

Fact Sheet – Healthy Eating

Healthy Eating When You're Older

As we get older we often need fewer kilojoules because we are less active than when we were younger. However, we still need a similar amount of nutrients, sometimes more. For example, as we age our requirement for calcium increases and we need extra serves of low fat milk, yoghurt and cheese.

This means our choices must be nutrient dense but not energy dense and we should be careful to choose discretionary foods only occasionally as these are higher in kilojoules.

Dietary Guideline 1

To achieve and maintain a healthy weight, be physically active and choose amounts of nutritious food and drinks to meet your energy needs.

- Older people should eat nutritious foods and keep physically active to help maintain muscle strength and a healthy weight.

Achieving and maintaining a healthy weight can help older people keep more active, manage their health problems better and live life more. The best way to do this is to try to follow the recommended number of serves from the Five Food Groups, avoid extra serves and discretionary food and drinks.

However we also know that people who are over 65 often have better health if they carry a little extra weight and have a slightly higher body mass index. Sometimes too, people with chronic health problems can put themselves at risk of malnutrition by restricting what they eat. If you are unsure about the benefits of losing extra weight, talk to your health professional.

Dietary Guideline 2

Enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods from the five food groups every day.

Circumstances, health problems, budgets and eating issues can mean that our range of foods gets smaller as we get older. However it remains important to eat widely from all the food groups to make sure we get the nutrients we need. Trouble shooting and a few tips can keep a wide variety of foods in our meals and snacks. If your budget is more limited, plan well, use what's available and buy only what you need. If you're cooking for one, collect some healthy, but quick and easy ideas and try to organise to eat regularly with friends or family. If nuts, grains and hard fruits and vegetables are a problem for your teeth, go for milled whole grains, soft cooked and canned fruits and vegetables and nut pastes.

Be careful to follow food safety guidelines, because food borne illnesses can hit older people particularly hard.

Dietary Guideline 3

Limit intake of foods and drinks containing fat, added salt, added sugars and alcohol

It's always good to limit saturated fats, added salt, added sugars, alcohol and low fibre choices for good health. However older people are also more likely to be living with a chronic disease and part of their self-management might involve careful attention to choosing foods. Sometimes though, limiting fats, added salt and added sugars can mean a person who is at risk of malnutrition, actually eats too few nutrients and kilojoules and can put themselves at risk. For some people it's not straight forward and they need to talk to their health professional about the benefits and risks.

Older people can also find that they need to eat more high fibre foods and drink more water to avoid constipation as bowels tend to slow down with age.

Recommended Number of Serves for Adults

The dietary patterns in the table below provide the nutrients and energy needed by all men and women of average height with sedentary to moderate activity levels. Additional serves of the Five Food Groups or unsaturated spreads or discretionary choices are needed only by adults who are taller, more active or in the higher end of a particular age group, to meet additional energy requirements.

Recommended average daily number of serves from each of the Five Food Groups*						Additional serves if taller or more active
	Vegetables & legumes/ beans	Fruit	Grain (cereal) foods (mostly wholegrain)	Lean Meat, poultry, fish, eggs, seeds, legumes, nuts	Milk, yoghurt, cheese (mostly reduced fat)	Approx number of serves from the 5 food groups
Men 19-50	6	2	6	3	2.58	0-3
Men 51-70	5.5	2	6	2.5	2.5	0-2.5
Men 70+	5	2	4.5	2.5	3.5	0-2.5
Women 19-50	5	2	6	2.5	2.5	0-2.5
Women 51-70	5	2	4	2	4	0-2.5
Women 70+	5	2	8.5	3.5	2.5	0-2.5

*includes an allowance for unsaturated spreads or oils, nuts or seeds (4 serves (28-40g) per day for men less than 70 years of age; 2 serves (14-20g) per day for women and older men.



Information provided by NSW Meals on Wheels

Source: <https://www.eatforhealth.gov.au/eating-well/healthy-eating-throughout-all-life/healthy-eating-when-you%E2%80%99re-older>