

Healthy Eating After 50

“I have trouble chewing.” “Food just doesn’t taste the same anymore.” “I can’t get out to go shopping.” “It’s too much trouble to cook for one person.” “I’m just not that hungry.”

Sound familiar? These are a few common reasons some older people don’t eat healthy meals. But, making healthy food choices is a smart thing to do—no matter how old you are! Here are some tips to get you started:

- Eat many different colors and types of vegetables and fruits.
- Make sure at least half of your grains are whole grains.
- Eat only small amounts of solid fats, oils, and foods high in sugars. Limit saturated fat (found mostly in foods that come from animals) or trans fats (found in foods like some margarines, shortening, cookies, and crackers).

Two Plans for Healthy Eating

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) suggest two eating plans. Eating a variety of foods from each food group in either plan will help you get the nutrients you need. One plan is called the USDA Food Guide (also known as MyPyramid). It suggests that people 50 or older choose healthy foods every day from the following:

Fruits—1-½ to 2-½ cups *What is the same as ½ cup of cut-up fruit?* One medium whole fruit or ¼ cup of dried fruit

Vegetables—2 to 3-½ cups *What is the same as a cup of cut-up vegetables?* Two cups of uncooked leafy vegetable

Grains—5 to 10 ounces *What is the same as an ounce of grains?* One roll, a small muffin, a slice of bread, 1 cup of flaked, ready-to-eat cereal, or ½ cup of cooked rice, pasta, or cereal

Meat/beans—5 to 7 ounces *What is the same as an ounce of meat, fish, or poultry?* One egg, ¼ cup of cooked beans or tofu, ½ ounce of nuts or seeds, or 1 tablespoon of peanut butter

Milk—3 cups of fat-free or low-fat milk *What is the same as 1 cup of milk?* One cup of yogurt or 1-½ to 2 ounces of cheese. One cup of cottage cheese is the same as ½ cup of milk.

Your doctor may have suggested that you follow a certain diet because you have a health problem like heart disease or diabetes. Or, you might have been told to avoid eating certain foods because they can change how well your medicines work. Talk to your doctor or a registered dietitian about foods you can eat instead.

Here’s a tip: Stay away from “empty calories.” These are foods and drinks with a lot of calories but not many nutrients—for example, chips, cookies, sodas, and alcohol.

The second eating plan is called the DASH Eating Plan. DASH stands for Dietary Approaches to Stop Hyper-tension. Following this plan will help you lower your blood pressure. See the resources at the end of this Age Page for more information on DASH.

How Much Should I Eat?

How much you should eat depends on how active you are. If you eat more calories than your body uses, you gain weight. What are calories? *Calories* are a way to count how much energy is in food. You use the



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energy you get from food to do the things you need to do each day. Just counting calories is not enough for making healthy choices. For example, a medium banana, 1 cup of flaked cereal, 2-½ cups of cooked spinach, 1 tablespoon of peanut butter, or 1 cup of 1% milk—all have roughly the same number of calories. But, the foods are different in many ways. Some have more of the nutrients you might need than others do. Milk gives you more calcium than a banana, and peanut butter gives you more protein than cereal. And a banana is likely to make you feel fuller than a tablespoon of peanut butter.

Here's a tip: In the USDA Food Guide, eating the smallest amount suggested for each food group gives you about 1,600 calories. The largest amount has 2,800 calories.

How Much Is on My Plate?

How does the food on your plate compare to how much you should be eating? For example, one very large chicken breast could be more from the meat/beans group than you are supposed to eat in a whole day. Here are some general ways you can check:

- 3 ounces of meat, poultry, or fish = deck of cards
- ½ cup of fruit, rice, pasta, or ice cream = ½ baseball
- 1 cup of salad greens = baseball
- 1-½ ounces of cheese = 4 stacked dice
- 1 teaspoon of butter or margarine = 1 dice (or die)
- 2 tablespoons of peanut butter = ping pong ball
- 1 cup of flaked cereal or a baked potato = fist

How many calories do people over age 50 need each day?

A woman: who is not physically active needs about 1,600 calories
who is somewhat active needs about 1,800 calories
who has an active lifestyle needs about 2,000-2,200 calories

A man: who is not physically active needs about 2,000 calories
who is somewhat active needs about 2,200-2,400 calories
who has an active lifestyle needs about 2,400-2,800 calories

Here's a tip: Get at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on most, if not all, days of the week.



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For More Information

To learn about the DASH diet:

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

Box 30105 Bethesda, MD 20824-0105 1-301-592-8573 1-240-629-3255 (TTY)

www.nhlbi.nih.gov

Federal Government Nutrition Websites www.nutrition.gov — learn more about healthy eating, food shopping, assistance programs, and nutrition-related health subjects

www.healthier.us.gov — learn how to follow a healthier lifestyle

www.mypyramid.gov — USDA MyPyramid Food Guide www.foodsafety.gov — learn more about how to cook and eat safely

National Institute on Aging Information Center

P.O. Box 8057 Gaithersburg, MD 20898-8057

1-800-222-2225 (toll-free) 1-800-222-4225 (TTY/toll-free) www.nia.nih.gov

Source

US Department of Health and Human Services

National Institutes of Health



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