



Healthy Eating and Healthy Aging for Adults

Eating well and being active can help you stay healthy and strong as you age. Eating a variety of nutritious foods and beverages each day helps to:

- Keep your bones and muscles strong
- Build a healthy immune system
- Prevent chronic disease and illness
- Manage health conditions like high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes

Healthy eating is about the foods you eat and more. It's about preparing and enjoying food with others, sharing food traditions and eating mindfully. Mindful eating includes taking time to eat and being aware of when you are hungry and full. Being mindful can help you make healthier choices more often.

What foods should I eat?

Healthy eating patterns such as Canada's food guide include a variety of vegetables and fruits, whole grains and protein foods. These foods will provide you with the nutrients and energy you need for good health.

Use your plate as a guide. Aim to fill:

- Half your plate with vegetables and fruits
 - Fresh, cooked, frozen and low sodium canned are good choices
 - Try preparing them in different ways, such as roasted, steamed, braised or stir fried
 - Keep cut-up vegetables in the fridge or a bowl of fruit on the counter so they are quick to grab
- One quarter of your plate with whole grain foods such as whole grain pasta and bread, oatmeal, brown and wild rice and barley
 - Whole grains have vitamins, minerals and more fibre than refined grains.
- One quarter of your plate with protein foods such as dried beans, peas and lentils, meat, tofu, fish, poultry, nuts and seeds, eggs, lower fat milk, yogurt, cheese and fortified soy beverage.
 - Try including protein foods that come from plants often

Like Canada's food guide, many healthy eating patterns encourage foods that come from plants. Eating plant-based foods can help you get more fibre.

Fibre helps prevent constipation, which is more common as we age. If you increase the amount of fibre you eat, drink enough fluid to keep your bowel movements soft.

A type of fibre called soluble fibre can help manage blood sugar (glucose) and help lower blood cholesterol. Soluble fibre is found in oats, barley, dried beans, peas and lentils, and nuts and seeds.

What should I drink?

Water is the best choice to quench your thirst.

Other healthy drink options include:

- Plain milk and unsweetened fortified soy beverage
- Unsweetened fortified plant-based beverages such as almond, oat or rice beverage
- Unsweetened tea or coffee

Your body needs fluids to function. When you don't get enough fluids your body becomes dehydrated. Dehydration can make you feel tired and confused. The best way to stay hydrated is to drink water throughout the day.

What nutrients are important as we age?

As you get older, your body's ability to use or absorb some nutrients may change. It's important to get enough of the following vitamins and minerals:

Calcium

Calcium is important for healthy bones, muscles and nerves and helps prevent osteoporosis. Women over the age of 50 and men over the age of 70 have higher calcium needs than younger adults.

High calcium foods include canned fish with bones, milk and milk products and calcium-fortified soy beverage. Fortified almond, oat and rice beverages are high in calcium and vitamin D, and are almost always low in protein and fat.

Vitamin D

Vitamin D helps your body absorb and use calcium for healthy bones and muscles. Adults over 50 years of age need to take a daily vitamin D supplement of 400 IU in addition to eating foods that are sources of vitamin D.

Good food sources of vitamin D include fresh or canned salmon, herring and egg yolk. Vitamin D fortified foods include cow's milk, fortified plant-based beverages and margarine.

Vitamin B12

Vitamin B12 helps your nervous system work, helps make red blood cells and prevents a type of anemia. Adults over 50 years need to eat vitamin B12 fortified foods or take a daily supplement containing vitamin B12.

Natural sources of vitamin B12 include meat, fish, poultry, eggs and milk products.

Vitamin B12 fortified foods can include meat substitutes, fortified nutritional yeast and fortified plant-based beverages. Check the label to see if they are fortified with vitamin B12.

Do I need to limit some nutrients?

Diets high in sodium, sugar or saturated fat can increase your risk of chronic disease. Limit the following nutrients:

Sodium

Too much sodium can increase the risk of high blood pressure and heart disease. Most Canadians eat too much sodium.

The main source of sodium is processed foods including bakery products, appetizers, entrees, deli meats, hot dogs, cheese, soups, sauces and condiments.

- If you eat processed foods high in sodium, eat them less often and in smaller amounts. Choose low sodium or no sodium versions
- Use the food label to help you choose foods lower in sodium. The percent daily value (%DV) shows you if the food has a little or a lot of sodium. 5% DV or less is a little. 15% DV or more is a lot
- Cook from scratch more often using vegetables and fruits, whole grains and protein foods that are lower in sodium
- Limit salt. It is high in sodium. Flavour your food with garlic, onion, lemon or ginger, and herbs and spices such as basil, cilantro, cumin or mint

Sugar

Sugary foods and drinks add calories to the diet, which can lead to weight gain and increase the risk of type 2 diabetes. Limit the following sugary foods:

- Regular soft drinks, fruit drinks, fruit punch, 100% fruit juice, sports and energy drinks
- Sweetened coffee and tea, specialty coffees and teas and hot chocolate
- Sweetened alcoholic drinks
- Cakes, cookies, muffins, pastry, chocolate bars and candy, ice cream and sweetened cereals

Try fruit, cut-up vegetables, nuts and seeds for healthier snacks. When baking, look for low sugar, high fibre recipes.

Saturated Fat

Replacing saturated fat with healthier fats can help reduce the risk of heart disease. Choose foods with healthy fats such as:

- Fatty fish like salmon, herring or mackerel
- Nuts and seeds
- Tofu
- Vegetable oil such as canola or olive oil
- Soft margarine

Limit foods high in saturated fat including:

- Fatty meats and processed meats
- High fat yogurt, cheese and ice cream
- Lard, ghee, butter, palm oil, coconut oil and hard margarine
- Most deep fried foods

For More Information

- Canada's Food Guide <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/>
- Healthy Eating for Seniors Handbook <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/seniors/health-safety/active-aging/healthy-eating/healthy-eating-for-seniors-handbook>
- Healthlink BC File #68e Food Sources of Calcium and Vitamin D <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/sources-calcium-vitamin-d>
- HealthLinkBC File #68f Dietary Fats and Your Health <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/dietary-fats>