



# *Eating well.*

## Growing old healthy

TIPS AND TRICKS  
FOR SENIORS

Québec 



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ISBN 9782550563549 (print version)

ISBN 9782550563532 (PDF)

Legal deposit:

Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, 2009

National Library and Archives Canada, 2009

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**The content of this document was prepared by the  
Institut universitaire de gériatrie de Montréal (IUGM) based  
on its 2006 publication, "Bien manger pour vieillir en santé."**

# Contents

- 6** Our bodies change...  
and so do our nutritional needs
- 10** A varied diet will provide you  
with the most benefit from foods
- 11** The food groups
- 14** Maintaining a healthy weight
- 17** Drinking enough fluids
- 17** Stimulating your appetite
- 18** Eating enough for your needs
- 20** Eating on a budget
- 22** Preserving foods
- 23** Aide-mémoire





**D**id you know that a healthy diet contributes to reducing the risk of developing chronic health problems such as heart disease, diabetes and hypertension? Or that it fosters a good quality of life and helps you to keep your independence?

With all that we hear in the mass media and elsewhere, knowing how to eat to take care of our health can often be confusing. Here are a few tips and tricks to help you to achieve a well-balanced diet.



An elderly couple is shown outdoors, smiling and engaged in grilling food. The man, on the left, has white hair and a mustache, wearing a brown cardigan over a striped shirt and a green apron. The woman, on the right, has short white hair and is wearing a purple jacket over a blue shirt and a yellow apron. They are both holding metal tongs and a plate of grilled food, which appears to be skewers of meat and vegetables. The background is a soft-focus view of green trees and foliage. A semi-transparent yellow banner with white text is overlaid across the middle of the image. The bottom left corner features a red circular pattern overlay.

*Our bodies change...*  
and so do our  
nutritional needs

The quantity of nutriment our bodies need at the age of 30 is not necessarily the same as what will be required at age 50 or 70. In fact, changes to our bodies as we age influence our nutritional needs. Here are some examples of nutriment that deserve particular attention.

## Proteins

Contrary to sugar and fat, the body does not keep reserves of available proteins. If you do not consume enough proteins, your body will take what it requires from your immune system and your muscles. It is therefore essential to incorporate a good source of proteins into each of your daily meals, including breakfast. Proteins are found in meats, poultry, fish, legumes, eggs, dairy products, tofu, nuts and cereals.

## Fibre

Constipation, a very unpleasant health problem, is extremely widespread among seniors. To remedy the problem, women should **gradually** add up to 21 grams of fibre to their daily diet; for men, the proper quantity is 30 grams. To measure your daily fibre intake, read the labels on your food. You can find fibres in whole grains, fruits, vegetables and legumes, as well as nuts. Fibre is also added to some foods that do not contain it naturally, such as yoghurt and fruit juices. With a high-fibre diet, it is important to drink sufficient fluids (see page 17) to avoid constipation.

*One portion  
of meat is  
about*

the size of  
the palm of  
your hand  
or a deck  
of cards.

## A SIMPLE WAY TO INCREASE YOUR FIBRE INTAKE

**Add ground flax  
seed or wheat  
or oat bran to  
your desserts,  
yoghurt or  
morning bowl  
of cereal.**

**A tablespoon  
of wheat bran  
provides  
1.5 grams  
of fibre.**

## **INCREASE YOUR CALCIUM INTAKE**

**Enrich your cream soups and mashed potatoes with powdered skim milk: 1/4 cup of skim milk powder per cup of milk results in a 66% increase in calcium and proteins.**

## **Calcium**

To keep your bones and teeth healthy and assure proper muscle function, it is important to eat three portions of dairy products or dairy substitutes (soy beverages, for example) every day. You can also increase calcium intake by adding canned fish (including bones), tofu, almonds, Brazil nuts, hazelnuts and green vegetables such as broccoli to your diet.

Calcium-enriched beverages such as orange juice, milk and soy drinks are also available in stores. However, you should be aware that calcium-enriched orange juice is not usually enriched with Vitamin D, a vitamin that is important to your body's ability to absorb calcium.

