NUTRITION FOR AGING



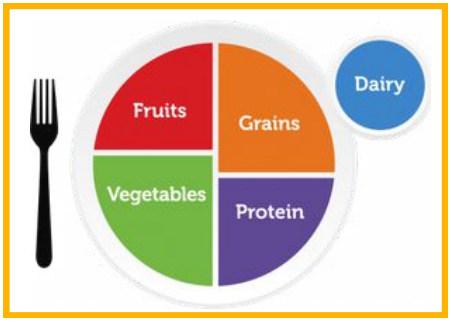
spectrum generations

By Kirsten Solomon, RDN

Updated September 2026

BUILD A BALANCED MEAL

Aim to fill half your plate with fruits and vegetables for balanced nutrition.
Content adapted from the Maine Office of Aging and Disability Services (OADS) Nutrition Guidelines for Older Adults



Vegetables



- Aim to eat 2-3 servings per day
- Enjoy them raw or cooked, fresh, canned or frozen
- 1 serving = 1 cup raw, ½ cup cooked, or 2 cup leafy greens (such as lettuce or spinach)

Fruits



- Aim For 2 servings daily
- Fresh, canned, frozen and dried fruit all count
- 1 serving = 1/2 cup fresh or canned; ¼ cup dried, 1 medium whole fruit or 1 cup 100% fruit juice

Whole Grains



- Incorporated whole grains as much as possible
- Aim for 6-8 servings per day
- 1 serving = 1 oz portion, 1 slice of bread, ½ cup cook grain such as rice, pasta or oats
- Substitute 2-3 servings with starchy vegetables/legumes

Dairy



- Aim for 2-3 servings daily
- Choose low-fat, vitamin D fortified
- 1 serving = 1 cup of milk or milk alternative (such as soy milk), 6 oz yogurt, or 1.5 oz hard cheese
- Milk alternatives are appropriate for dairy servings

Protein



- Aim to eat 6-12 oz protein daily
- 1 serving = ¼ cup beans or lentils, 1oz meat, poultry or fish, 1 egg or 1 Tbsp of nuts or nut butter
- Choose lean meats such as fish and chicken breast

Fats



- Aim to eat 3 serving daily
- 1 serving = 1 Tbsp oil, butter or mayo, 2 Tbsp salad dressing or ½ medium avocado

spectrum generations



PROTEIN

Protein is the body's building blocks. Eating adequate amounts of protein helps to build and maintain muscle, bones and skin. Protein also helps support healing after an illness or injury. As we age, our protein needs increase, yet many older adults do not consume enough protein to meet their needs.



- Choose lean proteins such as lean meat, eggs, chicken and pork as these contain less saturated fats than other options



- Meat alternatives such as tofu, tempeh, and seitan are protein-rich alternatives that are lower in saturated fats and provide a hearty meal



- Seafood provides a nutrient rich option that is high in protein, omega-3s and other essential vitamins and minerals



- Legumes such as beans, lentils, nuts, and seeds are antioxidant-rich alternatives. Consider adding them to your meals for a meatless main

EAT MORE

HEALTHY FATS

Fat helps to keep our bodies nourished, but not all fats are created equal. Fat should make up 20-35% of the calories you eat in a day, which is roughly 40-75 grams per day.

LIMIT

1) **Trans Fats:** These are linked to harmful health outcomes and should be avoided entirely

2) **Saturated fats:** These should be consumed in moderation, about 10% of our total caloric intake. They are mainly found in fatty animal products such as full-fat dairy, ribs, sausage and beef. Saturated fats usually solidify at room temperature



INCLUDE

The following types of fat should make up 20-35% of our total caloric intake. These fats help reduce inflammation and support heart health



1) **Monounsaturated Fats (Omega-6):** Found in foods like avocados, peanuts and peanut butter, almonds, hazelnuts, olives, pumpkin seeds, sesame seeds and certain oils (canola, olive and peanut)

2) **Polyunsaturated Fats (Omega-3):** These fats are found in seafood such as salmon and tuna, pine nuts, walnuts, flax seeds, sunflower seeds and certain oils (corn, soybean and sunflower)

FIND OUT ABOUT
FIBER

Fiber is found in plant foods that your body is unable to break down or absorb. It passes through the digestive track and supports many health functions. There are two types of fiber: soluble and insoluble.

