

# Proper Nutrition for Healthy aging



## Practical Tips and Suggestions for Seniors



INSTITUT UNIVERSITAIRE DE GÉRIATRIE DE MONTRÉAL

# Proper Nutrition for Practical Tips and Suggestions for Seniors



# Healthy aging

Did you know that improved nutrition can delay certain physical changes associated with aging and even help to reduce the risks of chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes and hypertension?

With so much information out there, eating well can present a puzzling challenge. If you are a senior, this brochure is intended for you. Here are a few practical tips and suggestions aimed at helping you to maintain a healthy and balanced diet.

# The body changes, and so do its nutri

The body's nutritional needs at 30 may not be what they are at age 50 or 70. The aging body undergoes changes that influence its nutritional needs. Here are a few examples of nutrients that are particularly important for seniors.



# tional needs

## Calcium

To maintain a good bone mass, it is essential to consume at least three to four portions of dairy products per day. Increased calcium intake can also be achieved by eating almonds, Brazil nuts and certain green vegetables.

Grocery stores also carry calcium-enriched beverages such orange juice, milk and soy milk. However, enriched orange juice does not contain vitamin D, which promotes calcium absorption.

To increase your calcium intake...

you can enrich your milk by adding powdered skim milk: 1/4 cup of milk powder per cup of milk produces milk that is 66% richer in calcium and protein.

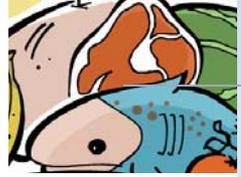


## Fibre

The highly unpleasant problem of constipation is widespread among seniors. To relieve constipation, women are advised to gradually integrate into their diet 21 grams of dietary fibre per day, while the amount recommended for men is 30 grams per day. To measure your daily intake, read your food labels! Foods that contain fibre include whole grain products, fruits and vegetables, and nuts.

To easily  
increase your  
fibre intake...

add wheat or oat bran to dessert recipes, yogurt or cereal. A tablespoon of wheat bran is equivalent to 1.5 grams of fibre.



## Protein

Unlike sugar or fat, proteins are not stored by the body. Thus, if protein intake is insufficient, the body will draw on the immune system and the muscles to meet its needs. It is therefore essential to include a good source of protein with every meal. Protein is found in meat, poultry, fish, legumes, eggs, dairy products, tofu and nuts.

To calculate a portion of meat... use the palm of your hand. A half-full palm is equivalent to a small portion.



## Vitamin B<sub>12</sub>

A vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency can lead to fatigue and to certain nervous system disorders that are sometimes irreversible. According to experts, 10 to 30% of seniors have difficulty absorbing vitamin B<sub>12</sub> from animal-based products (meat, poultry, fish, eggs, milk). Persons 50 and over are therefore advised to take a vitamin B<sub>12</sub> supplement or to consume foods enriched with vitamin B<sub>12</sub>, such as soy beverages, vegetarian meat analogue products and certain breakfast cereals (see nutritional information table on the product).

### The use of antacids...

to relieve heartburn reduces the absorption of vitamin B<sub>12</sub>. Thus, frequent antacid users are at greater risk of a vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency.



## Vitamin E

Vitamin E is among the body's principal antioxidants. Antioxidants protect the cellular membranes against free radicals (substances responsible for the aging of cells and for certain diseases). Vitamin E is found in nuts and grains, peanut butter, certain vegetable oils (wheat germ and sunflower oils), margarine, wheat germ, sweet potatoes and canned tuna. While it is possible to take vitamin E supplements, studies have yet to prove their effectiveness. It is therefore preferable to meet the body's needs through nutrition.

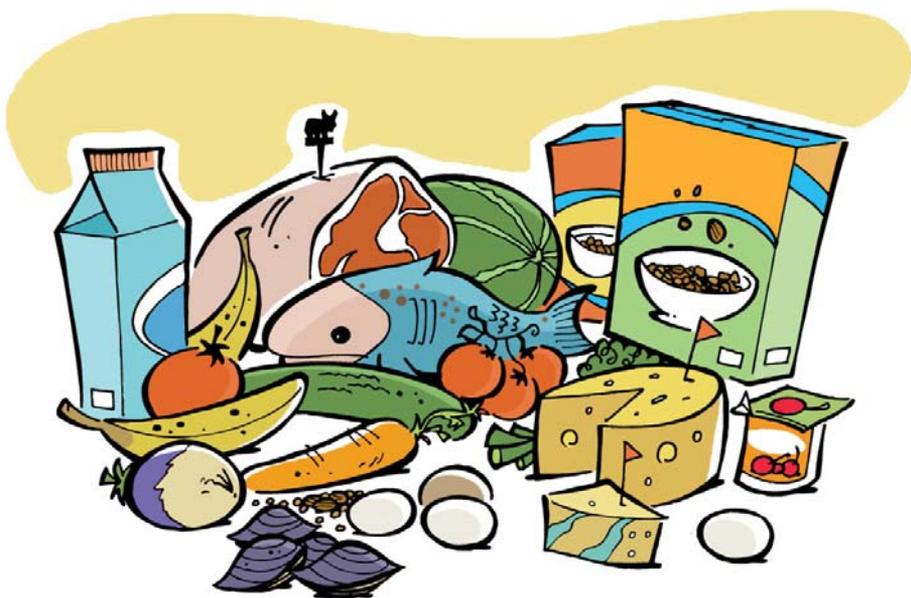
If your dentition  
prevents you  
from eating  
whole nuts...

