

# A guide to healthy eating for **Older Adults**



Good nutrition is important at any age. Eating well helps you feel your best each day. Healthy eating will help to prevent or manage heart disease, diabetes, osteoporosis and some cancers.

**This guide is for older adults.**

**Find tips and ideas to make healthy eating easy and enjoyable!**

**Remember, it is never too late to start eating well!**



## **What's inside:**

- Is weight gain a concern?
- Are you losing weight?
- Oops... I forgot to eat breakfast.
- How is your appetite ?
- Eat your veggies... and fruit!
- Bone up on calcium!
- What about protein?
- Troubles swallowing, biting or chewing?
- Are you eating alone?
- Drink water often!
- How to get the best nutrition for your money.
- Tips to make grocery shopping easier.
- Healthy Recipes.

# Is weight gain a concern?

Maintaining a healthy weight is important as you age. Instead of dieting to lose weight, it's better to make wise food choices, watch your portion sizes and be active.

**Fast weight loss is not healthy. When you lose weight quickly you can lose muscle and this can affect your health.**

**Remember that adults come in a variety of sizes and shapes!**

## **Quick and Healthy Snack Ideas** *(Aim for two snacks per day)*

Unsweetened Applesauce  
Low fat popcorn  
Lower fat cheese and crackers  
Fruit – fresh or canned in own juices  
Hard-cooked boiled eggs  
Hot or cold cereal  
Frozen yogurt with berries  
Milk and oatmeal cookie  
Yogurt and fruit  
Toast and peanut butter  
Canned soups (low sodium)  
Trail mix – nuts and fruit  
Veggies and dip

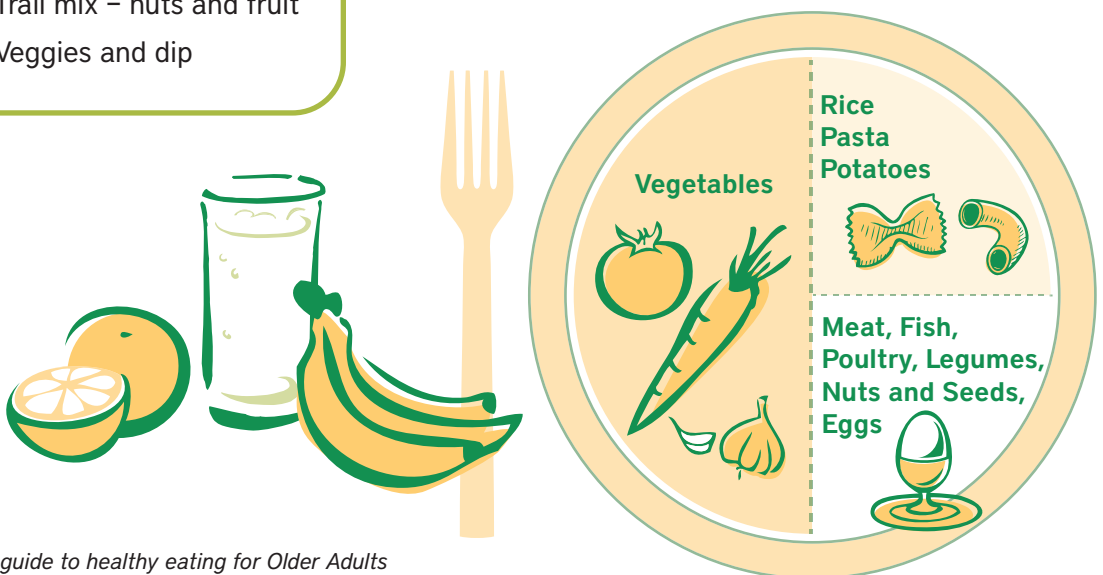
Canada's Food Guide [www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide](http://www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide) provides good advice on what foods to choose and how much you need to eat to be healthy.

