Healthy Eating & Physical Activity Across Your Lifespan

Young at Heart

TIPS FOR OLDER ADULTS

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES • USA

NIH National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases

WIN Weight-control Information Network

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(see tear-off)

INTRODUCTION

This booklet is part of the Healthy Eating & Physical Activity Across Your Lifespan Series from the Weight-control Information Network (WIN). The series offers health tips for readers at various life stages, including adulthood, pregnancy, parenthood, and later life. The entire series is also available in Spanish.

Visit WIN's website to view all WIN publications at *http://www.win.niddk.nih.gov.*

How can I use this booklet?

This booklet is one of many handy guides from WIN that you can use to develop and maintain healthy habits.

As you age, your body and life change, and so does what you need to stay healthy. Changes in your home life, health, medicines, income, and sense of smell and taste may affect your interest in healthy eating and physical activity. Perhaps you have had some of these thoughts about food and exercise:

- "The dishes I've always liked the most just don't taste the same as they used to."
- "Now that I live alone, it's too much trouble to cook for one."
- "I don't feel like going outside because I might slip and fall."

No matter what your age, it's never too late to make healthy changes in your life!

While seeking advice from your health care provider is a good place to start, if you want to stay healthy as you age, this booklet is for you. It offers tips and tools to help people ages 65 and over eat healthy foods and be physically active. The back page of this booklet is a tip sheet that you can tear off and post to remind yourself to be healthy every day.

Healthy eating and regular physical activity are your keys to good health at any age. They may lower your risk for obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and certain cancers. They may even help you ward off depression and maintain orthopedic health (related to bones and muscles).

HEALTHY WEIGHT

Why is keeping a healthy weight important?

As you age, you may notice changes in your body's makeup. You may lose muscle mass, which may increase frailty. You may also burn fewer calories, especially if you are not very physically active. To prevent weight gain, you may need to eat fewer calories than you did when you were younger. This means you have fewer calories to help you get the nutrients your body needs for energy. So, you need to eat foods that are high in nutrients or are "nutrient dense" (see page 5).

Keeping a healthy weight is crucial, but what is healthy varies from person to person. Ask your health care provider about what a healthy weight is for you.

Among older people, being underweight is of concern and may be related to not having enough to eat, not eating enough foods that are nutrient dense, or having an illness or disease.

Being overweight or obese is also of concern as extra weight may increase your risk for heart disease, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, and bone issues. Eating wisely and being physically active to preserve muscle and bone may help you maintain strength and a healthy weight as you age.

Being underweight, overweight, or obese is linked to increased risk for many health problems.

TOOLS YOU CAN USE

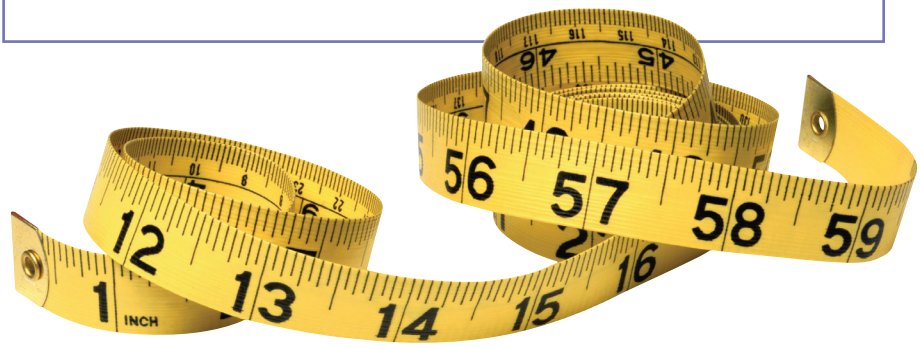
What is a healthy weight for me?

Two standard measures for seeing if you are at a healthy weight are these:

- The body mass index (BMI) is a measure of weight in relation to height. While a BMI score of 18.5 to 24.9 usually indicates a healthy weight for adults, the BMI is limited in how well it gauges body fat in older people or those who have lost muscle.
- Measuring around your waist may tell you if you carry extra fat. A waist circumference of more than 35 inches for women or 40 inches for men indicates increased risk for a number of health problems.

