

Feeling good into old age

It is essential to eat healthy as you advance in age.

People aged 70 years and over are the rapidly expanding sector of the North American population. Their nutritional needs are, in general, similar to those of adults aged 50–70 (see pp.150–154), but deficiencies are more common, especially in frail or homebound older adults who rely on others for basic needs. This age group does, however, need increased amounts of some crucial nutrients, specifically calcium and the vitamins B₆, B₁₂, folate, and D.

Changes in senses

The taste buds deteriorate with age. To compensate, many older people prefer very sweet or salty foods. Adding sugar contributes empty calories (those with no nutritional value) to the diet, and adding salt to food can worsen high blood pressure. The senses of smell and sight may also deteriorate, resulting in a preference for strong-smelling foods or a loss of interest in food.

Health problems

Most older people have at least one long-term disorder, such as cardiovascular disease, arthritis, and diabetes. In addition, many

are affected by dementia—which is a reduction in mental capacity due to a disorder that affects the brain.

These and other disorders affect what and how much you eat, and may require dietary restrictions, such as a low-fat or low-salt diet. The chapter Food as Medicine has more information on what to eat if you are ill (see pp.210–271).

Physical disabilities can affect nutritional health. For example, being unable to walk to the kitchen or go food shopping without help can result in poor eating habits. Emotional changes resulting from depression, grief, and loneliness can lead to loss of appetite.

Difficulty chewing

Dental problems are common in older people. Loose, decaying, or missing teeth, dentures that do not fit properly, and gum disease make it difficult to chew food and increase the risk of poor nutrition. Regular dental checkups are vital to help detect these problems before they become a nuisance.

Continuing healthy eating As you age, it becomes more difficult to digest and absorb certain nutrients. Therefore, it is vital to have a varied diet of easy-to-digest, nutrient-dense foods such as the salad shown here.

Staying active

It is important to keep as active as possible later in life as this will benefit your health and well-being. Gentle activities such as walking, swimming, and neck and shoulder exercises are excellent. Even a short walk around the yard or the garden, or moving around your home during the day is beneficial. If you cannot walk easily or have difficulty moving about, think about installing or using mobility aids in your home, such as a walker.



Source:

Nutrition for Life by Lisa Hark, PhD, RD and Darwin Deen, MD
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