**Try to eat at least the minimum number of servings from all four foods groups each day:**

- Grain Products (6 - 7 servings)
- Vegetables and Fruit (7 servings)
- Milk and Alternatives (3 servings)
- Meat and Alternatives (2 - 3 servings)

**Follow Canada's Food Guide for the correct serving size.**

- Eat regularly. Include three meals each day. If you are hungry add a small snack in between meals.
- Limit high fat and high sugar foods.
- Eat your meals slowly and enjoy each bite.
- Choose fruit instead of fruit juice.
- Eat when you are hungry. Stop when you are full. You don't need to finish all the food on your plate.
- Use the plate method to help you plan your meals.



# Are you losing weight?

It is natural for your weight to change from day to day. However, sometimes older adults lose weight quickly and without trying.

**If you have lost weight, especially without trying speak with your doctor.**



## Sunny Orange Banana Milk Shake

- ¾ cup vanilla yogurt
- 2 tbsp skim milk or soy protein powder
- 1 banana
- ½ cup of orange juice

In a blender, combine all ingredients and blend until smooth.

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**Tip:** To get your omega 3 fats, add flax seed oil to your shake.

## Here are some tips to help stop unwanted weight loss.

- Eat smaller amounts of foods more often. Try eating every 2-3 hours.
- Eat more food when your appetite is best.
- Have a snack before bed at night. Try cheese and crackers or yogurt.
- Eat your favourite healthy food any time of the day.
- Use milkshakes, smoothies or meal replacements (Ensure®, Boost®, Resource 2.0®) as snacks.
- Make every bite count! Fill up on high calorie healthy choices.
- Avoid smoking. It lowers appetite and limits taste.

### Add These Foods

3.25% milk or skim milk powder

Cream

Yogurt, kefir

Soft margarine, vegetable oils like olive oil or canola

Hard cheese or cheese sauce

Nuts (cashews, walnuts, pecans, peanuts), sunflower seeds, peanut butter or dried fruit

Jam, sugar, syrup, honey

Tuna, salmon

### To these Foods

Cream soups, hot/cold cereal, milkshakes, pudding, scrambled eggs, pancakes

Pudding, custard

Fruit, milkshakes, cake

Scrambled eggs, sandwiches, mashed vegetables (squash, potatoes, yams), rice, barley, stews or soups

Scrambled eggs, sandwiches, potatoes, vegetables

Hot/cold cereal, yogurt, ice cream, toast, pancakes, salad, or as a snack

Bread, crackers, cereal

Salads, scrambled eggs, crackers or toast



## Oops... I forgot to eat breakfast

Skipping a meal, especially breakfast, will make it hard to get all the nutrients you need each day.

- Eat at regular times every day.
- Plan your meals and snacks ahead of time.
- If you don't feel like cooking replace a meal with 2 or 3 easy snacks.
- Meals don't have to be complex or require cooking. Have toast with peanut butter, fruit and a glass of milk.
- Aim for at least 3 food groups for your meals.
- Pack healthy snacks to take with you when you are away from home.

## How is your appetite?

If you live alone, sitting down to eat a meal by yourself can be hard.

**You may not feel like making meals for just yourself. Food may not interest you and may not taste as good.**

**Here are some ideas to help increase your appetite:**

- Choose a comfortable place to eat.
- Exercise or take a walk before meals.
- Add flavour to your food by adding herbs and spices.
- Eat meals with family and friends, if possible.
- Try a new recipe.
- Join a cooking club or community kitchen.
- Ask your health care provider if your medications are causing appetite or taste problems.



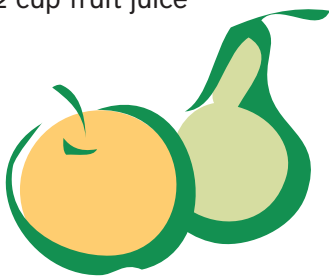
# Eat your veggies... and fruit!

Strive to eat at least 7 servings of fruit and vegetables each day. This may seem like a lot of food, but a serving is smaller than you think!