Check with your health care provider if you have concerns about your weight.

See the Resources section at the end of this booklet for a link to the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute website, where you can find an online tool for measuring BMI and learn more about measuring your waist circumference.



HEALTHY EATING

What kinds of foods do I need to eat as I age?

When you get older, your body begins to need fewer calories, but you need just as many nutrients. Nutrient-dense foods pack a lot of vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients your body needs into a small amount of calories.

Eat more of these nutrient-dense foods

Older adults, along with other Americans, are advised to "eat from the rainbow" of foods rich in nutrients, like these:

- fruits and vegetables (choose a range of types with vibrant colors)
- whole grains, like oatmeal, whole-wheat bread, and brown rice
- fat-free or low-fat milk and cheese, or soy or rice milk that is fortified with vitamin D and calcium
- seafood, lean meats, poultry, and eggs
- beans, nuts, and seeds

When you get older, your body begins to need fewer calories, but you need just as many nutrients.

TOOLS YOU CAN USE

How can I learn more about healthy eating for older adults?

Adults over the age of 50 have different dietary needs from those of younger adults. Based on Federal Government dietary guidelines, *What's On* Your *Plate? Smart Food Choices for Healthy Aging* provides healthy eating information for older adults. The guide includes tips on nutrients, food groups, and grocery shopping, as well as healthy sample menus. See the Resources section for details on how to download or order this guide.

Adults over the age of 50 have different dietary needs from those of younger adults.

Eat less of these foods

Some foods have many calories but offer few nutrients. Older adults should eat less of these foods:

- sugar-sweetened drinks and desserts that have added sugars
- foods with butter, shortening, or other fats that are solid at room temperature
- white bread, rice, and pasta made from refined grains

How can I follow a healthy eating plan?

You can use this booklet and other materials and links located in the Resources section to develop a healthy eating plan that works for your specific weight, budget, and dietary needs.

Control portion sizes

A portion is the amount of one food you eat in one sitting. Many people eat more than they need, especially when eating out or getting takeout. Try these tips:

- Avoid eating in front of the TV, computer, or other screen. You may not notice how much you are eating if you are distracted.
- Read the Nutrition Facts label found on food and drink packages to see how many calories and how much fat are in a single serving size of an item.

For help with reading nutrition labels, read *Using the Nutrition Facts Label: A How-To Guide for Older Adults* (see the Resources section).

Vitamin Power for Older Adults

Government dietary guidelines recommend these vitamins:

✓ **Vitamin B12.** If you are **50 years or older**, choose foods high in vitamin B12, such as fortified cereals, or take a B12 supplement (2.4 mcg total of B12 a day). Vitamin B12 helps your brain, blood, and nervous system.

✓ **Vitamin D**. If you are **older than 70**, you need 800 IU (international units) of vitamin D a day (600 IU for adults **under 70**). Natural sources include sunlight, salmon and tuna, and foods fortified with vitamin D such as cereals, dairy products, and orange juice. Vitamin D can help prevent softening of the bones and reduce the risk of bone fractures.

Plan and prepare your own meals

Eating healthy meals can be easier when you plan ahead and make them enjoyable. Try the tips listed below and see the Resources section for more ideas:

- Cook ahead and freeze portions for days when you don't want to cook.
- Keep frozen or canned vegetables, beans, and fruits on hand for quick and healthy meal add-ons. Rinse canned foods to remove extra salt. Drain juice and syrup from canned fruit to remove extra sugar.
- Eat often with someone you enjoy. If you can't cook for yourself, contact the Eldercare Locator listed in the Resources section for local programs that deliver meals.

Sodium Tips

Too much sodium (salt) can lead to high blood pressure.

- ✓ **If you are 51 years or older**, reduce your salt intake to less than 1,500 mg a day (about 2/3 of a teaspoon of salt).
- ✓ Read the Nutrition Facts label to find the sodium content.
- ✓ Limit how much packaged food you eat.
- ✓ Reduce salt when cooking or eating your food.
- ✓ Buy foods that are low in sodium.

