

Healthy Eating for Healthy Aging

By Jacqueline Pike

March is National Nutrition Month, an ideal time to re-assess our daily food intake and learn more about healthy eating habits as we age.

The body changes with aging. As we age, we require fewer calories and there's a loss of muscle mass. The skin gets thinner and the body's ability to absorb nutrients lessens. Even though fewer calories are required, older adults need higher levels of protein, fiber, Vitamin D, calcium, and Vitamin B12, compared to younger people. One [study](#) reported that some seniors simply may not be aware that malnutrition could be a problem or a risk if these deficiencies exist long term.

Some factors that commonly affect healthy nutrition in older adults are

- limited mobility
- poor vision
- lack of transportation
- recuperating from illness or surgery
- poor appetite
- medication side effects
- financial strain

If financial strain is one of the factors negatively impacting your food choices, please make use of this [guide](#). It contains a list of pantries and other free food resources in our area, many of which offer a variety of unprocessed foods.

If you are over 60 years of age and your ability to plan and prepare meals is compromised by impaired vision, mobility, or some of those other common factors, you are likely eligible for our Meals-on-Wheels service, which provides a nutritious daily meal. Contact our Information & Referral department at 508-394-4630 to enroll.

Here are 5 tips to help you stay healthy and well nourished.

- Get enough protein. Protein is vital to building, maintaining, and repairing tissues, cells, and organs throughout your body. Fish, eggs, dairy, soy, peas, beans, and lentils are all good sources of protein. The MyPlate app at <https://www.myplate.gov/life-stages/older-adults> can help get you started. *(I tried it! It's easy and simple to follow)*
- Try to eat at least 5 servings of fruits daily. Keep fruit on the table as a reminder! Or keep pre-cut options in the refrigerator.
- Aim for 5 servings of veggies daily, with 1 serving = ½ cup cooked. Some options are roasted broccoli, carrots, or sweet potatoes. Check out this [link](#) for some "Spend Smart. Eat Smart" recipes.
- Drink plenty of water. Staying well hydrated keeps organs and body systems functioning properly.
- Eat foods with high water content. For example, celery, green peppers, cantaloupe, or pineapple

According to the USDA, 85% of current healthcare spending is related to management of diet-related chronic disease. Don't let that statistic discourage you!

Even simple changes can help reduce the risks of chronic diseases and malnutrition. The goal is to eat healthy to stay healthy while aging.

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