

IMPROVING NUTRITION AS YOU AGE

INFORMATION FOR OLDER ADULTS, FAMILIES,
AND CAREGIVERS



READ THIS PAMPHLET TO LEARN:

- How to Improve What You Eat.
- Why Good Nutrition is Important as You Age.
- What Foods to Avoid for a Variety of Chronic Health Conditions.



**Sinai
Health**

Healthy Ageing
and Geriatrics

WHY IS NUTRITION IMPORTANT TO CONSIDER AS YOU AGE?

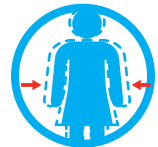
Healthy eating is a major factor in both preventing disease and managing existing conditions. However, more than 33% of Canadians over 65 are estimated to be at risk for poor nutrition. Women are also at greater risk for poor nutrition than men. As you age, the risk of experiencing malnutrition increases. The risk factors increase if you live alone, are physically inactive, suffer from depression, have bad teeth, are experiencing physical or cognitive decline, or are using medications to manage certain chronic conditions.



HOW CAN YOU TELL IF YOU ARE NOT EATING WELL?

You may be at nutritional risk if you:

- Have recently lost or gained more than 10 lbs unintentionally.
- Often skip meals.
- Usually eat alone.
- Eat fewer than 2 servings of fruits and vegetables daily.



WHY ARE SOME OLDER ADULTS AT RISK FOR POOR NUTRITION?

There are many reasons why older adults may not eat as well as they should. Some of these include:

- Changes to our bodies as we age – decreased mobility, sense of taste and smell, vision, metabolism, oral health—can contribute to poor appetite or a diminished interest in shopping, cooking and eating. 
- Health issues can make meal planning challenging. Diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, hypertension, kidney disease and cancer all have their own dietary requirements. 
- Food preferences related to one's place of residence, ethnicity and lifelong habits can challenge maintaining good nutrition.
- A slowdown in physical activity can often lead to a loss of appetite.
- Some physical conditions, like arthritis, can make eating more physically challenging by making it difficult to swallow or digest food. 
- Lack of money to get to a grocery store or even purchase fresh fruits and vegetables, meat or fish, and eggs and dairy foods.
- Some mental health conditions, like depression, and dementias can affect one's appetite.

WHAT ARE TIPS TO MAKE BUYING FOOD SAFER?

Knowing what to look for when shopping for food can help you avoid food poisoning. While most people who get food poisoning make a full recovery, older adults who experience food poisoning more commonly experience serious longer-term consequences. Also, age-related changes in the body, as well as chronic health conditions, such as diabetes and kidney disease, can make it difficult to fight off infections. To avoid food poisoning, you should:



- Buy cold or frozen food at the end of your shopping trip.
- Check the “best before” date on your food.
- Check fruits and vegetables to avoid buying items that are bruised or damaged.
- Put raw food in individual plastic bags.
- Keep your raw meat, poultry, fish and seafood away from other food in your grocery cart.
- Label and use the same bag or bin for raw meat, poultry, fish and seafood.
- Refrigerate or freeze raw meat, poultry, fish and seafood as soon as you get home from the grocery store.
- Wash your reusable grocery bags.



WHAT ARE TIPS FOR MAKING MEALS SAFER?

When preparing meals and cooking dinner, there are steps you can take to reduce your risk of food poisoning.

When preparing food:

- Wash your hands before and after touching raw meat, poultry, fish and seafood.
- Wash your fruits and vegetables under cool, running, drinkable water before eating or cooking them.
- Clean sinks, kitchen surfaces or containers immediately after they have been in contact with raw meat, poultry, fish and seafood.



- Avoid reusing plates or utensils that have touched raw food.



- Use one cutting board for ready-to-eat foods, and a different one for raw meat, poultry, fish and seafood.
- Clean your countertops, cutting boards and utensils with a kitchen sanitizer before and after preparing food.



When cooking food:

- Use an instant-read digital food thermometer for a more accurate reading. Meat can turn brown before all the bacteria in your food are killed.
- Remove your food from the heat and insert the digital food thermometer into the thickest part of the meat. For hamburgers, insert it into the side of the patty, all the way to the middle.
- Clean the thermometer in warm, soapy water between each temperature reading.

WHAT ARE TIPS FOR MAINTAINING A BALANCED DIET?

The Canada Food Guide Recommends the following tips to help you engage in healthy eating:



- Eat plenty of vegetables and fruits, whole grain foods and protein-rich foods. Choose protein rich foods that come from plants more often.
- Choose foods with healthy fats instead of saturated fat.
- Limit your consumption of highly processed foods. If you choose these foods, eat them less often and in small amounts.
- Prepare meals and snacks using ingredients that have little to no added sodium, sugars or saturated fat.
- Choose healthier menu options when eating out.
- Make water your drink of choice over sugary drinks.

A way to ensure that you are maintaining a balanced diet is to look at what foods fill your plate. Most of your plate should be filled by vegetables and fruits. Fill 1/2 the plate with vegetables, 1/4 with meat/meat alternatives, and 1/4 with a starchy vegetable or whole grain serving. Water should be your drink of choice.