Tips for Healthy Eating on a Budget

- ✓ Buy store brands of whole-grain breads, pastas, and other healthy items.
- ✓ Read weekly sales flyers to plan meals around healthy items at good prices.
- ✓ Buy and split bulk items or fresh produce with neighbors.
- ✓ Buy canned or frozen vegetables with low sodium. They are healthy, low-cost, and store well until you need them.
- ✓ Apply for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program—SNAP.
- ✓ See "Healthy Eating on a Budget" and SNAP in the Resources section for more tips.

Ask your health care provider about healthy eating plans

You may want to check with your health care provider or dentist if

- you find chewing difficult, don't want to eat, or have trouble with your dentures.
- you feel that life events such as the death of a loved one or moving from your home are keeping you from eating well.
- you think your medicines may be making your food taste bad or affecting your appetite.
- you think you should take a daily vitamin like iron or vitamin C.

Tips for a Healthy Eating Plan

- ✓ Eat breakfast.
- ✓ Do not skip meals, as doing so may make you hungrier later.
- ✓ Choose high-fiber foods, like whole-grain breads and cereals, beans, deeply colored vegetables (like kale and sweet potatoes), and fruits.
- ✓ Drink fluids throughout the day. You may feel less thirsty as you get older. But your body still needs water and other fluids to stay healthy and keep you regular.

Eating healthy meals can be easier when you plan ahead and make them enjoyable.

TOOLS YOU CAN USE

Are my eating habits healthy?

Many factors may affect an older adult's ability to eat well, including mouth pain, a fixed income, eating too little, living alone, and certain diseases. Review the checklist *Determine Your Nutritional Health* to see if any of the warning signs of poor nutrition apply to you.

See the Resources section for a link to the checklist. If you have concerns, discuss your results with your health care provider.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

How much physical activity do I need?

Physical activity is good for your health at every age. If you have never been active, starting regular physical activity now may improve your endurance, strength, balance, and flexibility. Being active may help you live on your own for a longer time and keep you healthy.

Being active can be hard if your mobility is limited or if you have serious health problems. But, you can find activities to meet your needs. Slowly raising your arms or legs, for example, may help you when done on a regular, repeated basis.

Being active may help you live on your own for a longer time and keep you healthy.

Do a variety of physical activities

Healthy older adults should do four types of activities regularly: aerobic (or endurance) exercise and activities to strengthen muscles, improve balance, and increase flexibility. See the table on pages 12–13 to learn more.

For any new physical activity, if you have not been active, start slowly and work up to your goal. To track your progress and stay motivated, keep a daily diary of what you do and how long you do it. See the Resources section at the end of this brochure for a link to a sample workout and other exercise and physical activity materials.

TYPES OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

	What is it?	What are the benefits?	What can I do?	How often?
AEROBIC ACTIVITY	• Aerobic (or endurance) exercise uses your large muscle groups (chest, legs, and back) to increase your heart rate and breathing. • You can speak several words in a row but not have a long chat while exercising.	• Stay active as you age.	• Go for a brisk walk. • Do heavy housework or gardening. • Look into a water aerobics or tennis class for seniors. You may find free or discounted classes at a local community or senior center.	• Aim to spread at least 150 minutes of moderately intense activity throughout the week. • Reach your 150-minute goal by exercising at least 10 minutes at a time.
ACTIVITY TO STRENGTHEN MUSCLES	• This activity strengthens your muscles by making you push or pull against something, such as gravity, hand-held weights, exercise bands, or even soup cans.	• Increase your strength and independence. • Reduce your need for a cane. • Improve your balance at the same time.	• Raise and lower arms and legs for a number of counts. You can even do this while seated. • Climb stairs in your house or at a mall if you can do so safely. Use your cane if needed. • Dig in the garden, rake, and push a lawn mower.	• Aim for at least 2 days a week.
ACTIVITY TO IMPROVE BALANCE	• Balance activity requires you to keep control of your body as you move. • It may help strengthen muscles in your abdomen (stomach area), lower back, hips, and legs.	• Stay steady on your feet. • Reduce the risk of a fall or injury. • Improve your strength at the same time.	• Try walking heel to toe in a straight line. • Practice standing on one foot. • Stand up from a chair and sit down again without using your hands.	• Aim for 3 or more days a week.
ACTIVITY TO INCREASE FLEXIBILITY	• Flexibility activity improves your range of motion.	• Keep the full range of motion of your muscles and joints. • Prevent stiffness as you age. • Lower your stress.	• Stretch all muscle groups. • Take a yoga class or practice yoga with a video.	• Aim for 3 or more days a week.

