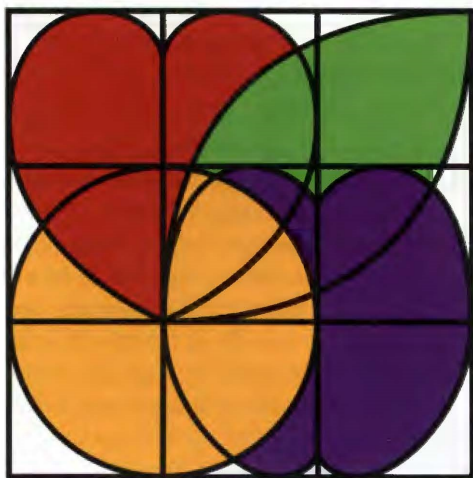


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The American Dietetic Association

Staying Healthy— A Guide for Older Adults



Did you know that...

- eating a wide variety of foods can help keep you healthy and protect you from nutrient deficiencies?
- being physically active increases your strength and flexibility?
- drinking enough liquid can help prevent constipation?
- for good health you should eat at least two servings of fruits and three servings of vegetables every day?

Staying healthy

Anyone who has lived a long time already knows something about staying healthy. But the effort to stay healthy shouldn't ever stop. Eating wisely and staying physically active should be lifelong goals.

If you're an older adult, it's important to *determine* your nutritional health by watching for warning signs of poor nutrition. Anyone with three or more of the following risk factors should consult a doctor, registered dietitian (RD), or other health care professional:

- D**isease
- E**ats poorly
- T**ooth loss or mouth pain
- E**conomic hardship
- R**educed social contact
- M**any medicines
- I**nvoluntary weight loss or gain
- N**eeds assistance in self-care
- E**lderly, above age 80

Keep your bones strong

As you age, you lose minerals from your bones. If you lose a lot of bone minerals, a disease called *osteoporosis* may develop. Osteoporosis causes your bones to break easily and take longer to heal. The good news is you can protect your bones.

Getting enough calcium at all ages is essential for strong bones. After age 50, your need for calcium actually increases. To meet your daily goal of 1200 milligrams of calcium, include a variety of calcium-rich foods, such as milk, yogurt, and cheese. Choose fat-free or lower-fat dairy products if you are watching your weight or trying to control your blood cholesterol level. Besides dairy products, you can also get calcium from sardines, canned salmon with bones, dark leafy greens (kale, turnip, and mustard greens), broccoli, dried beans, tofu prepared with calcium, dried figs, and calcium-fortified foods such as some juices, cereals, and breads. If you don't eat many foods that have calcium, ask a registered dietitian or doctor if you should take a calcium supplement.

Vitamin D helps your body absorb calcium. Like calcium, your need for vitamin D increases after age 50. Your body can make its own vitamin D if your skin is exposed to sunshine for 20 to 30 minutes a few times a week. Vitamin D is added to milk and may also be added to other foods, such as cereals. You'll find vitamin D listed on the Nutrition Facts panel if it has been added. In addition to getting enough calcium and vitamin D, include some form of physical activity every day to stay fit and help keep your bones strong.

Drink plenty of fluids

You need six to eight 8-ounce cups of water or other liquid each day. To meet these daily fluid needs, drink at least two glasses of water. The rest can come from other beverages, such as juice, lemonade, milk, coffee, tea, or soup.

Beverages that contain caffeine—such as regular coffee, tea, and colas—should not be your main sources of fluid. Caffeine causes you to urinate more than usual and may prevent you from meeting your fluid needs.

Here's an idea if you have trouble remembering how much water you've drunk during the day. Fill a jug or jar with 8 cups (64 ounces) of water each morning and place it in your refrigerator. Use that water to drink and to make juice, lemonade, soup, tea, and coffee. When the water is gone, you'll know you've met your water goal for the day.

A few words about constipation...