crush them in a coffee grinder  
before adding them to your  
cereal or dessert.

Make the most of your  
nutrition by eating a

# variety of food!

It is important to eat a broad range of foods to fulfil your nutritional needs – variety stimulates your taste buds and keeps your food flavourful! To stay healthy, seniors are advised to consume foods from at least three different food groups with each meal.





## Food groups

### Cereals

These include pre-cooked cereals (wheat, oats, millet, rice, etc.), breakfast cereals and flour-based products (pasta, bread, etc.). This group provides a small amount of **protein**, energy in the form of complex carbohydrates, **fibre** and mainly **B-complex vitamins**.

### Fruits and vegetables

This group includes fruits and vegetables, be they fresh, cooked, frozen, canned, dried or in juice form. Fruits and vegetables provide many vitamins, including **vitamin A** and **vitamin C**, **folic acid** as well as several substances that have a protective effect on the health of the heart and cells.

To optimize your intake of fibre, vitamins and minerals...

opt for whole-grain cereals as well as dark and coloured (green, orange, red and blue) fruits and vegetables.



### Dairy products

Dairy products include milk (pasteurized, condensed and powdered) and milk-based foods (soups and desserts, milkshakes and flavoured milk, yogurt, cheese, etc.). Dairy products are an important source of **calcium, vitamin B12** and **protein**.

### To prepare a milkshake...

using a blender, combine milk, ice cream, fruits or jam. Use your imagination to create various flavours (vanilla ice cream and strawberries, chocolate ice cream and bananas, etc.).

### Meats and meat substitutes

Meats and meat substitutes include meat, poultry, variety meats, eggs, fish, seafood, legumes (lentils, kidney beans, chick peas, dried peas and baked beans), nuts and grains. Meats and meat substitutes provide mainly **protein, iron** and **vitamin B12**.



## Pleasure foods

Pleasure foods include foods and beverages that don't come under the four food groups. And while several of these foods are rich in fat and sugar, they are precious allies, as flavour and taste must be more pronounced with age to be appreciated. Unless there is a contraindication owing to your medical condition, do not hesitate to add the following pleasure foods to your meals:

- Butter and margarine, oils and salad dressings
- Condiments (ketchup, mustard, mayonnaise, etc.)
- Jam, honey and syrup
- Fine herbs and spices
- Potato chips
- Pastries
- Tea, coffee and soft drinks
- Alcohol in moderation (beware of medication-alcohol interactions – always check with your pharmacist.)

### Opt for good fats...

such as non-hydrogenated soft margarine, and monounsaturated and polyunsaturated oils (ex: olive, canola, soya, corn, sunflower), which also provide **vitamin E**.

# Maintain a healthy weight

With age, the notion of a “healthy” weight takes on added importance. If you lose weight following a bereavement or an illness, seek advice on how to regain that weight. Your weight should not decrease with age – on the contrary, as muscle and fat are distributed differently in the body, you should experience a slight weight gain.





Unless otherwise indicated by your physician or dietician, do not embark on a weight loss program. Low-fat and low-sugar diets provide less energy to the body, while low-sodium diets may reduce the desire to eat. Diets that are too restrictive are even cited as a cause of dietary deficiencies among seniors and may do more harm than good. To go about your daily business, you must have a sufficient quantity of energy!

If you are unable to maintain a healthy weight, consult your physician or dietician to re-evaluate your nutrition.

In persons age  
60 and over...

a slight weight gain can be healthy in that it provides protection in the event of involuntary weight loss linked to an illness or accident.



## Proper hydration

While thirst decreases with age, this doesn't mean that the body requires no water – quite the contrary!

Unless there is a medical contraindication (heart, liver or kidney failure), women should drink at least 2 litres (approximately 8 glasses) of fluids per day and men at least 2.5 litres (approximately 10 glasses) per day. And not just water! Hot beverages, fruit or vegetable juices, milk, drinking yogurt and soups are also liquids. Pay special attention to staying hydrated during heat waves.

# Stimulating your appetite

As we age, the body undergoes changes in the secretion and function of hormones and enzymes. In some people, these changes can lead to a loss of appetite and an increase in satiation (the sensation of having had enough).

