be getting enough nutrients. Talk to your health care provider about the best way to gain weight and meet your nutritional needs.

Health Risks of Being Overweight or Obese

- type 2 diabetes
- high blood pressure
- high blood cholesterol
- coronary heart disease
- stroke
- some types of cancer
- gallbladder disease

If you already have one or more of these conditions, ask your health care provider if a modest weight loss (5 to 10 percent of your body weight) could help you feel better or need less medicine.

If you need to lose weight, make sure that you reduce your total calories, but do not reduce your nutrient intake. Do not try to lose weight unless your health care provider tells you to.

Tips for Safe Physical Activity

Physical activity is good for your health at every age. If you have never been active, starting regular physical activity now may improve your strength, endurance, and flexibility. Being active may help you live on your own for a longer time and lower your chance of getting type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease, and colon cancer.



Whatever activity you choose, follow the safety tips below:

- Ask your health care provider about ways you can safely increase the amount of physical activity you do now.
- Take time to warm up, cool down, and stretch.
- Start slowly and build up to more intense activity.
- Stop the activity if you experience pain, dizziness, or shortness of breath.
- Drink plenty of water.
- When you are active outdoors, wear lightweight clothes in the summer and layers of clothing in the winter.
- Wear sunscreen, sunglasses, and a hat for sun protection.
- Wear shoes that fit well and are right for your activity.

Getting Active

To get started, pick an activity you enjoy. Begin with small, specific goals, such as “I will take a 10-minute walk three times this week.” Slowly increase the length of time and the number of days you are active.

You may benefit most from a combination of aerobic,

Aerobic activities use your large muscle groups and increase your heart rate. They may cause you to breathe harder. You should be able to speak several words in a row while doing aerobic activities, but should not be able to carry on an entire conversation. Examples of moderate-intensity aerobic activities include:

- walking briskly
- water aerobics
- tennis
- housework or gardening
- active play with children or grandchildren
- dancing

strength, balance, and flexibility activities. Build up to 30 minutes or more of moderate-intensity cardiovascular or aerobic activity on most, preferably all, days of the week. Try to incorporate balance and flexibility activities into your daily workout as well. Work toward doing strength exercises on 2 or 3 days a week.

Regular aerobic activity can help you:

- Reduce functional declines associated with aging.
- Lose or maintain your weight by burning calories.

- Lower your risk of coronary heart disease and stroke by strengthening your heart and lowering your blood pressure and cholesterol.
- Keep your joints moving and reduce your arthritis pain.
- Lower your stress and boost your mood.
- Have more energy.
- Meet new friends by joining a class or walking group.



Doing strengthening activities regularly may help you:

- Keep your muscles and bones strong as you age.
- Increase your strength and independence.
- Reduce your need for a cane.
- Reduce the risk of bone fractures and other injuries, or recover faster if you are injured.

Strengthening activities require your muscles to use force against a resistance, such as gravity, weights, or exercise bands. Examples of strength training activities include:

- lifting weights
- household or garden tasks that make you lift or dig
- pushing a lawn mower

Balance activities typically focus on the muscles of your abdomen, lower back, hips, and legs. They require you to control your body as you move through space to avoid falls. Examples of balance activities include:

- walking heel to toe in a straight line
- standing on one foot
- standing up from a chair and sitting down again without using your hands
- Tai Chi
- rising up and down on your toes while standing and holding onto a stable chair or countertop



- Maintain or lose weight because muscle burns more calories than body fat.

Doing balance activities regularly may help you:

- Stay steady on your feet.
- Reduce the risk of a fall or injury.

Doing flexibility activities regularly may help you:

- Maintain the movement of your muscles and joints.
- Prevent stiffness as you age.

Flexibility activities help increase the length of your muscles and improve your range of motion. Examples of flexibility exercises include:

- stretching
- yoga
- Pilates

- Prevent injuries.
- Lower your stress.

Doing weight-bearing activities regularly may help you:

- Build and maintain bone mass.
- Reduce the risk of bone fractures.

Many activities give you more than just one benefit. For example, doing aqua aerobics using water weights gives you aerobic and strengthening benefits. Yoga combines balance, flexibility, and strengthening benefits. You do not have to do four separate types of activities each week. Choose what you like to do and round out your activities from there. Remember, any amount of physical activity you do is better than none.



