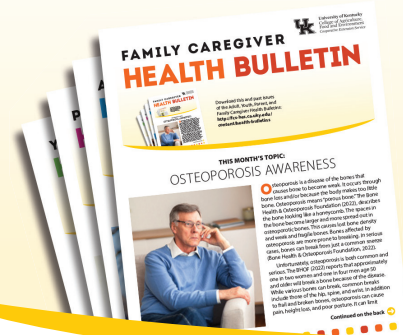


FAMILY CAREGIVER

HEALTH BULLETIN



MAY 2024

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THIS MONTH'S TOPIC

EATING WELL FOR HEALTH



Maintaining a healthy diet is important across the life span. As we get older, changes in nutritional needs, health, and life circumstances can challenge healthy eating. It is important to make food choices that optimize health and overall well-being.

A variety of factors may challenge healthy eating when older. For example, medical conditions and medication may make it hard to absorb and efficiently use essential nutrients. Cognitive impairment, oral health problems, and mobility issues create barriers to healthy eating and nutrition. Social factors such as bereavement, loss of independence, and social isolation can influence dietary practices. Older adults are also more likely to become less active. As their metabolism slows and energy decreases, they eat less. As a result, eating healthy and getting the proper nutrients necessary for healthy aging can be tough. Despite these factors, the Cleveland Clinic stresses

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making a conscious effort to eat a well-balanced, nutrient-rich diet. A healthy diet after age 65 is important because it contributes to:

- Cognitive function
- Memory
- Cardiovascular health
- Bone and muscle strength
- Immunity
- Digestion
- Mental health
- Overall well-being

The USDA recommends that a healthy, well-rounded diet after age 65 should limit processed foods and include:

- Variety of lean protein
- Fruits and vegetables
- Whole grains
- Low-fat or fat-free dairy
- Limited sugar, saturated fat, and sodium
- Proper hydration

Think nutrients

The ability to absorb nutrients decreases naturally with age. Sometimes this happens because of medical conditions and/or medication. Micronutrients are all the nutrients found in foods including all of our vitamins and minerals. Our bodies need micronutrients to work right, meaning healthy development, disease prevention, and overall well-being (CDC, 2022). As we age, it is important to get enough iron, vitamin A, vitamin D, iodine, folate, zinc, calcium, potassium, magnesium, fiber, and omega-3 fatty acids. In addition to talking to a health-care provider about proper nutrients, you should read the Nutrition Facts label to understand how much of certain micronutrients are in your food. You can also take dietary supplements, often in the form tablets, capsules, gummies, powders, and drinks, to add to or supplement your diet. Always talk to a health-care provider about whether supplements are necessary for your nutritional needs.

Stay hydrated

Dehydration is a common cause for hospitalization for those 65 and older. A variety of age-related changes in the body, health conditions,

and/or medications may make thirst decline as we get older. But some older adults choose not to drink because of concerns about bladder control. (You do not drink as much so you do not have to “go” as much). Limited mobility may make it difficult to get a drink or use the restroom quickly and/or frequently. Various medications, chronic illnesses, and even a common cold or a sore throat may make people less likely to want to drink. It is important to keep up with your fluids even when you do not feel well. Drinking water prevents dehydration, helps digestion, enhances absorption of some nutrients and can even help us feel more energized and think clearly. Other great sources of fluids include 100% fruit or vegetable juice, low-fat or fat-free milk, fortified soy beverages, and sometimes tea and coffee. Even various foods, such as fruits, vegetables, and soups, help keep up hydration.

Be social

The USDA recognizes that healthier eating occurs when it becomes a social event. From preparing to consuming, sharing food with others helps increase enjoyment and promotes adequacy of dietary intake for older adults. Eating with others can also improve and sustain mental health.

To find out if you or a loved one is making every bite matter, take the USDA MyPlate quiz. This quiz gives you an overview of how you are doing with the recommended food groups, and it gives personalized resources based on your specific results. You can even download a MyPlate app to set daily food group goals based on your quiz results, monitor progress, and earn badges to acknowledge your healthy eating accomplishments. To start the quiz, go to <https://www.myplate.gov/myplate-quiz>.

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