**Fruit and vegetables taste great and contain lots of vitamins, minerals and fibre. Choose dark green or brightly coloured vegetables and fruit more often.**

## **Examples of one serving of fruit or vegetables:**

- 1 medium sized fruit
- 1/2 cup of fruit or cooked vegetables
- 1 cup salad
- 1/2 cup fruit juice



## **Some easy ways to add fruit and vegetables to your daily food choices:**

- Add berries or sliced bananas on top of cereal.
- Add a green salad to your lunch.
- Grab an apple for an afternoon snack.
- Have two vegetables with dinner.
- Keep cut and ready-to-eat vegetables in the fridge.
- Add veggies to pizza, omelettes, pasta sauce and soups.
- Use frozen or low sodium canned vegetables.
- Add frozen fruit to yogurt. They are just as healthy as fresh!
- Your community may offer a locally grown fruit and vegetable box. For example try the "Good Food Box." [www.foodshare.net/train13.htm](http://www.foodshare.net/train13.htm). Fresh produce is available at an affordable cost. Call your local Health Unit for more information.

# Bone up on calcium!

**Milk and Alternatives contain calcium, Vitamin D and other nutrients that are important for strong bones.**

Aim for about 1200 mg of Calcium and 800 IU of Vitamin D each day if you are over 70 years of age.

If you do not get enough milk products or calcium-rich foods, speak to your health care provider. You may want to take a supplement. Everyone over the age of 50 should take a daily Vitamin D supplement of 400 IU.

## **Tips to increase the calcium in your diet:**

- Sprinkle grated cheese on sandwiches, salads and vegetables.
- Eat other calcium-rich foods – white, navy or baked beans, almonds, sesame seeds, broccoli and figs.
- Add fortified soy milk, milk or skim milk powder instead of water to prepare cream soups, hot cereals, mixes or stews.



## What about protein?

Meat, poultry, fish, eggs, legumes such as beans, peas and lentils, tofu, nuts and seeds are excellent sources of protein, iron and B vitamins.

You don't always need meat, fish or poultry to meet your protein needs.

Try other foods that are good sources of protein such as nuts, legumes, eggs or tofu. They are quick and easy and make great snacks!

Try to eat 2-3 servings of protein rich foods per day.

### One serving is:

- 75 g (2 1/2 oz) of meat, fish or poultry. This is about the size of a deck of cards.
- 60 mL (1/4 cup) nuts or seeds
- 2 large eggs
- 1/2 can of salmon or tuna
- 175 mL (3/4 cup) cooked legumes or tofu

### Easy ways to add protein-rich foods to your diet!

- Cook many servings of meats at once. You can freeze the extras and then the meat is ready to reheat when you need it.
- Use beans, peas or lentils or tofu in salads, soups or pasta sauce.
- Nuts or seeds make great snacks! Add them to muffins, salads and yogurt. Chopping or grinding nuts will make them easier to chew.
- Spread peanut or almond butter on toast, crackers or apple slices.
- Add canned fish, or an egg to salads, soups or pasta.

### Got Gas?

Legumes sometimes get a bad reputation! Here are some ways to still enjoy these nutritious foods, with less gas.

- Rinse canned legumes well under cold water.
- Change water several times if soaking dried legumes.
- Start slow. Gradually increase the amount of beans, peas and lentils that you eat.
- Drink lots of fluid.





# Troubles swallowing, biting or chewing?

If you have trouble swallowing you may not want to eat very much or may avoid foods that you find hard to swallow.

**Symptoms of swallowing problems are coughing and choking when you eat or drink. Talk to a doctor if you have trouble with swallowing.**

**If you have problems with your teeth, gums or dentures see your dentist.**

**If you find chewing difficult, choose foods that are softer to eat or change the way you prepare foods.**

**Here are some tips to make foods easier to swallow, bite or chew.**

- Thicker liquids are sometimes easier to swallow.
- Chop, mash or puree foods. Use a fork, blender or food processor.
- Add gravy or sauce to help soften and moisten food.
- Try different food textures to see what suits you best.