## **Vitamin B<sub>12</sub>**

Vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency can cause anaemia and some potentially irreversible nervous system diseases. Between 10 and 30% of seniors experience difficulty in absorbing the Vitamin B<sub>12</sub> found in food (meat, poultry, fish, eggs and dairy products). It is therefore recommended that they consume foods that are Vitamin B<sub>12</sub>-enriched, such as soy beverages, imitation meat vegetarian products and some breakfast cereals.

The use of antacids (either prescription or over-the-counter) to relieve heartburn reduces the body's ability to absorb Vitamin B<sub>12</sub>. Individuals who use this type of medication frequently are thus more at risk for Vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency.



## Antioxidants


Antioxidants are compounds that act as protective agents against the harmful action of free radicals (substances linked to cell ageing and certain diseases). The main antioxidants are Vitamins A, C and E. While Vitamin C is the main antioxidant found in fruits such as citrus fruit and in vegetables like bell peppers, broccoli and Brussels sprouts, Vitamin E can be found in nuts and cereals, peanut butter, some vegetable oils (like wheat germ and sunflower), margarine, wheat germ and sweet potatoes. Although vitamin supplements can be used, research shows that naturally occurring Vitamins C and E found in foods are best for meeting our needs. Vitamin A is found in various orange and dark green coloured fruits and vegetables like carrots, apricots, mangos, sweet potatoes and spinach, as well as in liver.

## Vitamin Supplements

Health Canada recommends that individuals over the age of 50 take a daily, 400 IU supplement of Vitamin D. This is particularly true between October and April, when hours of sunshine are insufficient for our skin to produce Vitamin D. Moreover, as we age, our Vitamin D needs increase and cannot be met only through food.

Calcium and Vitamin B<sub>12</sub> supplements are also recommended if you do not eat sufficient quantities of foods that contain these nutritious elements.

In any case, ask your pharmacist or your doctor for advice on the food supplements that you are considering, including recommended quantities. Some vitamins and minerals may interact with medication that your doctor has prescribed for you.



**If you have difficulty eating whole nuts, try using a coffee mill to powder them before adding them to your cereals, yoghurt or desserts.**



***A varied diet***

**will provide you with  
the most benefit from foods**

Variety in your food choices is very important for consuming a wide range of nutritious elements, but also for making meals that are invigorating and tasty. To stay healthy, seniors – like the rest of the population – should eat from at least three food groups at every meal.

## *The food groups*

### **Vegetables and fruits**

This group consists of fresh, cooked, frozen, canned, dried or juiced vegetables and fruits. Choose juices that are 100% pure fruit rather than fruit-flavoured beverages. Fruits and vegetables are sources of many vitamins including Vitamins A and C, folic acid and numerous substances that maintain cell and heart health.

### **Cereals**

These include cooked cereals (wheat, oats, millet, rice, etc), breakfast cereals and flour derivatives such as pasta and breads. This group is a source of **fibre** and many **B-complex vitamins**.

### **MAXIMIZE FIBRE, VITAMIN AND MINERAL CONTENT**

**Choose whole grain cereals and dark-coloured vegetables and fruits (green, orange, red and blue).**

## Milk and milk substitutes

Foods that include dairy products and substitutes include milk (pasteurized, condensed or powdered), foods manufactured from milk (milk-based soups and desserts, milk shakes, chocolate milk, yoghurt, cheese, etc.) as well as substitutes such as enriched soy beverages. These foods are an important source of **Calcium**, **Vitamin B<sub>12</sub>** and **proteins**. If you think you are lactose-intolerant, choose lactose-free milk.

### TRY A MILK SHAKE

Mix milk, frozen yoghurt, fruits or jams in your blender. Use your imagination to create different combinations of tastes (frozen vanilla, strawberry, chocolate or banana yoghurt, etc).



## Meat and meat substitutes

Meat and meat substitutes include meat, poultry, organs such as liver, eggs, fish, seafood, legumes (lentils, red beans, chick peas, dry beans, etc.), nuts and cereals. Meat and meat substitutes are a main source of **proteins, Iron** and **Vitamin B<sub>12</sub>**. Fish should be eaten at least twice a week as this food is rich in “good fats,” particularly Omega-3.

