

# Eat Right

Food, Nutrition and Health Tips from the American Dietetic Association

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## Eating Right for Older Adults

Eating right doesn't have to be complicated. Start with the following recommendations from the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*.

### A Healthy Eating Plan:

- Emphasizes fruit, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat or fat-free milk and milk products
- Includes lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs and nuts.
- Is low in saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, salt (sodium) and added sugars.

### Make Your Calories Count

Think nutrient-rich rather than “good” or “bad” foods. The majority of your food choices should be packed with vitamins, minerals, fiber and other nutrients—and lower in calories. Most older adults need fewer calories than in younger years. Making smart food choices can help you stay healthy, manage your weight and be physically active.

### Focus on Variety

Eat a variety of foods from all the food groups to get the nutrients your body needs. Fruits and vegetables can be fresh, frozen or canned. Include more dark green vegetables such as leafy greens and broccoli and orange vegetables like carrots and sweet potatoes. Vary your protein choices with more fish, beans and peas. And, eat at least 3 ounces of whole grain cereals, breads, crackers, rice or pasta every day.

### Know Your Fats

Look for foods low in saturated fats, *trans* fats and cholesterol to help reduce the risk of heart disease. Most of the fats you eat should be polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats. Check the Nutrition Facts panel on food labels for total fat and saturated fat.

### Physical Activity for Fitness and Health

Balancing physical activity and a healthful diet is your best recipe for managing weight and promoting overall health and fitness. Set a goal to be physically active at least 30 minutes every day. You can break up your physical activity into 10 minute sessions throughout the day. If you are currently inactive, start with a few minutes of activity such as walking.



**Need help eating right and  
staying active?**

**Visit [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org) and  
[www.MyPyramid.gov](http://www.MyPyramid.gov).**

Then gradually increase the minutes as you become stronger.

### How Many Calories Do I Need?

The number of calories you need each day depends on your age, gender and activity level. The estimated calorie needs for adults age 51 and older are listed in the chart below.

#### For women who are:

Sedentary (not active) 1,600 calories per day  
Moderately active 1,800 calories per day  
Active 2,000 calories per day

#### For men who are:

Sedentary (not active) 2,000 calories per day  
Moderately active 2,200 to 2,400 calories per day  
Active 2,400 to 2,800 calories per day

### Sample MyPyramid Plan

This is a sample daily eating plan for a **1,800 calorie** food pattern. Your calorie needs may be more or less. For a personalized MyPyramid Plan and more information about the food groups, go to [www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov).

Food Group	Amount
Grains	6 ounces
Vegetables	2 ½ cups
Fruits	1 ½ cups
Milk	3 cups
Meat & Beans	5 ounce

#### Oils & Discretionary Calories:

Aim for 5 teaspoons of oils a day.  
Limit extra fats and sugars to 195 calories a day.

### Special Nutrient Needs

#### Calcium and Vitamin D

Older adults need more vitamin D and calcium to help maintain bone health. Include three servings of vitamin D-fortified, low-fat or fat-free milk and yogurt each day. Other calcium-rich foods are

fortified cereals and fruit juices, dark green leafy vegetables and canned fish with soft bones. If you take a calcium supplement or multivitamin, choose one that contains vitamin D.

#### Vitamin B12

Many people over 50 years old do not get enough vitamin B12. Fortified cereal, lean meat and some fish and seafood are sources of vitamin B12. Ask your doctor or dietitian if you need a vitamin B12 supplement.

#### Fiber

Eat more fiber-rich foods to help stay regular. Fiber also can help lower your risk for heart disease, control your weight and prevent type 2 diabetes. Choose whole grain breads and cereals and include more beans and peas. Fruits and vegetables also provide fiber.

#### Potassium

Increasing your intake of potassium along with reducing sodium (salt) may lower your risk of high blood pressure. Fruits, vegetables and low-fat or fat-free milk and yogurt are good sources of potassium. Also, choose and prepare foods with little or no added salt.

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**For a referral to a registered dietitian and for additional food and nutrition information visit [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org).**



The American Dietetic Association is the world's largest organization of food and nutrition professionals. ADA is committed to improving the nation's health and advancing the profession of dietetics through research, education and advocacy.

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This tip sheet is provided by:

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Sources: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, ADA Complete Food & Nutrition Guide.