

Eat Well, Age Well

Good nutrition is important during every stage of life. As you get older, it becomes even more significant. Eating a low-salt, low-fat diet that is rich in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains may help reduce your risk of developing a number of chronic conditions associated with aging, including diabetes, heart disease, cancer, and stroke. In addition, eating well helps your bones and immune system remain strong and gives you more energy. Following a healthy diet can set you on the road to leading a long, healthy and comfortable life.

Eating well means consuming a wide variety of healthy foods that provide your body with the nutrients it needs to function properly. When planning your meals and snacks, it is important to choose nutrient-dense foods that are high in essential nutrients but low in calories.



Examples include fruits, vegetables, and whole grains such as whole wheat bread, whole wheat pasta, brown rice, and whole grain cereals. It is equally important to avoid consuming “empty calories” that provide little nutritional value. Empty calories can be found in foods and beverages that are high in fat and sugar, such as cookies, chips, alcoholic beverages and soft drinks.

A diet that includes the proper nutrients is critical to preventing or delaying the onset of certain health problems associated with aging. As you get older, your nutritional needs change. For example, as you age, your body may not burn off all of the energy, or calories, you take in when you eat. That is because the body uses energy at a slower rate, and many older adults aren't as physically active. This means that your daily calorie requirements will be less than they were when you were younger.

While your body may require fewer calories, the need for some vitamins and minerals, such as calcium and vitamins D and B12, increases. Calcium and vitamin D are necessary to maintain strong, healthy bones and teeth. Eating foods rich in calcium and vitamin D can help prevent or slow osteoporosis, a condition in which your bones become smaller, more fragile, and can easily break. Older adults should consume 1200 milligrams (mgs) of calcium and 600 international units (IU) of vitamin D a day. Good dietary sources of calcium include milk, yogurt, cheese, almonds, and green leafy vegetables, such as turnip greens and broccoli. Good dietary sources of vitamin D include egg yolks, and fatty fish, such as salmon, tuna and herring. Many foods, such as milk and soy beverages are also fortified with Vitamin D. Vitamin B12 keeps your nervous system working normally, and is essential for the formation of red blood cells. This vitamin helps you feel energetic and alert.

When you were young, your body could easily absorb all of the vitamin B12 it needed from natural sources, including meat, fish, milk, yogurt and cheese.

As you get older, your body does not absorb vitamin B12 as well; therefore, the daily requirements for this vitamin increase as you age. Adults over age 50 need approximately 2.5 micrograms (mcg) of B12 a day. In addition to natural sources, you can also obtain this vitamin from foods fortified with B12, such as veggie meats (tofu patties) and fortified soy beverages.

Your nutritional needs are based on a variety of factors, including your age, gender, body weight, activity level, and current health status. It is important to talk to your doctor or a dietitian about your individual nutritional needs and develop a healthy plan that is right for you. The best way to get the nutrients you need is from the foods you eat; however, as you age, your body can have difficulty getting all of the nutrients that you need from your food alone.



In addition, certain health conditions can limit the foods you can eat. In these cases, taking a multivitamin/mineral supplement intended specifically for people over 50 may be beneficial. Talk to your doctor about your specific eating habits and whether you should take a multivitamin/mineral supplement. Your doctor can also tell you about other supplements that may be helpful, potential negative side effects and how the supplements will interact with medications you may be taking. Remember that multivitamins and mineral supplements are intended to be a “supplement” to what you already eat, and should not replace healthy eating.

Aging is a fact of life. You cannot stop the clock or reverse the aging process, but your daily lifestyle choices can make a difference in your overall health and well-being. Eating well is vital for good health and can help you lead a longer, healthier life. It is never too late to change your eating habits. The healthy habits you form today can help you maintain good health in the future and help you look and feel better in the years to come.

