

Eat Right

Food, Nutrition and Health Tips from the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics



Eating Right for Older Adults

Eating right doesn't have to be complicated. Before a meal, think about what foods you are going to eat. Choose foods that provide the nutrients you need. Build a healthy plate with foods such as vegetables, fruits, whole grains, low-fat dairy and lean protein foods.

Consider the following tips to help you get started on your way to eating right.



Make half your plate fruits and vegetables.

Eat a variety of different colored vegetables, including dark-green, red and orange. Beans, peas, and lentils are also good choices. Fresh, frozen and canned vegetables can all be healthful options. Look for "reduced sodium" or "no-salt-added" on the labels.

Add fruit to meals and snacks. Choose fruits that are dried, frozen or canned in water or 100% juice, as well as fresh fruits.

Make at least half your grains whole.

Choose breads, cereals, crackers, and noodles made with 100% whole grains. Whole grain corn tortillas, brown rice, bulgur, millet, amaranth and oats all count as whole grains, too. Also, look for fiber-rich cereals to help stay regular and cereals that are fortified with vitamin B12.

Switch to fat-free or low-fat milk, yogurt and cheese.

Older adults need more calcium and vitamin D to help keep bones healthy. Include three servings of fat-free or low-fat milk, yogurt or cheese each day. If you are lactose intolerant, try lactose-free milk or a calcium-fortified soy beverage.

Vary your protein choices.

Eat a variety of foods from the protein food group each week, such as seafood, nuts, beans, peas, and lentils, as well as lean meat, poultry and eggs. Spread your protein intake throughout the day by including a lean source with meals and snacks. Protein foods are also a source of vitamin B12, which is a nutrient that decreases in absorption as we age or due to some medications.

Limit sodium, saturated fat and added sugars.

Look out for salt, or sodium, in foods you eat. Compare sodium in the foods you buy and choose those with lower numbers. Add spices or herbs to season food without adding salt.

Make major sources of saturated fats occasional choices, not every day foods. Examples of these include desserts, fried foods, pizza, and processed meats like sausages and hot dogs .

Switch from solid fats to oils when preparing foods.

Select fruit for dessert more often in place of desserts with added sugars.

Stay Well Hydrated

Drink plenty of fluid throughout the day. Choose unsweetened beverages, like water or milk, in place of sugary drinks.

Enjoy your food but be mindful of portion sizes.

Most older adults need fewer calories than in younger years. Avoid oversized portions. Try using smaller plates, bowls and glasses.

Cook more often at home, where you are in control of what's in your food.

When eating out, look for healthier menu options. Choose dishes that include vegetables, fruits and whole grains, along with a lean protein food. When portions are large, share a meal or take half home for later.

Be physically active your way.

Pick activities that you like and start by doing what you can. Every bit adds up and health benefits increase as you spend more time being active.

If you are currently inactive, check with your doctor concerning increased physical activity.

Consult a registered dietitian nutritionist if you have special dietary needs. A registered dietitian nutritionist can create a customized eating plan for you.

For a referral to a registered dietitian nutritionist and for additional food and nutrition information, visit www.eatright.org.



The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics is the world's largest organization of food and nutrition professionals. The Academy is committed to improving health and advancing the profession of dietetics through research, education and advocacy.

This tip sheet is provided by:

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