



Nutrition for Older Adults

The International Council of Nurses
Informed Patient Project

As you age, you will face many changes and challenges. In order to stay well and enjoy life, it is essential to maintain good nutrition habits and to make wise food choices. Information on nutrition can help you make those choices.

What can good nutrition do for me?

An adequate daily intake of calcium and vitamin D can promote bone and dental health and reduce the risk of osteoporosis, fractures and disability. Adults over 50 years of age need approximately 1,200 milligrams of calcium and 400 to 600 International Units (IU) of vitamin D each day. The best sources of vitamin D are oily fish, margarines and fortified cereals. Nonfat dairy products offer the best source of calcium.

Eating plenty of fruits and vegetables can help keep your immune system healthy. *Lycopene*, a pigment that gives vegetables and fruits their red colour, has strong antioxidant capabilities that can help lower your chances of developing cancer and other disease.

Vitamin E strengthens your immune system and reduce the risk of developing cataracts, heart disease and

Alzheimer's. Foods rich in vitamin E include almonds, vegetable oils, seeds, wheat germ, spinach and other dark, green leafy vegetables.

Folic acid and vitamins B-6 and B-12 help maintain healthy nerve cells and red blood cells, which promote good mental function. Dark green leafy vegetables, citrus fruits, nuts and whole grains are good sources of folic acid. Vitamin B-6 is found in fortified cereals, fish, beans, meat, sunflower seeds and some fruits and vegetables. Vitamin B-12 is naturally found in animal foods.

Vitamin and mineral supplements

With aging, your need for vitamins and minerals may stay the same or increase. Not all people need supplements. For some, calcium, vitamin-D and vitamin B-12 supplements may be indicated. However, some supplements may not benefit your health. For your safety, talk to your pharmacist, nurse or doctor before taking any over-the-counter products.

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supports this initiative



How much should I eat?

As people get older, metabolic rates slow down and can decline as much as 30%. Some adults over 50 need less food to maintain their weight. Your daily intake is highly individual. Your age, sex, size and level of activity will determine the amount of calories you need.

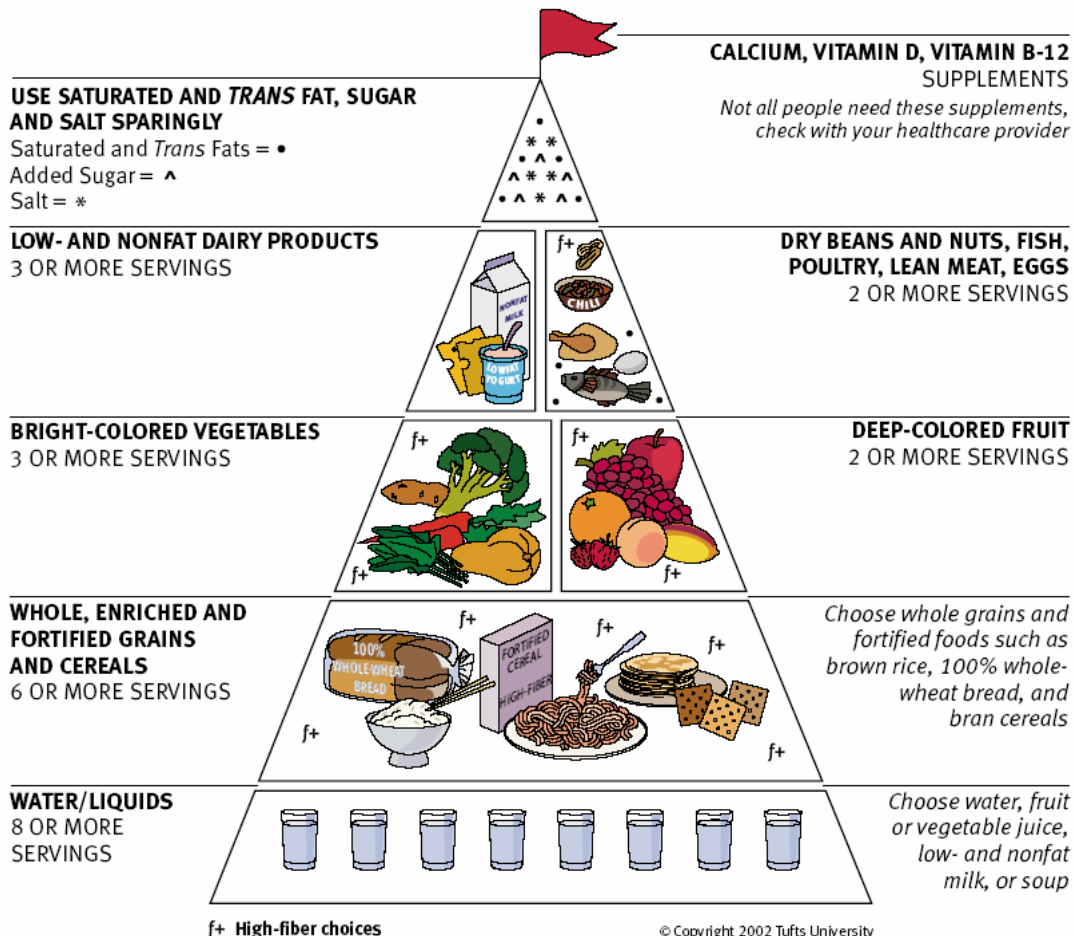
The Food Guide Pyramid for Older Adults can help you choose a variety of nutrient-rich foods everyday. Almost everyone should have at least the minimum number of servings listed in each food group. If you have a health

condition, a qualified professional should assist you with your dietary needs.

As you get older, you have a decreased sense of thirst and are more prone to dehydration. Some medications can also increase your need for water. It is important to drink 6 to 8 glasses of fluids, preferably water each day. Alcoholic beverages can cause dehydration and should not count toward your fluid intake.

Remember to include physical activity in your daily routine. Walking, climbing stairs and gardening can help you maintain a good appetite and will keep you in shape.

Food Guide Pyramid for Older Adults



Finding out if my nutrition is good

To find out if your eating habits are healthy; ask yourself the following questions. If you answer “yes” to several of these questions, consult your health care professional.

- Have I lost or gained weight lately?
- Do I have a health problem that limits what I should eat?
- Do I often find it difficult to chew or swallow foods?
- Do I frequently eat less than three meals per day?
- Do I avoid eating fruits, vegetables and whole-grain foods?
- Do I take medication or over-the-counter products every day?
- Do I drink more than three alcoholic beverages every day?
- Do I eat alone most of the time?
- Do I have a health condition making it difficult to grocery shop or cook?
- Do I have financial problems making it difficult to buy food?

Nutrition tips

Potatoes with skin are an excellent source of potassium. Potassium is important for cardiovascular health and helps retain calcium, which is needed to build and maintain strong bones. Leaving the skin on baked or boiled potatoes will give you a wealth of vitamins, minerals and fibre.

Canned fruits and vegetables maintain their nutrient quality for more than two years and are safe to eat as long as the container is not damaged.

If you want to learn more about reading nutrition facts, search the website:
www.eatright.org.

For more information on nutrition for older adults consult the following sites:

- The European Food Information Council. www.eufic.org.
- British Nutrition Foundation. www.nutrition.org.uk
- Age Concern. (2004). Staying Healthy in Later Life. Fact sheet 45. www.ageconcern.org.uk/information_325.htm
- World Health Organization (2003). Nutrition. Ageing and nutrition: A growing global challenge www.who.int/nut/age.htm