



Eat well, live well



Eating well is key to a person's physical well-being at any stage in life. But this becomes even more crucial in the golden years. Here's a guide to good nutrition and healthy eating.

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e can see physical changes in our bodies as we get older – the character and laugh lines that emerge, the silvering of our hair, overall slowing down as we retire

and take life at a more leisurely pace. As with all stages of our lives, what we consume day-to-day affects our well-being – it either contributes or takes away from it. As we get older, it pays to give extra attention to our diet, because good nutrition goes a long way to promoting health and preventing illness.

Nutrition & ageing

Being informed is the first step to ensuring that. While we can see the outward signs of ageing, there are a host of internal changes too that affects how and what we should eat to stay healthy.

- ❁ **Metabolic rates and energy needs decrease.** In our later years, we need to get the same amount of nutrients into our systems but with fewer calories to prevent weight gain. So choose nutrient-dense foods.
- ❁ **Lean tissue mass decreases with reduced physical activity.** Not all of us will run the marathon at 75, so we'll need more protein-rich foods to maintain lean tissue mass.
- ❁ **Skin synthesis of vitamin D diminishes.** Older skin is less adept at converting ultraviolet light in sunshine into vitamin D, so we will need a dietary source (eg. oily fish, eggs, dairy) or supplements to help us along.

- ❁ **Secretion of stomach acids decrease.** This affects the absorption of vitamin B12, folic acid, calcium, iron, and zinc and may result in deficiencies. We may have to increase our dietary sources of such vitamins and consider supplements. Check with the doctor first though.

It is important to obtain specific instructions from a registered dietitian or your doctor on which foods are allowed, how much, and how they should be prepared. This is because some foods (eg. Chinese herbs, alcohol, etc) or medications may interact with each other in a harmful way.

Healthy eating

Complications that arise from age-related conditions can also affect how we eat. Do you suffer from constipation – common among older folks – a sore mouth, nausea, cramps, heartburn or bloating? Plan your menu to counter or avoid these situations.

Here are some general tips:

- ❁ **Eat a wider range of foods** which span a variety of texture, colour, and temperature. Eating healthily also means eating happily, so include favourite dishes.
- ❁ **Eat plenty of vegetables and wholegrains.** Wholegrains and fortified cereals contain nutrients such as folate, zinc, calcium, vitamins E and B-12, which are often lacking in the diets of older people. Change to eating wholemeal bread and brown rice instead of overly refined white bread and white rice.

Add chopped, dark green leafy vegetables like spinach or kailan into soups, stews or rice dishes for more iron.

- ❁ **Cut down on high-fat foods.** For example, use low fat, high calcium milk, instead of full cream or condensed milk. Reduce the oil you use in cooking, and cut down on deep-fried foods and creamy desserts.
- ❁ **Go easy on sugar and salt.**
- ❁ **Drink lots of fluid** – about six to eight glasses a day.
- ❁ **Eat more fruits.** They are rich in dietary fibre, vitamins and minerals, phytochemicals (plant chemicals) and antioxidants. High fibre foods are especially good to counter constipation. Add them to salads, or blend them in favourite fruit cocktail with lots of ice. Great for a hot day!
- ❁ **Take more calcium.** Dairy products such as milk, cheese and yoghurt are rich sources. Fish with edible bones (eg. ikan bilis, sardines), dried peas and beans, various forms of bean-curd products, fortified soy bean milk and orange juice are good alternatives.
- ❁ **Cut down on gas-producing foods.** If you tend to feel bloated, avoid foods like cabbage, onions, nuts, beer and carbonated drinks.
- ❁ **Make dining enjoyable.** Create a pleasant setting for your meals. Include flowers, place mats, matching tableware, attractive glasses, good ventilation and lighting. ♥