



Specialized nutrition advice for older adults

Madison - Nutrition remains important throughout life. Good nutrition in the later years can help reduce the risk of diseases that strike older adults. This contributes to a higher quality of life, enabling older people to maintain their independence, according to Susan Nitzke, University of Wisconsin-Extension nutrition specialist.

In addition to general advice for all Americans, the new Dietary Guidelines for Americans have key recommendations for adults over age 50.

- Consume extra Vitamin B-12 from fortified foods or supplements. “Almost all multivitamin supplements and fortified foods, such as breakfast cereals, have vitamin B-12 in a form that is very easy for the body to use,” says Nitzke. “As people age, their body’s ability to use this vitamin from food tends to decrease, so they need a little extra from fortified food or a supplement.”
- Consume plenty of calcium and Vitamin D. As you get older, your bones get thinner and may break more easily. The Dietary Guidelines recommend at least three cups of milk or equivalent foods per day for older adults, along with fortified foods and supplements to boost Vitamin D levels. “In a study at Tufts University, 176 men and 213 women over age 65 reduced their risk of breaking a bone if they took a supplement containing calcium and vitamin D for three years,” says Nitzke.
- Be physically active. Participating in regular physical activity helps maintain your physical and mental health and quality of life as you get older. “Being active may be more difficult as you get older,” says Nitzke, “but even small amounts of physical activity like walking, swimming, or strength training with weights can make a difference in your health.” If you have health concerns or a painful condition like arthritis, ask your health care provider to recommend activities that are safe and appropriate for you.
- Reduce sodium and increase potassium. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend that older adults consume no more than 1500 milligrams of sodium and increase their potassium intakes to 4700 milligrams per day. “Reducing sodium and increasing potassium are both helpful in preventing high blood pressure,” says Nitzke. Most of the sodium in our diets comes from salt that is added to processed foods. To reduce sodium, read food labels and look for products with less than five percent of the Daily Value for sodium. Fruits, vegetables and milk are good sources of potassium.
- Play it safe with food. Avoid unpasteurized milk, unpasteurized apple juice, raw sprouts, and raw or undercooked eggs, meat, poultry, fish or shellfish. Deli meats and frankfurters should be reheated until they are steaming hot. “Older adults are more vulnerable to foodborne illness, so it is important to take these precautions when selecting and preparing food,” says Nitzke.

For more information, contact your county UW-Extension office. Information is also available from the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and MyPyramid (<http://www.healthierus.gov> and <http://www.mypyramid.gov>), the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (<http://www.cdc.gov/aging/index.htm>), the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (<http://vm.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/seniors.html>), and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/physical/growing_stronger/index.htm and <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/sgr/olderad.htm>).

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