

Eat Right

Food, Nutrition and Health Tips from the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

Eating Right for Older Adults

Eating right doesn't have to be complicated. Before you eat, think about what goes on your plate or in your bowl. Choose foods that provide the nutrients you need without too many calories. Build your healthy plate with foods like vegetables, fruits, whole grains, low-fat dairy and lean protein foods. Try these eating right tips.



Make half your plate fruits and vegetables.

Eat a variety of vegetables, especially dark-green, red and orange vegetables plus beans and peas. Fresh, frozen and canned vegetables all count. Choose “reduced sodium” or “no-salt-added” canned vegetables.

Add fruit to meals and snacks. Buy fruits that are dried, frozen or canned in water or 100% juice, as well as fresh fruits.

Make at least half your grains whole.

Choose 100% whole-grain breads, cereals, crackers, pasta and brown rice. Also, look for fiber-rich cereals to help stay regular.

Switch to fat-free or low-fat milk, yogurt and cheese.

Older adults need more calcium and vitamin D to help keep bones healthy. Include three servings of fat-free or low-fat milk, yogurt or cheese each day. If you are lactose intolerant, try lactose-free milk or a calcium-fortified soy beverage.

Vary your protein choices.

Eat a variety of foods from the protein food group each week, such as seafood, nuts, and beans and peas, as well as lean meat, poultry and eggs.

Cut back on sodium and empty calories from solid fats and added sugars.

Look out for salt (sodium) in foods you buy. Compare sodium in foods and choose those with lower numbers. Add spices or herbs to season food without adding salt.

Make major sources of saturated fats such as desserts, pizza, cheese, sausages and hot dogs occasional choices, not every day foods.

Switch from solid fats to oils when preparing food.

Drink water instead of sugary drinks. Select fruit for dessert. Eat sugary desserts less often.

Enjoy your food but eat less.

Most older adults need fewer calories than in younger years. Avoid oversized portions. Try using a smaller plate, bowl and glass.

Cook more often at home, where you are in control of what's in your food.

When eating out, choose lower calorie menu options. Choose dishes that include vegetables, fruits and whole grains. When portions are large, share a meal or take half home for later.

Write down what you eat to keep track of how much you eat.

Be physically active your way.

Pick activities that you like and start by doing what you can. Every bit adds up and health benefits increase as you spend more time being active.

If you are currently inactive, start with a few minutes of activity such as walking. Gradually increase the minutes as you become stronger.

Consult a registered dietitian nutritionist

if you have special dietary needs. A registered dietitian nutritionist can create a customized eating plan for you. Visit www.eatright.org to find a registered dietitian nutritionist near you.

For a referral to a registered dietitian nutritionist and for additional food and nutrition information visit www.eatright.org.



The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics is the largest organization of food and nutrition professionals. The Academy is committed to improving the public's health and advancing the profession of dietetics through research, education and advocacy.

This tip sheet is provided by:

Authored by Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics staff registered dietitian nutritionists.
Sources: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, ADA Complete Food & Nutrition Guide.