Weight-bearing activities require your bones and muscles to work against gravity. They include any activities in which your feet and legs are bearing your total body weight. Examples of weight-bearing activities include:

- walking
- tennis
- climbing stairs

Work physical activity into your day.

There are plenty of ways to be active without setting aside a special time for “exercise.”

The tips below may help you to add more activity to your everyday life.

- Take short walks throughout your day. Try a 10-minute walk before breakfast, at lunchtime, and after dinner.
- Clean your house or garage, or wash your car.



Be good to yourself.

Due to loss of loved ones, health problems, trouble paying bills, or other reasons, many older people feel lonely, sad, or stressed in their daily lives. Feelings like these may cause you to lose energy, not feel like doing anything, not eat enough, or overeat. Being good to yourself may help you to cope with your feelings and improve your energy level, eating habits, and health. Here are some ideas for being good to yourself:

- Get enough sleep.
- Stay connected with family and friends.
- Join a walking group, or other social group.
- Surround yourself with people whose company you enjoy.
- Volunteer or get active with groups in your community.



Physical Activity

- Try a part-time job at a place you would enjoy working for a few hours a week.
- Watch a funny movie and laugh.
- Take up a hobby such as playing cards, gardening, cooking, or dancing.

Remember, it is never too late to improve your eating plan, be more physically active, and be good to yourself for a healthier life.



Additional Resources

AARP

Phone: 1-888-687-2277

Internet: <http://www.aarp.org>

American Dietetic Association

Consumer Nutrition Information Hotline

Phone: 1-800-366-1655

Internet: <http://www.eatright.org>

Food and Nutrition Information Center, U.S. Department of Agriculture

Phone: (301) 504-5414

Internet: <http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic>

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

Phone: 1-800-575-9355

Internet: <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov>

National Institute on Aging

Exercise: A Guide from the National Institute on Aging

Phone: 1-800-222-2225

Internet:

<http://www.niapublications.org/exercisebook/exercisebook.asp>

**The President's Council on
Physical Fitness and Sports**

Exercise: The Key to the Good Life

Phone: (202) 690–9000

Internet: <http://www.fitness.gov/pepup.htm>

U.S. Administration on Aging

You Can!

Phone: (202) 619–0724

Eldercare Locator: 1–800–677–1116

Internet: <http://www.aoa.gov/youcan>

**U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S.
Department of Health and Human Services**

Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005

Phone: 1–866–512–1800

Internet: <http://www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines>

U.S. Food and Drug Administration

Eating Well as We Age

Phone: 1–888–463–6332

Internet: <http://www.fda.gov/opacom/lowlit/eatage.html>

How to Understand and Use the Nutrition Facts Label

Phone: 1–888–463–6332

Internet: <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/label.html>

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Fit and Fabulous as You Mature

Phone: 1-877-946-4627

Internet:

<http://www.win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/mature.htm>

Weight Loss for Life

Phone: 1-877-946-4627

Internet:

http://www.win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/for_life.htm





Weight-control Information Network

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Bethesda, MD 20892-3665

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(NIDDK) of the National Institutes of Health, which is the Federal Government's lead agency responsible for biomedical research on nutrition and obesity. Authorized by Congress (Public Law 103-43), WIN provides the general public, health professionals, the media, and Congress with up-to-date, science-based information on weight control, obesity, physical activity, and related nutritional issues.

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This publication is also available at
<http://www.win.niddk.nih.gov>

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- ❑ ***Eat breakfast every day.***
- ❑ ***Select high-fiber foods like whole-grain breads and cereals, beans, vegetables, and fruits.***
- ❑ ***Have three servings of Vitamin D-fortified low-fat or fat-free milk, yogurt, or cheese every day. Milk products are high in calcium and vitamin D and help keep your bones strong as you age. Or take a calcium and vitamin D supplement.***
- ❑ ***Drink plenty of water or water-based fluids. You may notice that you feel less thirsty as you get older, but your body still needs the same amount of water to stay healthy.***
- ❑ ***Ask your health care provider about ways you can safely increase the amount of physical activity you do now.***
- ❑ ***Fit physical activity into your everyday life. For example, take short walks throughout your day. You do not have to have a formal physical activity program to improve your health and stay active.***
- ❑ ***Get enough sleep.***
- ❑ ***Stay connected with family, friends, and your community.***



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