## Soft Food Ideas

Grain Products	Soft fresh breads, mashed or boiled potatoes, pasta, rice, barley, quinoa, oatmeal or cream of wheat
Meats and Alternatives	Canned fish, ground beef, chicken or pork, lamb, canned beans, peas or lentils, eggs, tofu
Milk and Alternatives	Yogurt, kefir, pudding, ice cream, tapioca, custard
Vegetables and Fruit	Well cooked vegetables, canned fruit in own juices, 100% fruit or vegetable juice, apple sauce and other pureed fruits
Foods from two or more food groups	Shepard's pie, perogies, spaghetti with sauce, chili, hearty soups, dal

## Try these Food Textures

Texture	Food example
Blended or pureed liquid (runs off spoon slowly)	Smooth, creamy soups, applesauce, puddings
Soft foods and thick liquids (pudding-like)	Custards, yogurts, mashed potatoes, turnips, squash, yams, smooth cooked cereals
Semi-solid foods (firm but not tough)	Soft fruit, pasta, pureed entrees, scrambled eggs, tofu, ground meats
Solid Food (firm, but not hard)	Soft cooked vegetables, soft fruit, diced meat, toast





## Are you eating alone?

When you eat alone, it can sometimes be hard to stay motivated about cooking meals.

### Cooking feels like a chore!

You might find that making meals is a challenge. Perhaps, it is hard for you to use utensils or stand for a long time. With a little bit of planning you can enjoy a variety of foods.

- Collect simple recipes that use only a few ingredients and are fast to make.
- Prepare foods when you have the most energy. Chop vegetables in the morning for later use.
- Cook meals ahead of time.
- Find healthier frozen, ready-to-eat dinners. Look for those with lower sodium and fat. Aim to get at least 10 or more grams of protein from these dinners.
- Buy bagged salads or pre-chopped vegetables.
- If you have trouble using kitchen utensils speak to your doctor. Your doctor can refer you to an Occupational Therapist.
- Consider moving to a place where meals are prepared/provided for you.
- Have some of your meals delivered.

### Try these tips to help you to stay interested in eating.

- Have a nice place to eat. Set a table with flowers and a place mat.
- Take your meal outside, watch TV, put the radio on or read a book.
- Enjoy dinner in a restaurant, or take-out.
- Consider taking Meals on Wheels a few times a week or more.
- Share a potluck dinner with friends.
- Join a collective kitchen or share cooking with friends.
- Exchange recipes with others.
- Join a seniors dining club.
- Check your local senior centres; many serve weekly meals.

### Drink water often!

Many older people do not drink enough fluids. As we age, our sense of thirst declines. We need to drink whether or not we feel thirsty. Drinking fluids may help to prevent constipation.

- Try to drink 9-12 cups of fluid each day. This includes water, milk, juice, soup, coffee/tea.
- Keep a bottle or glass of water nearby.
- Have a cup of tea or coffee in the afternoon.
- Drink a glass of water when you wake up.
- Have a glass of milk, 100% juice or water with your meals.





# How to get the best nutrition for your money!

If you are on a tight budget, with a little planning, you can buy a variety of healthy foods and still control what you spend.

Here are some tips to help you eat well on a budget. Eating well is vital to your health.

## Best buys for each food group

### Vegetables and Fruit

- Frozen vegetables
- Fresh fruit/vegetables in season
- Staples like carrots, potatoes, oranges, bananas

### Meat & Alternatives

- Dried or canned beans, peas or lentils
- Canned fish
- Less expensive cuts of meat, such as stewing, blade or flank, or pork shoulder.
- Eggs
- Tofu

### Grain Products

- Dry pasta
- Parboiled or brown rice
- Hot cereals like oatmeal, cornmeal or creamed wheat

### Milk & Alternatives

- Powdered milk
- Store brand cheese and yogurt



## Tips to make grocery shopping easier

Do you find it hard to get to the grocery store?  
Is it a challenge to shop by yourself?  
Or get your groceries home?

### Before you go:

- Make a list of groceries you need.
- Find a shopping buddy. Share large food items with them.

### Transportation:

- Order your groceries by phone and have them delivered.
- Look into community services that offer rides to the grocery store.
- Share a taxi with a friend and split the cost.

### At the store:

- Shop when the store is not as busy.
- Read labels to be sure you are getting what you want.
- Don't forget your glasses!

Find out if your local church, legion or recreation centre offers low cost, hot meals.