Constipation is a stubborn problem for many people as they age. Getting enough water, fiber, and physical activity are ways you can stay regular and avoid constipation. Water helps your body get rid of wastes and keeps stools softer. Fiber gives bulk to stools, making them easier to eliminate. Fiber-rich foods include whole-grain breads and cereals, legumes, vegetables, fruits, and nuts. Being active helps to keep your body regular by aiding digestion. If these remedies don't work, ask a registered dietitian or your doctor what other steps you can take.

Be active

It's never too late to get moving. No matter what your age, you can benefit from physical activity, even if you haven't been active for a long time. The reasons for being active are many. For example:

- Moving your body burns energy and aids in keeping a healthy weight.
- Weight-bearing activities, such as walking, help strengthen your bones.
- Regular physical activity helps keep your heart and lungs healthy.
- Being active helps keep your blood pressure, blood cholesterol, and blood sugar normal.
- Physical activity helps muscles stay strong and gives you better balance and flexibility.
- For those with trouble sleeping or loss of appetite, being active helps promote sleep and feelings of hunger.

Fitting physical activity into your daily routine can be easy and enjoyable. Aim for a total of 30 minutes on most, if not all, days. You can split your activity into three 10-minute spurts or do it all at one time. Walking is one of the easiest and most convenient ways to be active. Even activities like gardening, pushing a vacuum cleaner, taking the stairs instead of the elevator, carrying groceries, or walking from the far end of the parking lot count toward your daily activity.

Maintain a healthy weight

As you get older, you need fewer calories to maintain your weight, especially if you're less active. Carrying extra weight increases your risk for high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, and certain cancers. To control an expanding waistline, you may need to make some changes in your eating plan and activity level. For example:

- Look carefully at the food portions you serve yourself. Could some be smaller?
- Include regular physical activity (see panel 5).
- Eat regular meals. Meal skipping often leads to snacking and overeating.
- Choose snacks carefully, such as fresh or canned fruit, vegetables and fat-free dip, low-fat yogurt or cottage cheese, graham crackers, or trail mix with cereal, dried fruit, and peanuts.
- Trim fat from your food choices. Choose lean meat and trim visible fat before eating. Try lean ground turkey or lean ground beef in recipes, or use cooked beans (kidney, northern, or pinto) in place of ground meats in chili or lasagna. Bake, broil, microwave, or steam foods instead of frying them. Take the skin off turkey and chicken before eating. Use low-fat or fat-free milk or yogurt, and use less butter, margarine, cream, and sour cream. Switch to low-calorie salad dressings.

If sweets are your downfall, start by keeping fewer temptations around. When you have a taste for a sweet treat, try one of these lower-calorie ideas:

- fresh fruit on low-fat ice cream, frozen yogurt, or angel food cake
- sugar-free pudding made with fat-free milk
- fig bars, graham crackers, and gingersnaps, which have less fat than many other types of cookies

When weight loss is a problem

Maybe you're having the opposite problem—a poor appetite and weight loss. If you fill up quickly at mealtime, try eating five or six small meals a day. Try to have three different types of food at each meal: a fruit or vegetable, a bread or cereal, and a dairy food or a protein (meat, fish, poultry, beans, nuts, peanut butter, or eggs). If necessary, a registered dietitian or your doctor may suggest a canned nutrition supplement drink or vitamin or mineral supplements. Whether you need to keep weight on or take it off, you will have fewer problems if you stick to a regular meal schedule.

Food and medicine

When certain foods and medicines are taken together, they can interact and either enhance or hinder the action of your medication. Some medications should be taken with meals to prevent irritating your stomach, while others should be taken on an empty stomach. And some foods and medications shouldn't be consumed within several hours of each other. To get the full benefits of both food and medicine, follow the directions on your medication carefully. You'll find information about when, how much per dose, and how long to take the medication. Be sure to tell your doctor and pharmacist whether you are taking any over-the-counter medications, too.

