

Making Healthy Food Choices

With so many options at the grocery store, deciding how to create a balanced, healthy meal can be overwhelming. A good guide to eating a balanced meal is to make sure it includes the following:

- Carbohydrate-rich foods like sweet potatoes and brown rice
- Protein-rich foods like salmon and beans
- Fruits and vegetables (five portions a day)



But there are also foods you can add to your diet that will help you get more of the nutrients you need. Below is a list of important nutrients, their effects on your body and foods they are found in.

Foods High In Omega-3 Fatty Acids

Found in: sardines, tuna, mackerel, and salmon. They are also found in flaxseed, soybeans, canola oil, and walnuts

These fatty acids help prevent inflammation and can decrease the risk for cancer, rheumatoid arthritis, and heart disease. They also can help slow the progression of macular degeneration and potentially reduce the risk of Alzheimer's disease and keep the brain alert. Nutritionists recommend a serving of omega-3 fatty acids twice a week.

Foods Rich in Calcium

Found in: dairy products (milk, yogurt, and cheese), leafy green vegetables and cereals fortified with calcium

Calcium helps our bodies build and maintain healthy bones and has been known to lower blood pressure. The body's need for calcium is so essential that, if you are not getting enough, it begins to reabsorb it from the bones making them fragile and brittle and leading to osteoporosis. The World Health Organization recommends that people aged 50+ consume 1200 mg of calcium daily.

Foods Rich in Fiber

Found in: nuts, wholegrain cereal, wholegrain bread & pasta, brown rice, fruits & vegetables.

As we get older, our digestive system slows down. Foods rich in fiber promote proper digestion by moving food through the digestive tract and have been known to reduce the risk of heart disease.

Foods Rich in Vitamin B12

Found in: Dairy products, meat and poultry products

Vitamin B12 is responsible for maintaining nerve function, production of red blood cells, and DNA. As you age, absorbing the vitamin from food is harder. Consult your health care provider about supplements.

Foods Rich in Iron

Found in: shellfish, red meat, spinach & legumes (beans, lentils, chickpeas, peas, soy beans)

Iron plays a vital role in the body. It produces hemoglobin which carries oxygen in the blood from the lungs to the rest of the body. When you are not consuming enough iron, there's a limited supply of oxygen to the body tissues. This results in feeling tired and lethargic.

Foods Rich in Vitamin D

Found in: sunshine, eggs, salmon, tuna and Vitamin D-fortified cereals, milk, yogurt and juices

Vitamin D aids in the absorption of calcium in the body, slowing down the rate at which bones lose calcium and helping maintain density, preventing osteoporosis. New evidence shows that it may also protect against chronic conditions like multiple sclerosis, type 2 diabetes, cancer, and rheumatoid osteoporosis. A vitamin D deficiency also increases your chances of falling.

Foods Rich in Potassium

Found in: fruits and vegetables such as bananas, prunes and potatoes

Many older Americans do not get the recommended 4,700 mg of potassium, daily. Potassium aids in cell function, reduces blood pressure, lowers your chances of kidney stones and strengthens bones. Because too much potassium can be dangerous, consult your doctor before taking any supplements.

Foods Rich in Magnesium

Found in: whole grains, nuts, fresh fruit and vegetables

Magnesium plays a crucial role in 300 physiological functions. It keeps your heart, immune system and bones strong. As you grow older, your body's ability to absorb magnesium decreases and some medications also decrease the absorption of magnesium.

Foods Rich in Vitamin C

Found in: fruits and vegetables

Vitamin C has antioxidant properties which are believed to prevent cancer and heart disease. It is also involved in the production of collagen, which gives your skin elasticity and gets rid of dead skin cells giving you healthy skin; repairing bones and teeth; and aiding in healing wounds.

Water

As you age, your body's ability to conserve water decreases. Dehydration causes drowsiness, confusion, and other side effects, so it is essential to stay hydrated. High-fiber diets make it even more important to drink lots of water because fiber absorbs water. The surest way to check for dehydration is to observe your urine: light and transparent means you are hydrated; dark, bright yellow or cloudy is a sign of dehydration. Consult your health care provider about a suitable amount of water for you.