

Healthy Eating and Regular Physical Activity: A Winning Combination for Older Adults

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Sometimes people assume that falls and injuries, cancer, and chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease are a natural part of growing older. But research tells us that these conditions might occur because we are not active enough or are not eating a healthy diet. If we choose to be active and eat a healthy diet, in combination, we can slow down the progress of diabetes, heart diseases and some cancers. They also help to prevent falls and injuries.

Healthy eating as we age

As we get older, we need fewer calories, but our need for nutrients remains the same and even increases in some cases. This makes meal planning important. Here are some tips on eating well:

Eat balanced meals from the four food groups every day

Canada's Food Guide defines the four food groups as:

- milk and alternatives
- grain products
- vegetables and fruits
- meat and alternatives.

Eat a variety of foods within each food group. For instance, eat different kinds of grain products such as whole grain breads, rice, pasta, bagels, and so on. You should also think variety in terms of type of food (fresh, canned, frozen) colour, flavour, texture, and method of preparation.

Enjoy breakfast every day. It may help control hunger cravings later in the day.

Eat less sugar

Try to limit foods like granola bars, cakes, pastries, cookies, chocolates, doughnuts, ice-cream, frozen desserts, sports and energy drinks. Some of these items are marketed as healthful, but they are loaded with sugar.



Eat less fat and salt

- Choose lower-fat milk products.
- Choose leaner meats, poultry, and fish.
- Choose meat alternatives such as peas, beans, and lentils.

Choose whole grain and fresh fruit and vegetables

Whole grain foods are good as they provide many nutrients. Fruits and vegetables are packed with nutrients (generally low in fat). Choose dark green and orange vegetables.

Active living as we age

The *Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines for Older Adults 65 Years and Older* recommends that older adults:

- take part in endurance (aerobic) activities, such as brisk walking and cycling) at least 150 minutes per week, in sessions of 10 minutes or more

- do activities that improve strength at least two days per week
- do exercises or activities that enhance balance and flexibility.

Being active every day is a step towards better health and a desirable body weight. Be active in a way that suits you. This will help ensure that you are active on a regular basis. Here are some more tips:

- Your aerobic (endurance) activities should be moderate to vigorous in intensity. Examples are brisk walking, swimming, dancing, aerobics, bicycling, and cross-country skiing. Try to take the stairs or walk whenever and wherever possible.
- Do activities that increase strength and involve the major muscle groups at least twice each week. Examples are lifting weights or household items such as laundry or groceries, climbing stairs, and doing wall push-ups.
- Do activities to improve your balance every day, to help prevent falls. Examples include reaching and bending, Yoga, and Tai Chi.

How do diet and exercise affect bones and muscles?

As we get older we lose bone strength and muscle mass. Here are some ways to keep bones and muscles strong:

- Eat enough protein.
- Include calcium in your diet. The recommendation is that you get 1,200 mg calcium a day, either through your diet or supplements or both.
- Include vitamin D in your diet. You need 800 to 2,000 IU vitamin D from your diet, supplements, or both. Dietary sources of vitamin D include fortified milk and fish (salmon, mackerel, and herring).
- Do weight-bearing activities like walking or lifting.
- Do exercises that help build muscles.

See your health professional

If you are an older adult who is planning to make changes to your present level of physical activity, it is important to get good advice. Talk over the benefits and any health concerns with a qualified health practitioner.

Learn more about healthy eating and active living:

Active Living Coalition for Older Adults:
www.alcoa.ca

Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide:
www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide or call 1-866-225-0709

Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines for Older Adults – 65 Years & Older:
www.csep.ca/guidelines

Canadian Centre for Activity and Aging:
www.uwo.ca/actage

Osteoporosis Canada: www.osteoporosis.ca

Dietitians of Canada: www.dietitians.ca

Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/seniors-aines/index-eng.php

For advice on diet and nutrition, please consult a registered dietitian.

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