Meals in minutes

Are you too busy to cook or sometimes don't feel like preparing meals? Fresh, frozen, canned, and dried foods can be used together to make quick, easy, and nutritious meals. Remember to include a variety of foods from each of the five food groups of the Food Guide Pyramid for Persons 50 Plus (see panel 10). Here are some quick and delicious mealtime suggestions:

- For an easy breakfast, add hot water or hot milk to instant cereal. It's just as fast as ready-to-eat cold cereal. Frozen waffles with syrup and fresh or canned fruit are also quick and tasty.
- Frozen meals that include a vegetable can be teamed with a salad and a glass of low-fat milk for a hearty lunch or dinner with little effort. For maximum nutrition, look for frozen meals with meat, poultry, or fish (preferably not fried); a starch (such as rice, pasta, or potato); and a vegetable. If you're watching your weight, choose from one of the many low-calorie frozen meals available.
- Prepare meals ahead for later in the week. Leftovers can often be used for another dish. For example, make spaghetti sauce with lean ground beef or turkey and serve over noodles one day. Add kidney beans, chopped vegetables, and chili seasoning for another meal.
- Precut fresh vegetables or plain frozen vegetables are convenient options. For an easy meal, stir-fry or saute fresh or frozen vegetable pieces in a little oil. To add protein to the meal, mix in cooked chicken pieces or a handful of peanuts and serve over rice.
- Freeze homemade soups, stews, lasagna, and other casseroles in small containers so you can thaw enough for one or two meals at a time.

■ For handy salads, wash, tear, and dry salad greens, and then store them in a plastic container in your refrigerator for later in the week. Or you can buy washed, cut salad greens in a bag. When you want a salad, put a handful of greens in a bowl and add your favorite toppings. Make a salad your meal by adding sliced cheese or meat, your favorite vegetables, kidney beans, or nuts, and serve with French bread and canned fruit.

More flavor, less salt (and sodium)

Many frozen and canned meals are high in sodium, a component of salt. If you're trying to limit your sodium intake, you'll want to look for products labeled low sodium or no added salt. Or perhaps you're bored with the same old foods and can't find flavors that appeal to you. In either case, try some new seasonings or experiment with salt-free seasoning blends. Here are a few ideas for cooking with herbs and spices:

- Basil, oregano, and Italian seasoning add exotic flavor to vegetables, pasta, and poultry.
- Carrots, winter squash, and creamed spinach taste great with a dash of nutmeg.
- Dill weed or dill seed makes an excellent seasoning for potato soup, cooked cabbage, or cole slaw.
- Simmer a bay leaf with your soups and stews for a subtle boost in flavor and aroma.
- Sage is an excellent accent for roasted poultry, poultry stews, and stuffings.
- Add a pinch of thyme to peas, lima beans, and other legumes.

Food Guide Pyramid for persons 50 plus

Now that you have the idea, here's an example of how to put together easy meals for a whole day of good nutrition:

Breakfast:

- 1 fresh orange or ½ grape-fruit
- ¾ cup bran flakes with ½ cup low-fat or fat-free milk
- 1 slice toast with margarine or jam
- coffee, tea, or water

Snack:

- 4 whole-grain crackers
- 1 cup fruit yogurt
- water

Lunch:

