

Detailed Nutrient Needs for Older Adults

As adults age, calorie needs change due to more body fat, less lean muscle and less activity. The challenge for older adults is to meet the same nutrient needs as when they were younger, yet consume fewer calories.

The answer to this problem is to choose foods high in nutrients in relation to the calories they contain. Such foods are considered "nutrient-dense." For example, low-fat milk is more nutrient-dense than regular milk. Its nutrient content is the same, but it has fewer calories because it has less fat.

Protein

Protein needs usually do not change for older adults; however, needs can vary due to chronic disease. Skinless turkey or chicken and fish are preferable to red or salty meats. Other examples of foods with protein include:

- Poultry
- Eggs
- Peas
- Beans
- Tofu
- Nuts



Fat

Reducing the overall fat content in the diet is the easiest way to cut calories. "Good" fats come from oils, such as:

- Olive oil
- Seeds
- Sunflower oil
- Avocados and avocado oil
- Nuts



Carbohydrates



About 60 percent of calories should come from carbohydrates, with emphasis on complex carbohydrates. Glucose tolerance may decrease with advancing years, but complex carbohydrates put less stress on the circulating blood glucose than do refined carbohydrates.

Whole grain nutrition (brown rice, whole wheat bread, rolled oats, barley, millet) is preferred over refined "white" products (white bread, white rice or products made with white flour).



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Vitamins and Minerals

Calcium is an important nutrient to help minimize bone loss and prevent osteoporosis. Milk, cheese and yogurt retain their calcium content; cream cheese, cream and butter do not. Vitamin D helps to absorb and properly consume calcium. Other foods high in calcium include:



- Figs
- White beans
- Cabbage/bok choy
- Tofu
- Kale

Zinc, along with vitamins C and E, and the phytochemicals lutein, zeaxanthin and beta-carotene may help prevent or slow the onset of age-related macular degeneration. The best way to obtain these nutrients is to consume at least five servings of fruits and vegetables daily, especially ones that are dark green, orange and yellow. Good choices include:

- Kale
- Spinach
- Broccoli
- Peas
- Oranges
- Cantaloupes

Research has shown that eating foods with vitamin E may also help reduce the risk of Alzheimer's disease. The same benefits did not hold true for vitamin E from supplements. Good sources of vitamin E include:

- Whole grains
- Peanuts
- Nuts
- Vegetable oils
- Seeds

Zinc deficiency can be related to specific diseases in the elderly. It can also be a factor with vitamin K in wound healing. However, habitual use of more than 15 mg per day of zinc supplements, in addition to dietary intake, is not recommended without medical supervision.

Low levels of **vitamin B12** have been associated with memory loss and dementia and linked to age-related hearing loss in older adults. As people age, the amount of the chemical in the body needed to absorb vitamin B12 decreases. To avoid deficiency, older adults are advised to eat foods rich in vitamin B12 regularly:



- Meat
- Poultry
- Fish
- Eggs
- Dairy foods



Water

Generally, water as a nutrient receives little attention. However, of all the nutrients, water is the most important, serving many essential functions. Adequate water intake:

- Reduces stress on kidney function, which tends to decline with age
- Eases constipation
- Flushes toxins from the body
- Helps keep joints flexible and the mind clear

The equivalent of five to eight glasses of water should be consumed every day. In addition to drinking enough water each day, foods with high water content should also be consumed. High water content foods include:

- Melons
- Onions
- Soup
- Grapes
- Apples
- Cucumbers
- Cabbage

Fiber

Adequate fiber, together with adequate fluids, helps maintain normal bowel function. A daily fiber intake of 25–35 grams is suggested for most people. Good sources of insoluble fiber include:

- Vegetables
- Whole grains
- Fruits (both fresh and dried)
- Whole grain products and legumes (beans, peas, and lentils)

Some foods, such as prunes, figs and raisins contain natural laxatives as well as fiber, and some people find it helpful to include these foods in their daily diets.

Care Response understands the challenges of preparing healthy meals as frailty becomes an issue. We use proven techniques to prepare nutritious meals at home that are not only eaten, but welcomed by clients.



Source: Colorado State University Extension Program