# Healthy and Easy Recipes

## Whole Wheat Pasta and Tuna Salad

Makes 8-10 servings

8 oz	whole wheat fusilli pasta	250 g
2 cans	(each 6 oz/170g) water packed flaked tuna, drained	2
3/4 cup	finely chopped red, green or yellow bell pepper (or a combination)	175 mL
3/4 cup	finely chopped red onion	175 mL
3/4 cup	coarsely chopped arugula	175 mL
1/2 cup	cooked green peas	125 mL
1 cup	low-fat plain yogurt	250 mL
1/4 tsp	light mayonnaise	1 mL
1 1/2 tsp	Dijon mustard	7 mL
1 tsp	tarragon vinegar	5 mL
1/2 tsp	freshly ground black pepper	2 mL
1/4 tsp	salt	1 mL

1. In a large pot of boiling salted water, cook pasta according to package directions. Drain and transfer to a large bowl.
2. Add tuna, bell pepper, onion, arugula and peas to pasta and stir to combine. Let cool slightly.
3. In a small bowl, whisk together yogurt, mayonnaise, mustard, vinegar, pepper and salt. Add to pasta mixture and stir well to coat noodles. Cover and refrigerate for at least 4 hours or up to 8 hours before serving.

Source: Cook! ©Dietitians of Canada 2011. Published by Robert Rose Inc.

Visit the Dietitians of Canada Web site at [www.dietitians.ca/Your-Health.aspx](http://www.dietitians.ca/Your-Health.aspx)

### Tips:

Use salmon instead of tuna and add 2 tsp (10 mL) chopped fresh dill.

Omit the arugula and serve the salad on a bed of any type of lettuce.

Try different types of pasta such as macaroni, shells or rotini.

Control sodium by omitting the salt.

#### Nutrients per serving

Calories	160
Protein	11 g
Fat	3.0 g
Carbohydrate	22 g
Fibre	3 g
Sodium	304 mg



## Country Lentil Soup

Makes 8 servings

1 tbsp	vegetable oil	15 mL
1 cup	diced onion	250 mL
1/2 cup	diced carrot	125 mL
1/2 cup	diced celery	125 mL
4 cups	vegetable or chicken broth	1 L
1 cup	dried red lentils	250 mL
1/4 tsp	dried thyme	1 mL
1/2 cup	chopped fresh flat leaf parsley	125 mL
	Salt and freshly ground black pepper	

1. In a large saucepan, heat oil over medium heat. Sauté onion, carrot and celery until softened, about 5 minutes. Add broth, lentils and thyme; bring to a boil. Reduce heat, cover and simmer for 20 minutes or until lentils are soft. Remove from heat.
2. Working in batches, transfer soup to blender. Purée on high speed until creamy. Add up to 1 cup (250 mL) water if purée is too thick. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Return to saucepan to reheat, if necessary.
3. Ladle into bowls and garnish with parsley.

Source: *Simply Great Food* ©Dietitians of Canada 2007. Published by Robert Rose Inc. Visit the Dietitians of Canada Web site at [www.dietitians.ca/Your-Health.aspx](http://www.dietitians.ca/Your-Health.aspx)

### Tips:

**Use sodium reduced broth to lower the sodium content.**

**Substitute green or brown lentils for the red. Increase cooking time.**

**Use canned beans instead of lentils. Rinse well, to remove the salt.**

#### Nutrients per serving

Calories	117
Protein	3.7
Fat	2.0 g
Carbohydrate	18.7 g
Fibre	3.7 g
Sodium	504 mg



## Sautéed Peppers and Eggs

Serves 2

2 tsp	olive oil	10 mL
2	red bell peppers, sliced into thin strips	2
4	eggs	4
Pinch	salt	Pinch
	freshly ground black pepper	
2	multigrain buns, split and toasted	2

1. In a large skillet, heat oil over medium-low heat. Spread red peppers evenly in pan, cover and simmer, stirring occasionally, for 15 to 20 minutes or until peppers are very tender, but not browned. (If peppers start turning brown, add 1-2 tbsp/15 to 30 mL water and cover again.)
2. In a small bowl, whisk together eggs, salt and pepper to taste. Stir into skillet, cover and cook, stirring occasionally, for 2 to 3 minutes or until eggs are just set.
3. Place toasted multigrain bun halves on serving plates and spoon egg mixture over top.