WHAT ARE NUTRITION CONSIDERATIONS FOR OLDER ADULTS WHO ARE MANAGING CHRONIC HEALTH CONDITIONS?



HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE (HYPERTENSION)

Salt raises our blood pressure. About 75% of the salt we eat on average comes from prepared foods such as canned or packaged soups, bread, cookies, breakfast cereals and frozen prepared foods.

If you have high blood pressure, you have to be more mindful about the amount of salt you eat. One solution is to shop in the outside aisles of the supermarket to avoid packaged foods, or choose those that say “low-salt.” Maintaining a healthy weight, staying physically active, limiting alcohol consumption, and eating lots of fruit and vegetables are also recommended ways to better control high blood pressure.



HEART DISEASE

If you have heart disease, or have had a stroke, having a diet based on Canada’s Food Guide is all the more important. Your heart will thank you for replacing fatty foods with fruits and vegetables. Some nutrition tips to help manage heart disease include:

- Choose to eat whole fruits and vegetables, rather than juices, for additional fibre.
- Foods high in antioxidants can help slow the build-up of cholesterol in your veins and arteries. Examples include: broccoli, peppers, strawberries, oranges, kiwi, cantaloupe, carrots, tomatoes, squash, pink grapefruit, sweet potatoes and swiss chard.

- Look for brand names that carry no-salt, low sugar and low-fat items. Beware that some products that say they are “fat free are high in sugar. So read the ingredients on the item before you buy or eat them.
- Avoid table salt, or use low-sodium heart health salt substitutes or flavour enhancers.



DIABETES

Maintaining good control of one’s blood sugars is extremely critical for people of all ages diagnosed with diabetes or pre-diabetes. Following the same dietary guidance in the above sections will also help you better control your blood sugars. Improved control of one’s blood sugars from the early stages of the disease onwards can help avoid some of the ravaging impacts of uncontrolled blood sugars in later life, including heart and kidney disease, loss of vision, circulation problems that can lead to amputations, and loss of mobility.



CANCER

Every individual with cancer will have different nutritional needs. If you are undergoing treatment for cancer, you may need more high protein and energy foods than usual. It may be easy to become dehydrated, so drinking a lot of water is recommended. You may wish to speak to your health care team about nutritional supplements that may be helpful for you to take to ensure proper protein, vitamin and mineral intake during your treatment and recovery.

WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION?

CANADA'S FOOD GUIDE

Canada's Food Guide provides advice on how to plan meals, eat well and maintain a balanced diet.



www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/canada-food-guide.html

DIETITIANS OF CANADA

Dietitians of Canada provides resources to help with healthy food choices, including links to several food trackers, self-assessment tools, cooking guides and recipes.



www.dietitians.ca

UNLOCK FOOD

Unlock Food (formerly Eat Right Ontario) offers A Guide to Healthy Eating for Older Adults, as well as advice about cooking and meal preparation.



www.unlockfood.ca
[www.unlockfood.ca/EatRightOntario/media/ERO_PDF/en/Seniors/Food-For-Healthy-Aging_E_Apr19-\(2\).pdf](http://www.unlockfood.ca/EatRightOntario/media/ERO_PDF/en/Seniors/Food-For-Healthy-Aging_E_Apr19-(2).pdf)

RELEVANT RESOURCES IN OUR SERIES

- Calcium, Vitamin D and Bone Health
- Living Longer, Living Well – Your Guide to Healthy Ageing

ADDITIONAL HEALTH RESOURCES IN OUR SERIES:

- Advance Care Planning: How to Start the Conversation
- Alcohol and Your Health
- General Tips for Memory Problems
- Improving Urinary Incontinence
- Managing Caregiver Stress
- Managing Chronic Pain
- Managing Common Mental Health Conditions in Older Adults
- Managing Constipation
- Managing Mild Cognitive Impairment, Alzheimer’s Disease And Other Dementias
- Managing Multiple Chronic Health Conditions
- Managing Sedative-Hypnotic Use Among Older Adults
- Managing Sleep in Older Adults
- Managing Substance Use and Addictive Disorders As You Age
- Preventing Falls at Home
- Recognizing and Managing Anxiety
- Recognizing and Managing Delirium
- Recognizing and Managing Depression
- Recognizing and Managing Hearing Loss
- Safe Medication Use for Older Adults
- Substitute Decision Makers and Powers of Attorney
- Understanding Your Palliative Care Options

ADDITIONAL COMMUNITY RESOURCES IN OUR SERIES:

- Community Transportation Options
- Driving Assessment Services
- Elder Abuse
- Funding for Mobility and Other Aids from the Assistive Devices Program
- Housing Options for Older Adults
- How to Register for Wheel-Trans
- Meals on Wheels

Visit www.sinaigeriatrics.ca/healtheducation for additional resources for older adults, families and caregivers.

NOTES



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