

7 Nutrition Tips for Older Adults

When it comes to meeting their nutritional needs, older adults can face tough challenges. Issues like COVID-19, chronic diseases and dementia take their toll in ways that make staying healthy an effort for older adults and their family caregivers. Isolation often creates additional obstacles. Research conducted by Home Instead, Inc. before the coronavirus pandemic forced the increased isolation of so many, revealed that 75% of lonely older adults in the U.S. (69% in Canada) already were not getting the right amount of at least one element of nutrition.



1. Involve older adults in a meal plan.

Older adults will be more likely to eat well if their menu includes foods that are not only nutritious but ones they like. Helping older adults create a plan every week can help older adults maintain a schedule of preparing and eating good food.



2. Create a balanced menu.

Think of the USDA MyPlate, a tool designed to show food group targets at each meal. Half of your plate should be fruits and veggies. The other half of your plate should have a portion of whole grain and meat/seafood/protein. A cup of milk or milk alternative is the last food group target. Personalize the portions for your loved one by considering the size of their fist. That is a good way to estimate correct portions of their body size; for example, a fist-sized portion of a whole grain and a palm-sized portion of a meat/seafood/protein are appropriate.



3. Adapt healthy alternatives.

Some food preferences may no longer be appropriate in an aging adults meal plan due to a diagnosis or ailment. Look for low sugar or low fat alternatives which can often be substituted in a recipe without loss of flavor or familiarity.



4. Avoid the extreme.

Oftentimes a caregiver or companion may create a diet for their parent with health issues that is too extreme. They may think their loved one needs to avoid all grains and carbohydrates when, in reality, they just need to limit them. Total elimination can lead to low blood sugars and digestive problems. For individuals who have heart disease or are overweight, 700 milligrams or less of sodium per larger meal is a good gauge. Some carbs are fine for diabetics. Include as many food groups as possible, and check with an older adult's doctor for a plan that is best suited to your loved one.



5. Improve.

Fruits and vegetables are particularly important to a healthy older adult diet. While nutritionists often focus on fresh ingredients, canned and frozen foods can be healthy options as well. Fresh may not be as readily accessible for older adults who don't live close to their loved ones or who may not have the ability to get groceries as often.



6. Enhance the flavor of foods.

While access to nutritious foods is important, so too is flavoring food to improve taste. While many older adults may be watching their weight or have dietary restrictions, it is okay to put butter or a light tub margarine on vegetables to make them taste good. Also, experiment with herbs and spices.



7. Encourage healthy snacks.

Three meals a day isn't always an option for older adults. Supplement meals with healthy snacks such as a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, fresh or canned fruit chunks, veggie sticks with a light ranch dip, cheese and crackers, or a wheat tortilla roll-up with turkey, lettuce and cheese.

For more resources and information, go to [HomeInstead.com/CompanionshipDiet](https://www.HomeInstead.com/CompanionshipDiet)

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