Source: Cook! ©Dietitians of Canada 2011. Published by Robert Rose Inc.  
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### Tips:

**Add sautéed mushrooms and onions to the mix.**

**Melt some cheese over the eggs for extra protein!**

#### Nutrients per serving

Calories	288
Protein	16 g
Fat	15.4 g
Carbohydrate	22 g
Fibre	3 g
Sodium	384 mg

# Healthy and Easy Recipes

## Couscous Primavera

Makes 6 to 8 servings

1 tbsp	canola oil	15 mL
1	onion, chopped	1
2	cloves garlic, minced	2
3	carrots, chopped	3
1 cup	frozen peas, thawed	250 mL
1 1/2 cups	reduced sodium chicken broth	375 mL
1 cup	whole wheat couscous	250 mL

1. In a large skillet, heat oil over medium heat. Sauté onion for 3-4 minutes or until softened. Add garlic and sauté for 30 seconds. Add carrots and peas; sauté for 3 to 4 minutes or until carrots are fork tender.
2. Add broth, increase heat to high and bring to a boil. As soon as it comes to a boil, turn off heat and stir in couscous. Remove from heat. Cover and let stand for 5 minutes or until liquid has absorbed. Fluff with fork.

Source: Cook! ©Dietitians of Canada 2011. Published by Robert Rose Inc.  
Visit the Dietitians of Canada Web site at [www.dietitians.ca/Your-Health.aspx](http://www.dietitians.ca/Your-Health.aspx)

### Tips:

Add half a 540 mL (19 oz) can of rinsed, drained chickpeas.

Instead of couscous try quinoa or bulgur. Cook according to package.

#### Nutrients per serving

Calories	134
Protein	5 g
Fat	2.2 g
Carbohydrate	25 g
Fibre	5 g
Sodium	139 mg



## Need More Nutrition Information?

Visit Dietitians of Canada at [www.unlockfood.ca](http://www.unlockfood.ca) for articles, videos, recipes and interactive healthy eating tools. Use *Browse by Topic* to find information for “Seniors”.

Visit Nutri-eSCREEN® at [www.nutritionscreen.ca/escreen](http://www.nutritionscreen.ca/escreen) if you are an older adult. Use this questionnaire to learn more about your eating habits. Find out how well you are doing with daily food choices that help you stay healthy and active, and where you can improve.

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### Talk with a dietitian for free at a provincial call centre.

- In **British Columbia** 8-1-1
- In **Manitoba** 1-877-830-2892 or 204-788-8248 in **Winnipeg**
- In **Newfoundland** and **Labrador** 8-1-1

Local health centres, physician offices or grocery stores may be able to provide dietitian services.

Find a dietitian in your neighbourhood: [www.dietitians.ca/Find](http://www.dietitians.ca/Find). Employee health benefits often cover dietitian services.

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### Contact your local health department to find more nutrition information:

- Other handouts on healthy eating, food budgeting, label reading and other health related information
- Contacts for local dietitians in the community, who can offer further support
- Nutrition workshops or seminars
- Local healthy food programs



# Cookbooks and on-line recipes:

Check your local library or bookstore for these cookbooks.

- 1. Cook!** (Dietitians of Canada, 2011)  
This cookbook is filled with healthy recipes that are quick and easy to make. It also features time-saving tips.
- 2. Simply Great Food** (Dietitians of Canada, 2007)  
This cookbook is filled with healthy recipes that are quick and easy to make. It also features time-saving tips.
- 3. The Basic Shelf Cookbook** (Revised 2011)  
Available online for purchase at Canadian Public Health Association at [publications.cpha.ca](http://publications.cpha.ca)

Visit: [www.Cookspiration.com](http://www.Cookspiration.com) developed by Dietitians of Canada for healthy recipe ideas to suit your taste and schedule. Try the new menu planner tool to help plan your day.

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## About this resource

*A Guide to Healthy Eating for Older Adults* was developed as part of the SCREEN® (Seniors in the Community Risk Evaluation for Eating and Nutrition) Project. This resource is not meant to replace the advice of a qualified Health Professional. Talk to your doctor or dietitian for individualized guidance on diet and your health.

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*Dietitians are passionate about the power of food and its connection to health. We look beyond fads and gimmicks to deliver reliable, life-changing advice.*