Many activities give you more than just one benefit! Water aerobics with weights gives you strengthening and aerobic benefits. Yoga combines balance, flexibility, and strengthening. Choose what you like to do—some physical activity is better than none.

How can I become more physically active?

- Pick an activity you enjoy and start with small, specific goals, such as "I will take three 10-minute walks this week." Slowly increase the total amount of time and number of days you are active.
- If you live in an assisted living or retirement facility, ask if the fitness center offers a free health checkup and fitness program.
- Start a walking group with one or more friends where you live or through your place of worship.

You can get 30 minutes of exercise through three sets of activity, such as dancing for 10 minutes at three different times.

TOOLS YOU CAN USE

How can I start or maintain an exercise program that works for me?

You can start slowly and increase your goals as you build your strength over time. For example, you can do many arm and leg exercises without weights to get started. As you progress, you can add hand-held weights, like soup cans, to improve your strength.

The *Go4Life* campaign, sponsored by the National Institute on Aging (NIA), offers easy-to-use materials on health and aging. Try their tips on how to create an exercise program that works for you. Check the Resources section for links to free NIA materials that you can download or order to start or maintain a healthy exercise program that is just right for you.

Remember to follow these safety tips:

- Ask your health care provider about ways you can safely increase the amount of physical activity you do now.
- Take time to warm up and cool down.
- Start slowly and build up to more intense activity.
- Wear a sturdy pair of shoes.
- Stop if you have pain, become dizzy, or feel short of breath.
- Drink water.

You can start slowly and increase your goals as you build your strength over time.

Ask your health care provider about being active

Healthy older adults generally do not need to check with a health care provider before becoming physically active. However, health care providers may be able to recommend types of exercise that are best for you and ways to progress at a safe and steady pace.

If you have a health issue or problem, you should talk with your health care provider to find out if there are any limits on what you can do. Your provider can help you plan for the types and amounts of exercise that are healthy for you.

Ask your health care provider about ways you can safely increase the amount of physical activity you do now.

BEING GOOD TO YOURSELF

Due to loss of loved ones, health problems, trouble paying bills, or other reasons, many older adults may feel lonely, sad, low, or stressed. You may not feel like doing anything, not eat enough, or overeat.

Here are some ideas for being good to yourself:

- Get enough sleep.
- Stay in touch with family and friends to keep your spirits up.
- Join a walking group or other social group.
- Surround yourself with people you enjoy.

Remember, it's never too late to improve your eating plan, be more physically active, and be good to yourself for a healthier life.

Being good to yourself may help you improve your "get up and go," eating habits, and health.

RESOURCES

Additional Reading from the Weight-control Information Network

The following publications are available online at *http://www.win.niddk.nih.gov/publications* and also by calling WIN toll-free at 1–877–946–4627.

Fit and Fabulous as You Mature provides tips to help older women get moving and eat healthy foods.

Just Enough for You: About Food Portions explains the difference between a portion and a serving and offers tips to help readers eat healthy portions.

The World Around You provides tips on how to use the world around you, no matter who you are or where you live, to stay healthy and fit.

More Resources for Older Adults

AARP
1–888–687–2277
http://www.aarp.org

Eldercare Locator
U.S. Administration on Aging
1–800–677–1116
http://www.eldercare.gov/Eldercare.NET/Public/Index.aspx

National Diabetes Education Program
1–888–693–NDEP (1–888–693–6337)
http://yourdiabetesinfo.org

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute
Online Guidelines to Measuring BMI and Waist Circumference
http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/lose_wt/risk.htm

NIH Senior Health Website
National Institutes of Health (NIH)
http://nihseniorhealth.gov

Healthy Eating Resources

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
1–800–877–1600
312–899–0040
http://www.eatright.org

