

Good nutrition for seniors

FAQ

Should food be considered preventative health care?

Good nutrition is the cornerstone of good health, promoting health and well-being, but also reducing the risk of diet-related conditions (e.g. hypertension, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and obesity) and chronic diseases (e.g. cardiovascular disease, heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and some cancers).

What foods should you be eating if you're older?

- colourful fruits and vegetables like sweet potato, beetroot, oranges and apples
- legumes like kidney beans, chickpeas and lentils
- whole grain breads and cereals
- lean meat, oily fish, poultry and eggs
- dairy products like milk, yogurt and cheese
- nuts and seeds
- plenty of water.

What key nutrients do seniors need?

Nutrient	Why it's important	Food sources
Calcium and Vitamin D	Bone health.	Three serves of calcium-rich foods per day e.g. dairy (milk, cheese and yogurts), canned fish with soft bones (salmon and tuna) and dark green, leafy vegetables (e.g. kale, silverbeet and spinach).
Fibre	Regular bowel movements; helps prevent heart disease and type 2 diabetes.	Wholegrain breads, cereals, beans, peas, fruit and vegetables.
Vitamin B12	Deficiency can cause anaemia, nerve problems and poor memory.	Fortified cereals, lean meat, dairy and seafood (clams, mussels and crab).
Omega-3 fatty acids	Anti-inflammatory; reduces symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis, macular degeneration and Alzheimer's disease.	Two serves of oily fish per week (e.g. salmon, tuna and sardines), walnuts, flaxseeds and avocados.
Potassium	Bone health; reduces high blood pressure.	Bananas, plums, prunes and potatoes with skins on.

How many kilojoules should a person over 70 be consuming?

	Sedentary	Active
Male (over 70)	2000 calories per day	2600 calorie per day
Female (over 70)	1600 calories per day	2000 calories per day

What are some red flags that might show that someone isn't getting their nutritional requirements?

- loss of appetite
- digestive issues
- sudden weight fluctuations, particularly weight loss
- changes in appearance of skin tone
- mental health issues e.g. cognitive problems, depression and lethargy
- recent illness.

Should seniors be taking supplements like vitamins?

Supplements can help fill gaps in our diet. Always consult your GP before starting a supplement, and choose a multivitamin that provides 100 percent of recommended vitamins and minerals to avoid toxic overdose.

How much salt do we need?

To prevent chronic disease, adults over 51 should consume no more than 1500 milligrams (3/4 teaspoon) of sodium per day and try to avoid overly processed and packaged foods.

Should we try to avoid a lot of packaged or tinned foods?

Yes, aim for fresh, whole foods - fruits, vegetables, grains, lean meat, poultry, fish and eggs.

Does someone living with dementia have special nutritional requirements?

Nutritional requirements are like other people their age, but research says eating these foods can help prevent or reduce cognitive decline:

- colourful fruits and vegetables, especially green, leafy vegetables
- legumes
- unsaturated fatty acids e.g. avocado, nut, seeds and oily fish.

What role can professionals like dietitians, speech pathologists, or occupational therapists play in assisting seniors with nutritional needs?

Professional	How they can help
Dietitians	Provide expert nutrition advice for people of all ages and prescribe dietary treatments for a wide range of conditions, including digestive issues, food allergies, type 2 diabetes and obesity.
Speech pathologists	Assist with dysphasia (i.e. difficulty swallowing) which can lead to poor nutrition and dehydration. They may recommend changes to the textures of foods and drinks, and provide exercises and techniques to help people swallow safely.
Occupational therapists	Enhance patient's functional independence. Help people eat healthy food by assisting with meal planning, shopping, and preparing well-balanced meals.

When people get older does their appetite change?

Yes, generally appetite is reduced due to illness or medical conditions. Dietary restrictions can also reduce the type and amount of food an older person can eat, increasing risk of malnutrition.

Does the appearance of food matter when considering nutritional needs?

The appearance of food is particularly important with seniors due to reduced appetite. Food that looks appetizing may help increase hunger.

How important is taste for seniors?

It's a common misconception that older people want bland food. Taste buds start to shrink and disappear as you age, so it's important to keep food appetising by adding flavour in the form of herbs and spices.

What is an easy way for someone living at home to add nutrition to their day?

Having snacks on hand that are high in protein, calcium and vitamin D, such as a milk, yogurt, cheese and nuts.

Special thanks to Chorus RAS Assessor Frances Sheehan. Interested in learning more about nutrition for seniors? Listen to our podcast - [Chorus Voices Episode 34: More than a meal](#).