



# The Golden Years of Nutrition

After age 60, you truly should consider yourself in your “golden years.” It is a time for relaxing, catching up on things you never had time for before, and enjoying life in general. You will only be able to make the most of these years if you give your body and mind the nutrition they need to keep up. Many seniors fall into the trap of neglecting their diet, either by consistently eating convenient but unhealthy processed foods or by skipping meals altogether. As the body ages, it becomes more important than ever that it gets the vitamins, minerals, protein, fat, and fiber that keep us strong and healthy.

## Standard Nutrition Guidelines

The best foundation for senior-specific nutrition is the balanced diet that you have always known about. Plenty of fruits and vegetables (uncooked when possible), lean proteins like chicken and turkey, and whole grains should form the basis of your normal diet, with only a small amount of fat and sugar added in on special occasions. If you’ve been following good nutrition habits all your life, continuing into your senior years is easy. If not, it’s time to make a change! Seniors who consume a high amount of fat, cholesterol, sodium, and sugar are at higher risk of developing serious diseases.

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## LEARN MORE

Make smart decisions about your health and visit a physician or health specialist for advice and questions.

### USDA Nutrition Information

[www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov)

### CDC Healthy Aging

[www.cdc.gov/aging/](http://www.cdc.gov/aging/)

### American Society for Nutrition

[www.nutrition.org](http://www.nutrition.org)

# NUTRITION FOR SENIORS



**HEALTHY DIRECTIONS**

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## Caloric Needs

An older body needs fewer calories— the basic unit of fuel that food provides— than a younger one. As you spend more time resting and less time working each day, your body burns fewer calories. You should adjust your caloric intake to match your change in lifestyle; consuming the same number of calories while burning fewer translates into dangerous weight gain.

Seniors must be aware that their bodies still need calories to function. Avoid skipping meals, even when you don't feel like eating. Malnutrition is a common problem among seniors; eating meals with others and keeping a stock of healthy, easily prepared foods are great ways to ensure that you look forward to mealtimes.

## Digestion System

As it ages, your body's ability to process food effectively will change, often for the worse. In particular, the digestive system becomes weaker and more prone to damage. You can protect your digestive system by avoiding spicy and acidic foods and by increasing your fiber intake. If problems continue, you may need to consult with your doctor for more specific dietary guidelines.

The mechanics of eating (biting, chewing, swallowing, etc.) become less efficient with age as well. Recognize when it is time to cut back on foods that are tough

and hard to process in your mouth. Oral health has a huge impact on nutrition. Visiting your dentist regularly and when dental problems arise will also help you maintain healthy nutritional habits.

## Increased Needs

In addition to the standard guidelines for good health, the senior body often needs some extra help with key nutrients. Adding foods rich in these nutrients and taking supplements might be necessary:

### Fiber

*Fiber aids digestion and fights high cholesterol. This double benefit is one of the most important additions to a senior diet.*

### Calcium

*Weak bones break more easily and have a harder time supporting the body's weight. Dairy products are loaded with calcium that strengthens the skeleton.*

### Vitamins

*Many seniors are lacking in vitamins B and D because their body's systems have become less efficient at storing them. Supplements can balance vitamin levels and keep your skin, eyesight, and mental activity strong.*



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## Senior Health Dangers

Seniors are vulnerable to a number of diseases; a healthy diet is the primary way to ward them off.

### Diabetes

*The less sugar you eat, the better. Diabetes means a change in lifestyle and a daily danger of attacks— it is worth the trouble to control sugar intake before problems appear!*

### Obesity

*In addition to contributing to other diseases like diabetes and heart disease, obesity drastically increases the risk of falling and puts excess strain on the body's skeletal support system. Limit fat in your diet to help prevent and reduce obesity.*

### Heart Complications

*High cholesterol and high blood pressure sometimes do not take affect until senior years. If you haven't been paying enough attention to these issues, it is time to do so. Cut back on fatty foods to lower your risk of heart attack and stroke.*

### High Sodium

*While a small amount of sodium is necessary for the body, many people consume too much because they add it to their already salted food. High blood pressure is a result of high sodium. Remove temptation by keeping your salt shaker off the table and always be aware of the sodium content on food labels.*

### Cognitive Decay

*More and more studies are showing the effects of poor diet on mental health. As age increases, those effects are amplified. Observing good nutritional habits will help to stave off dementia and retain memory.*

## Exercise

The more active your body is, the more it will continue to process the food you eat in healthy ways. In addition to eating right, get outdoors, get your blood flowing, and avoid sitting indoors for too long. You don't have to become a body builder to stay in shape; just a short walk a few times a week is enough to benefit your physical health.

Visit your doctor regularly to find out what you should be doing to keep yourself healthy. A physician can tell you what diseases you might be prone to due to family history and lifestyle, allowing you to target those diseases as you think about nutrition.

## Attention to Changes

The transition to your "golden years" comes with many changes. Be sure that you are paying attention to your nutritional needs so that health issues do not hinder you from enjoying them.

