

Retirement Guide

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A quick and easy guide to maximizing your nutrition as you age

If you've dabbled in nutrition research, you may have come to the realization that getting the proper nutrients as you age involves far more than heating up a can of soup or popping a multivitamin. That's because of the many physiological changes going on in the aging body that affect nutritional health, a topic that's thoroughly covered in "[Eating well for an active, healthy retirement](#)," a free e-book that delivers a plethora of practical tips on eating well and preparing healthy food as you age.

Dealing with a nutritional catch-22

In broad terms, your metabolism slows down as you age, your body becomes less effective at breaking down food and you lose **muscle mass** and become more prone to gaining **weight**. The dilemma is this: while most older adults need to cut calories, they also need to consume more nutrients because the ability to absorb vitamins B12 and D, **calcium** and potassium decreases with age. Not to mention, certain commonly prescribed **medications** can affect how the body absorbs and retains nutrients.

The best way to accomplish eating more nutrients while eating a proper amount of food is to ditch empty calorie foods like soda and chocolate bars, instead focusing on **nutrient-packed** foods. "Although seniors don't need as many calories as when they were younger, it's crucial that the food they do eat is of high quality and includes enough protein as well as high-fiber foods like fresh produce and whole grains," says geriatric nutritionist Rebecca McCullough, who is the director of nutrition, health and wellness at Holiday Retirement.

"I think most people – not just seniors – completely miss the boat when it comes to **MyPlate** guidelines for fruits and vegetables," notes McCullough, but she is not concerned about seniors who live in **Holiday Retirement communities** because they are provided with three healthy, balanced meals a day—plus they have access to a robust snack bar.



Optimizing heart and brain health

When it comes to optimizing health, McCullough, a contributor to the **healthy dining e-book**, says one of the best things you can do is maintain a **healthy body weight**. "Serious health complications can develop in seniors who are either underweight or obese," she says, adding that too much weight loss can lead to dizziness, which can precipitate a life-altering fall. Alternately, obesity can make you more susceptible to Type 2 **diabetes** and cardiovascular diseases.

From a nutritional point of view, you can reduce your risk of developing diabetes and heart disease by cutting back on saturated and trans fat, sugar, processed meat products like hot dogs and salami, and highly processed carbohydrates. A **heart-healthy** diet can also help maintain your **brain health**, which may reduce your risk of developing dementia. Keep in mind, much is unknown about this common cognitive disorder (one in nine seniors develops **Alzheimer's disease**), which, incidentally, can dramatically affect your **relationship with food and eating**.

Confronting other physical changes

As you get older you may notice several other physiological changes. For instance, you may develop a rather sudden intolerance to lactose or gluten, which can be managed by cutting out dairy or bread. You may also start to experience more bouts of indigestion and constipation. (McCullough recommends treating this latter problem by increasing fiber and avoiding over-the-counter medicines such as stool softeners.)

On top of this, dental health and complications from dry mouth can also change the way you relate to food. Missing teeth, poorly fitting dentures or other **dental problems** can make it difficult to eat chewy or crunchy foods, meaning that you may have to resort to cooked, not raw, vegetables and soft protein sources like shredded meat, yogurt and beans.

Likewise, a diminishing sense of smell and taste can affect your ability to enjoy food. But, don't try to compensate by loading on the salt, as too much sodium can lead to high blood pressure. Instead, try seasoning your food with herbs and spices as advised in [this free e-book](#).

Another recommendation is to constantly sip water throughout the day. That's because older adults often lose the ability to notice thirst, which sometimes develops into **dehydration**, a condition that can lead to serious consequences.

This article has given center stage to the major physiological changes that affect your nutritional health. For more easy-to-understand advice on using food to optimize your health, download "[Eating well for an active and healthy retirement](#)" today.

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