## Food that tastes good

As we age, the aroma and taste of food must more be pronounced for us to enjoy it. Enrich the taste of your food with herbs, spices, condiments and good fats, such as olive or canola oil. As for high calorie and fatty foods like chips, pastries and muffins, eating them occasionally will not harm your health, especially if you are not very hungry and they are the only food that you feel like eating at a particular moment.

**Favour good fats, such as non-hydrogenated margarines and oils composed of mono-unsaturated and polyunsaturated fats (olive, canola, soy, corn, sunflower) that also provide Vitamin E.**



# *Maintaining* a healthy weight



As we age, the notion of maintaining a healthy weight takes on more importance. It is normal for your body to evolve as you grow older, because the proportion of muscle to fat will change, but your over-all weight should remain basically the same. If you lose weight **involuntarily**, please consult your physician.

Unless prescribed by your doctor or your dietician-nutritionist, you should not go on a diet. Low-fat, low-sugar diets provide less energy to your body, while reduced-salt diets may curb your appetite. Diets that are too restrictive are known to be a cause of food deficiencies in seniors, and can do more harm than good. To be able to carry out your daily tasks, you must have sufficient energy!

Consult your doctor or your dietician-nutritionist to reevaluate your eating habits if you do not succeed in maintaining a healthy weight.

**Minor weight accumulation  
in individuals aged 60 and  
more can be positive since  
it can provide some protection  
against unintentional weight loss  
during illness.**





## *Drinking enough fluids*

As we age, we become less thirsty, but this does not mean that the body requires less water. To the contrary!

In the absence of a medical contraindication (for instance if you suffer from heart, liver or kidney problems), you should drink at least eight glasses of liquid a day (about two litres). Other liquids such as hot beverages, vegetable or fruit juices, milk, liquid yoghurt and soups also count! In addition, during heat waves or when you are physically active, take care to avoid dehydration, and drink enough liquids.

## *Stimulating your appetite*

With age, the body is subject to changes that can lead to reduced appetite and to an increase in the feeling of being full.

Nevertheless, even if your appetite dwindles, your nutritional needs do not diminish and can even increase.

# *Eating enough for your needs*

Here are a few tips to help ensure that you eat enough to satisfy your basic energy needs:

- Make sure that you eat at least three meals a day, and snack between meals. Smaller-portioned meals and several snacks are sometimes better suited to people who have a light appetite
- Vary your menus and ensure that you include proteins in every meal. Your lunch could include, for instance, eggs, cheese, yoghurt, ham or peanut butter
- Add colour to your dishes. Spend time on the presentation of your meals. An attractive dish is always more appetizing!
- Season your meals to improve their taste
- Make meals a pleasant experience. Use a tablecloth, put on pleasant music and, on occasion, take out your best tableware!
- Invite your neighbours for lunch or dinner. In general, we eat better when the meal is also a social occasion

- Keep your refrigerator and your larder pantry well stocked with healthy food that is easy to prepare or pre-cooked
- Buy fruits and vegetables that are pre-cut and ready to serve
- Eat at fixed hours to stimulate your appetite and to regulate your body's signs of hunger
- Remain active: walk, dance, swim, etc. The important thing is to stay active. Physical activity stimulates the appetite!
- Pamper yourself by choosing some of your favourite foods
- Avoid tobacco. Besides harming your health, it changes the taste and aroma of food, making it less appetizing
- When you eat soup as your entire meal, don't forget to add a source of proteins such as legumes (lentils, dried peas), meat cubes or cheese

## **A SIMPLE AND DELICIOUS VEGETABLE DIP**

**Blend a package of cream cheese (250 grams) with a small container of plain yoghurt (113 grams) and a package of dehydrated soup (leek, onion, spinach, etc.).**



# *Eating* on a budget



Some people erroneously believe that eating healthy costs a lot. With a little planning, you can eat well without ruining your budget! All you need to do is remember the following tips as you plan your meals.