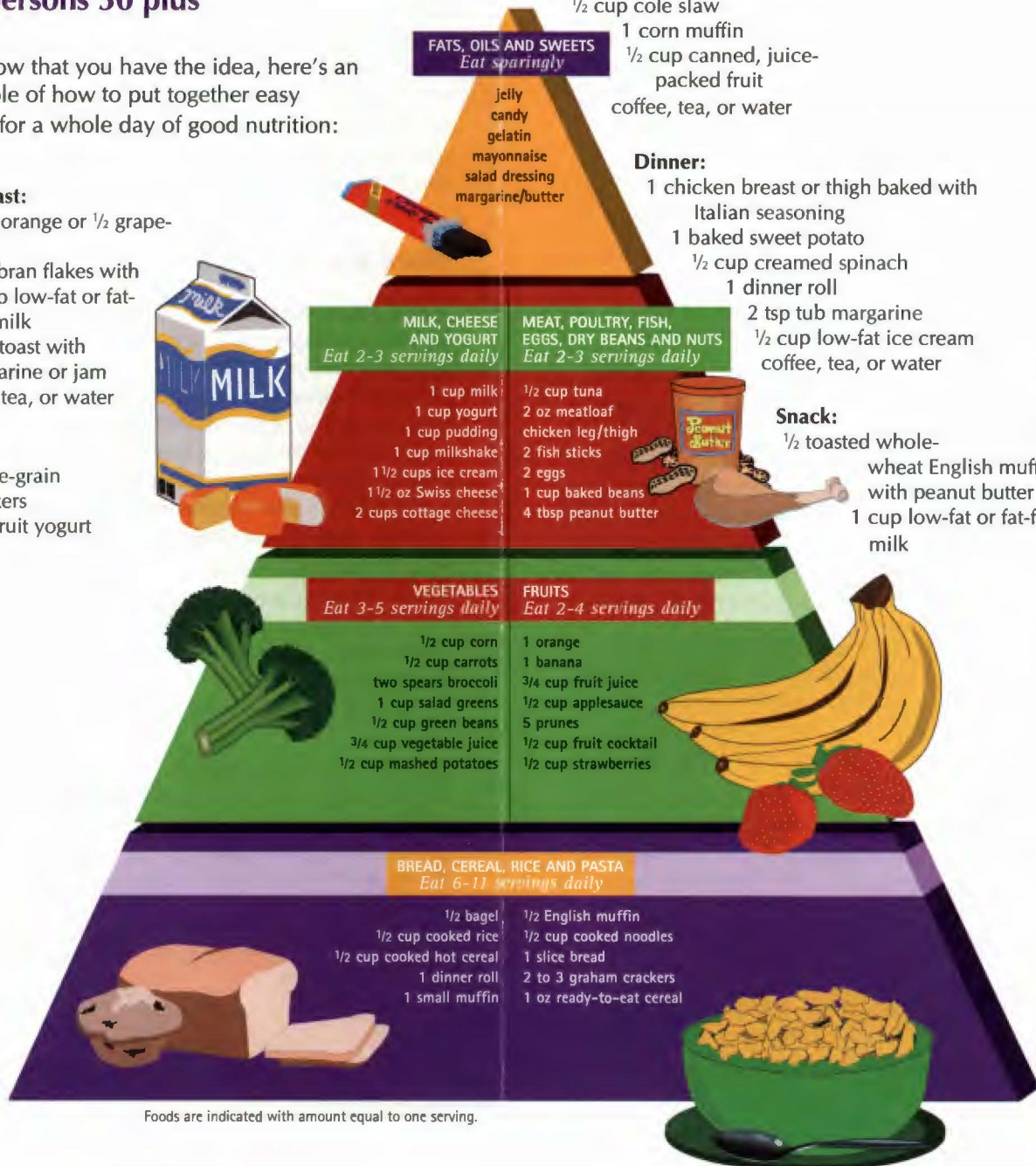
- 1 cup lentil or split-pea soup
- ½ cup cole slaw
- 1 corn muffin
- ½ cup canned, juice-packed fruit
- coffee, tea, or water

Dinner:

- 1 chicken breast or thigh baked with Italian seasoning
- 1 baked sweet potato
- ½ cup creamed spinach
- 1 dinner roll
- 2 tsp tub margarine
- ½ cup low-fat ice cream
- coffee, tea, or water

Snack:

- ½ toasted whole-wheat English muffin with peanut butter
- 1 cup low-fat or fat-free milk



More important nutrients: friends

One way to spark a tired appetite is to eat with friends, especially if you usually dine alone. Visit your local senior citizens center. Many serve a full midday meal on weekdays. In some communities, meals for seniors are served in other local buildings, such as churches or schools. Both are excellent places to meet old and new friends and to enjoy a meal that takes more work to prepare than you might want to try. Some seniors have weekly or monthly potluck suppers in their homes with their friends. They take turns hosting meals, and everyone brings a favorite dish.

A registered dietitian can help

To obtain a referral to a registered dietitian in your area or to listen to nutrition messages in English or Spanish, call The American Dietetic Association's Consumer Nutrition Hot Line at 800/366-1655. Visit ADA's Web site at www.eatright.org.

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