Age Page: Healthy Eating After 50
National Institute on Aging
1–800–222–2225
http://www.nia.nih.gov/HealthInformation/Publications/HealthyEating.htm

Determine Your Nutritional Health
http://www.healthcare.uiowa.edu/igec/tools/nutrition/determineNutrition.pdf

Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010
http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines

Eat Right When Money's Tight
U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)
http://www.nal.usda.gov/snap/EatRightWhenMoneysTight.pdf

Food and Nutrition Information Center
USDA
301–504–5414
http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic

Healthy Eating on a Budget
USDA
http://www.choosemyplate.gov/healthy-eating-on-budget.html

MyPlate
USDA
http://www.choosemyplate.gov

Recipe Finder Tool
USDA
http://recipefinder.nal.usda.gov

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
USDA
http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap

U.S. Government Website on Nutrition
http://www.nutrition.gov

Using the Nutrition Facts Label: A How-To Guide for Older Adults
U.S. Food and Drug Administration
http://www.fda.gov/Food/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/ucm267499.htm

What's On* Your *Plate? Smart Food Choices for Healthy Aging
National Institute on Aging
1–800–222–2225
http://www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/whats-your-plate

Physical Activity Resources

2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
http://www.health.gov/paguidelines

National Institute on Aging
1–800–222–2225

- *Exercise & Physical Activity: Your Everyday Guide from the National Institute on Aging*
  http://www.nia.nih.gov/HealthInformation/Publications/ExerciseGuide
- *Go4Life*
  http://go4life.nia.nih.gov
- *Workout to Go: A Sample Exercise Routine from the National Institute on Aging at NIH*
  http://www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/workout-go

The President's Council on Fitness, Sports and Nutrition
240–276–9567
http://www.fitness.gov

Inclusion of resources is for information only and does not imply endorsement by NIDDK or WIN.

Why should I participate in clinical trials?

Clinical trials are research studies involving people. Clinical trials look at safe and effective new ways to prevent, detect, or treat disease. Researchers also use clinical trials to look at other aspects of care, such as improving the quality of life for people with chronic illnesses. To learn more about clinical trials, why they matter, and how to participate, visit the NIH Clinical Research Trials and You website at *http://www.nih.gov/health/clinicaltrials*. For information about current studies, visit *http://www.ClinicalTrials.gov*.

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The Weight-control Information Network (WIN) is a national information service of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK), part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). WIN provides the general public, health professionals, and the media with science-based, up-to-date, culturally relevant materials and tips. Topics include healthy eating, barriers to physical activity, portion control, and eating and physical activity myths.

Publications produced by WIN are reviewed by both NIDDK scientists and outside experts. This publication was also reviewed by Kathryn M. Kolasa, Ph.D., R.D., L.D.N., Brody School of Medicine, East Carolina University.

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Photos courtesy of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/Cade Martin (p. 8) and Amanda Mills (pp. 2, 14, and 16).

LIFESPAN TIP SHEET

FOR OLDER ADULTS

- Eat breakfast every day.
- Select high-fiber foods like whole-grain breads and cereals, beans, vegetables, and fruits.
- Have three servings of vitamin D-fortified low-fat or fat-free milk, yogurt, or cheese every day to help keep your bones strong as you age.
- Drink plenty of water or water-based fluids.
- Ask your health care provider about ways you can safely increase your physical activity.
- Fit physical activity into your everyday life. Take short walks throughout your day.
- Stay connected with family, friends, and your community.

LEARN MORE

Find more tips on healthy eating and physical activity for older adults in *Young at Heart* available online at *http://www.win.niddk.nih.gov.*

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The Lifespan Series includes the following publications:

- Fit for Two: Tips for Pregnancy
- Helping Your Child: Tips for Parents
- Better Health and You: Tips for Adults
- Young at Heart: Tips for Older Adults

Spanish-language publications in the Lifespan Series include the following:

- Consejos para la futura mamá
- Cómo ayudar a su hijo
- Cómo mejorar su salud: consejos para adultos
- Sugerencias para personas mayores

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For more information from WIN, visit *http://www.win.niddk.nih.gov*

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