- Try frozen fruits and vegetables. Since the non-edible parts of the product have already been removed, there is no loss. Moreover, they have excellent nutritional value and can be quickly prepared in the microwave oven or on the stove. They are also very practical for making soups.
- Shop in stores that are part of a grocery chain, where food costs a lot less. Many such stores also offer free delivery for seniors on specific days of the week. Ask about this feature!
- Read the weekly advertising flyers to plan your menus according to which products are on sale, and use the discount coupons. When food that you enjoy is on sale, stock up!
- Save money by buying seasonally available fruits and vegetables and bulk foods like flour, sugar, spices, lentils, rice, etc.
- When you feel like cooking, prepare extra portions and freeze them. You can also cook large quantities and share them among a group of friends. Besides economizing and adding variety to your menu, this is a great way to socialize! You can also join one of the many group kitchens that exist throughout the province. For more information, go to [www.rccq.org](http://www.rccq.org).

## **FOODS THAT ARE HEALTHY AND INEXPENSIVE**

- **Eggs**
- **Legumes**  
(beans, peas, red beans, etc.)
- **Canned fish**  
(tuna, salmon, sardines)
- **Organs (liver, kidneys)**
- **Pasta.**

## *Preserving foods*

Concerned about food spoilage? Here are a few good, practical ideas you can try:

**TRY THIS  
HOME-STYLE  
FRUIT SALAD**  
Mix ripe fruit  
with a cup  
of fruit juice and  
1/4 cup of a  
clear soft drink.  
To enhance  
the taste, add  
1/2 ounce of  
grenadine syrup  
and 1/2 ounce  
of dark rum.  
It's a tasty treat  
and a good  
way to extend  
the life of  
ripe fruit.

- Keep an eye on the expiration dates on the labels of your foodstuffs
- Meat keeps in the freezer for up to six months. Freeze your meat, cooked or raw, in individual portions labelled with the date of freezing
- Canned food remains good for up to one year
- Frozen fruits and frozen vegetables offer the advantage of being able to be used one portion at a time. Keep the unused portions in a freezer bag
- If you eat less than one bread a week, freeze half and keep other half in a plastic bag in the refrigerator
- Over-ripe bananas can be frozen with the peel on, and thawed at a later date in the microwave. Try pureeing them and adding them to the batter when you make your own bread, cakes or muffins
- Herbs and green onions can be easily frozen. Wash the leaves and dry them with care, then chop and freeze them in airtight freezer bags
- Whenever you want to use them, add the appropriate amount to your salads or cooked food a few minutes before serving
- Rather than risk spoilage, freeze leftovers instead. You will be happy to use them on a day when you don't feel like cooking

# Aide-mémoire

## INCLUDE THE FOUR FOOD GROUPS

In your daily menu choices

- Vegetables and fruits
- Cereals
- Milk and milk substitutes
- Meat and meat substitutes

## HEALTHY AND INEXPENSIVE FOODS

- Eggs
- Legumes  
(beans, peas, red beans, etc.)
- Canned fish  
(tuna, salmon, sardines)
- Organs  
(liver, kidneys)
- Pasta

## PAY PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO

- **Proteins** in every meal
- **Fibre:**  
21 grams a day for women,  
30 grams for men
- **Calcium:** dairy products, nuts, tofu,  
broccoli, canned fish
- **Vitamins:**
  - Vitamin A: carrots, apricots,  
mangos, sweet potatoes,  
spinach, liver
  - Vitamin B<sub>12</sub>: meat, poultry, fish,  
eggs, dairy products, Vitamin B<sub>12</sub>  
enriched food such as soy drinks,  
imitation meat vegetarian products  
and some breakfast cereals
  - Vitamin C: fruits and coloured  
vegetables (oranges, red peppers)
  - Vitamin E: nuts and cereals,  
peanut butter, some vegetable oils,  
margarine, wheat germ, sweet  
potatoes
- Calcium, Vitamin D and Vitamin B<sub>12</sub>  
**supplements**
- **Liquids:** the equivalent of eight glasses  
of liquid a day, including water, hot  
drinks, vegetable or fruit juices, milk,  
liquid yoghurt and soups.

*Eating  
well,*  
Growing old healthy

TIPS AND TRICKS  
FOR SENIORS