While your appetite may drop off, your nutritional needs do not necessarily follow suit. In fact, since food is no longer absorbed as effectively, the body's needs can actually increase.



# Here are a few suggestions

aimed at ensuring that you **eat**  
to satisfy your basic energy needs.

**Stay active: walk, dance, swim and practice outdoor activities. Physical activity stimulates the appetite.**

Stay away from tobacco, as it suppresses the appetite and alters the taste and smell of foods, making them less flavourful.

Cut up your weekly fruits and vegetables in advance. That way, when you're hungry, they're ready to serve with a dip of your choice.

**When you prepare a soup as a meal, don't forget to include a source of protein. For example, add legumes (lentils, dried peas) or cubes of meat or cheese.**

To prepare a delicious vegetable dip...

combine one container of cream cheese (250 grams), a small container of plain yogurt (113 grams) and a packet of powdered soup (leek, fine herbs or onion).

**Eat meals at fixed hours to stimulate your appetite and to listen to your body when it tells you to eat.**

Keep your refrigerator and pantry well stocked with easy-to-prepare or pre-cooked meals.

# enough



Vary your menus, particularly your breakfast menu. Try pancakes, waffles, hot and cold cereals, and so forth.

A wide variety of cream cheese flavours are now available to spread on your bagels – be adventurous and give them a try!

Add some colour to your plate. And be attentive to presentation – what looks good is also more appetizing!

Season your meals to make them more flavourful.

Treat yourself to your favourite foods. Serve yourself an aperitif!

Provide a pleasant atmosphere for meals. Put down a table cloth, play some music, and why not light a few candles on occasion!

Make sure that you eat at least three meals a day as well as snacks between meals. Small meals and several snacks are sometimes better suited to persons who experience a loss of appetite.

Invite your neighbours to join you. According to some researchers, people who eat with company spend more time seated at the table, which increases the amount of food ingested by up to 30%.

# Eating well

# at a reasonable cost

Some people wrongly believe that it is expensive to eat well. But with a little foresight and determination, it is possible to eat well at a reasonable cost! All you need to do is incorporate the following suggestions into your everyday routine.

Healthy and  
inexpensive foods

- eggs
- legumes (beans, peas, kidney beans, etc.)
- canned fish (tuna, salmon, sardines)
- beef liver
- pasta





When you have the energy, prepare several portions in advance and freeze them. You can also cook large quantities with friends and share meals. In addition to saving money and adding some variety to your menu, you'll have fun!

Buy your food in large grocery outlets where it is cheaper. Several chains offer free delivery for seniors. Stay informed!

Try quick-frozen fruits and vegetables. Their advantage is that nothing is lost, as the inedible portions have already been removed. They provide excellent nutritive value and can be quickly prepared in the microwave or on the stove. They are also very practical for preparing soups.

Consult the flyers to plan your weekly menu around special offers and discounts. And when your favourite foods are on special, stock up!

Save money by buying fruits and vegetables that are in season and certain foods in bulk (flour, sugar, spices, lentils, rice, etc.).

# Preserve foods for extended periods

Concerned about your food going to waste?

Meat can be kept in the freezer for three to six months. Freeze your meat, cooked or raw, in individual portions and write the date on the package.

The advantage of frozen fruits and vegetables is that they can be eaten one portion at a time. The rest can be returned to the freezer in a plastic container.

Canned foods keep  
for up to a year.

If you eat less than one loaf of bread per week, keep half in a plastic bag in the refrigerator and freeze the other half.

To prepare homemade  
fruit salad...

mix your ripe fruit with 1 cup of fruit juice and  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of clear carbonated beverage. To bring out the flavour, add  $\frac{1}{2}$  ounce of grenadine and  $\frac{1}{2}$  ounce of brown rum. On top of enjoying a tasty treat, you'll prolong the preservation of your very ripe fruit by a few days.



Here are a few hints that will help you avoid this

Before your small fresh fruits (strawberries, raspberries, and blueberries) go to waste, think about using them in a fruit salad or freezing them.

You can take them out at a later date and add them to your cereal, or you can use them to make jam.

Blackened bananas can be frozen with the peel and thawed in the microwave in one minute. They can then be puréed and used to make delicious bread or muffins.

Fresh green onions and fine herbs can easily be frozen. Wash them soon after buying them, making sure to spin them well. Then chop them up and place them in the freezer in a hermetically sealed plastic bag. When you need them, simply remove a handful and add it to your salads a few minutes before serving.

Rather than risk losing them, leftovers can be frozen. You'll be happy to have them on a day when you're not especially keen on cooking.

Wash your lettuce soon after buying it and place it in the refrigerator in a hermetically sealed container. This way, it will stay fresh for longer.



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