

Women's Health Month: How to Eat for Your Body at Every Stage



Girls and early teen years

Girls build most of the bone density they will have for life during these years. Research shows girls build about **90 percent** of their peak bone mass by their early 20s, which means nutrition during childhood and adolescence strongly affects future osteoporosis risk.

Key nutrition priorities:

- Iron
- Calcium and vitamin D
- Protein
- Healthy fats

Iron:

Iron needs increase once girls begin menstruating

Ages 14 to 18 is about **15 mg per day**

Best sources:

- Red meat, poultry, fish
- Beans and lentils
- Spinach and leafy greens
- Pumpkin seeds

Absorption tips:

Pair with **vitamin C** foods like citrus, bell peppers, or tomatoes

Avoid coffee or tea with meals

Avoid taking iron with large amounts of calcium

Calcium and Vitamin D

These nutrients are essential for building strong bones during this stage.

Recommended intake:

Calcium: about 1,300 mg per day (ages 9 to 18)

Vitamin D: about 600 IU per day

Best calcium sources:

- Dairy products
- Sardines or salmon with bones
- Calcium set tofu
- Leafy greens like kale and bok choy



Best vitamin D sources:

- Sun exposure (early morning/late evening)
- Fatty fish like salmon or sardines
- Egg yolks
- Fortified foods if needed

Protein

Protein supports growth, hormones, and muscle development.

About **0.8 grams per kilogram of body weight** per day

For active girls or athletes slightly higher intake may be beneficial to support performance and recovery

Best sources:

- Eggs
- Chicken, turkey, beef
- Fish
- Greek yogurt
- Beans and lentils
- Tofu and tempeh
- Nuts and seeds

Young adult women



Women in their **20s and 30s** often have busy schedules, higher stress, and inconsistent meals. This can make it harder to consistently meet their nutritional needs. Nutrition during this stage plays a key role in supporting hormones, fertility, metabolism, and long term health.

Key nutrition priorities

- Iron
- Folate
- Protein
- Fiber
- Omega 3 fats

Iron

Needs remain higher during these years at **18 mg per day**

Best sources:

- Red meat, poultry, seafood
- Beans and lentils
- Spinach and leafy greens

Folate

Supports cell growth and reproductive health

Folic acid is the synthetic form found in many supplements and some women do not convert it efficiently. Better options include:

- Natural folate from food
- 5 MTHF or methylfolate
- 400 mcg per day

Best food sources:

Leafy greens, avocado, beans, asparagus

Protein

Supports muscle, metabolism, and hormone balance. Aim for about **0.8 to 1.0 g per kg of body weight**, and a bit more if you're active

Fiber

Supports gut health, hormone balance, and blood sugar. Aim for **25 g per day** at least. Good sources include vegetables, beans, chia seeds, and flax seeds.

Omega 3 fats

Support heart, brain function, and inflammation balance. Focus on foods like fatty fish, walnuts, flax, and chia. Aim for **two servings of fatty fish per week**.

Women in midlife

Hormone shifts during midlife, typically between ages **40 and 60**, can affect metabolism, muscle mass, bone density, and blood sugar control. These changes can impact energy, body composition, and overall health. Nutrition becomes especially important during this stage to help support these shifts.

Key nutrition priorities

- Higher protein intake
- Calcium and vitamin D
- Magnesium
- Fiber
- Blood sugar balance



Protein

Protein needs increase during this stage to help preserve muscle. Aim for about **1.0 to 1.2 g per kg of body weight** to support strength, metabolism, and overall function.

Calcium and vitamin D

Bone loss can begin to accelerate during this stage, making calcium and vitamin D especially important for bone density and long term skeletal health.

Calcium: 1,000 to 1,200 mg per day

Vitamin D: 600 to 800 IU per day

Magnesium

Magnesium supports sleep, stress response, muscle function, and blood sugar balance.

Helpful forms include magnesium glycinate, malate, and citrate.

Fiber

Fiber needs remain similar, but become more important for metabolic health. Aim for about **25 g per day** to support cholesterol, digestion, and hormone metabolism.

Blood sugar balance

Blood sugar fluctuations become more common during this stage. Some helpful habits to maintain stable blood sugar:

- Eat protein with meals
- Prioritize fiber rich foods
- Limit refined sugar
- Maintain muscle with resistance training

Women in older adulthood



Women, typically **ages 60 and beyond**, have higher rates of osteoporosis and muscle loss with age. These changes can affect strength, mobility, and overall independence. Nutrition becomes critical for maintaining muscle, bone health, and cognitive function.

Key nutrition priorities

- Protein
- Calcium and vitamin D
- B vitamins
- Hydration and electrolytes

Protein

Protein needs may increase to help prevent muscle loss. Aim for about **1.0 to 1.2 g per kg of body weight** and spread intake evenly across meals to support muscle maintenance.

Calcium and vitamin D

Needs increase to support bone health, bone density, and fracture prevention.

Calcium: 1,200 mg per day

Vitamin D: 800 IU per day

B vitamins

B vitamins support brain function and nerve health. Vitamin B12 absorption often declines with age, so intake becomes especially important. This includes nutrients like **B12, B6, and folate**, which can be found in foods like **fish, eggs, and dairy**, with supplementation if needed.

Hydration and electrolytes

Thirst signals may decrease with age, so it's important to stay consistent with hydration. Key minerals that support hydration include **sodium, potassium, and magnesium**.

- Drink water throughout the day.
- Include mineral rich foods.
- Consider electrolytes during heat, illness, or low appetite.

Sources

Description: NIH Osteoporosis and bone mass development in youth

<https://www.bones.nih.gov/health-info/bone/bone-health/peak-bone-mass>

Description: Office on Women's Health nutrition recommendations for women

<https://www.womenshealth.gov/healthy-eating>

Description: National Institutes of Health nutrient intake guidelines

<https://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/list-all>

Description: Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics nutrition for women through the life cycle

<https://www.eatright.org/health/wellness/preventing-illness/nutrition-through-the-lifecycle>