Soluble

- Mixes with with water during digestions and forms stools
- Slows digestion and helps with satiety
- Helps to controls blood sugar
- Shown to lower cholesterol
- Reduces the risk of heart disease

Insoluble

- Adds bulk to stool and moves it through the intestines
- Supports colon health
- Helps to prevent constipation or bowel strain when going to the bathroom



Foods that contain fiber include:

Almonds
Avocado
Apples
Beans
Berries
Broccoli
Brussels Sprouts
Chia Seeds
Carrots
Lentils
Leafy Greens
Oats
Peaches
Plums
Pumpkin Seeds
Quinoa
Whole grain Breads
Whole Grain Cereals

Fiber Goal

25-30g per day

spectrum generations

CALCIUM & VITAMIN D

For Strong Bones



CALCIUM

Calcium is a mineral that helps keep our muscles and heart healthy. It is also what makes up our bones and teeth. Eating calcium-rich foods helps build muscles when we are young and keeps our bones strong as we age. Not eating enough calcium can cause our bodies to pull it from our bones which can make them weaker and more likely to break. Calcium-rich foods include dairy products, leafy greens, legumes, almonds and fortified foods.



VITAMIN D

Vitamin D plays many roles in our bodies. It supports immune function and also helps our body to absorb calcium to keep our bones strong. While our bones are made of calcium, vitamin D is the “key” that allows calcium to enter. They work in collaboration with each other to maintain healthy bones and teeth. Vitamin D is absorbed through our skin from the sun but also is found in fortified foods (such as milks and cereals), fatty fish, mushrooms and egg yolk.



THE IMPORTANCE OF

B12

B12 is essential for building healthy red blood cells and supporting nerve function. It also helps to keep our brain sharp and energy levels steady. As we age it is common for the body to struggle to absorb B12 from food, which can lead to deficiency. B12 deficiency symptoms can include: fatigue, pale skin, dementia, weight loss, and numbness in the hands and feet.

Foods rich in B12 include



Dairy (yogurt, cheese and milk)



Egg



Seafood (clams, trout, salmon, tuna)



Beef, lamb and poultry



Fortified cereal



Nutritional yeast

Thinking about supplements?

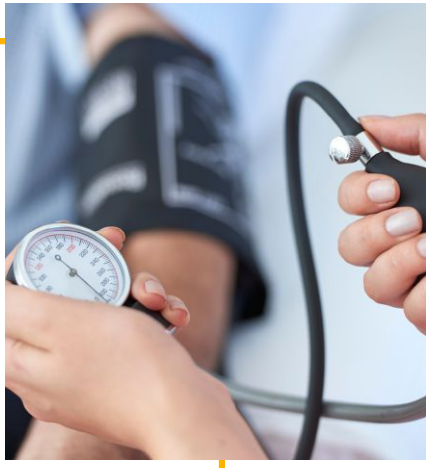
Food and drinks are the best way to obtain vitamins and minerals because our bodies absorb them most effectively. However, some individuals may need supplementation to get enough nutrients, such as B12 and Vitamin D. It is best to speak with your physician before starting any supplements

spectrum generations

CUT BACK ON
SODIUM

Sodium comes from salt of any kind. Most individuals in America consume too much sodium. The majority of sodium in our diet we consume is from packaged food and pre-made meals (such as those served in restaurants)



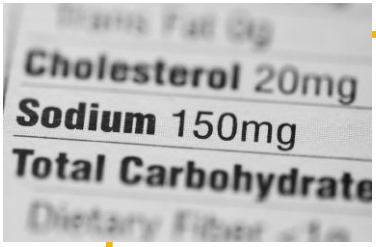


The body does need small amounts of sodium to function, but too much salt can cause increase our risks of certain conditions such as hypertension, heart disease, stroke and even diabetes.

Ways to limit sodium include

- prepare more meals at home
- use fresh herbs and spices in place of salt
- rinse canned foods such as beans and vegetables to remove excess salt

The USDA recommends consuming less than 2,300 mg sodium per day. That works out to be about 700-800 mg per meal. Be sure to check your food labels for sodium levels and opt to buy products labeled "low salt", "sodium free" or "no salt added" at the grocery store.



spectrum generations

HYDRATION



Hydration is an unsung hero of our health and one that is often overlooked. Feelings of thirst may decrease as you age.

Fluids help to maintain hydration and keep our body functioning properly.

Hydration helps to

- Keep us full between meals
- Maintain body temperature
- Lubricate joints and tissues
- Maintain healthy bowel function

The color of our urine is usually a good indicator of hydration status. Urine that is dark yellow can be a sign of dehydration.

Healthy beverage options include:

- Water
- Low fat milk or fortified milk alternatives
- Naturally sugar free options such as tea
- 100% fruit or vegetable juice

Sugar sweetened beverages such as sodas, lemonade and sweet tea can contain **5x the daily recommendation of sugar.**

If choosing to drink alcohol, drink it in moderation - 1 drink per day or less for women, 2 drinks per day for men and be mindful of how alcohol may interact with your medications.

CHECK THE LABEL

The nutrition facts label can help you to make informed choices about your health!

- Servings per container: the total number of recommended servings per the entire package
- The serving size: the amount of food that is recommended to be eaten at one time.
- Daily Value: how much of a nutrient contributes to your daily diet per serving
  - 5% or less is low
    - this would be optimal in added sugar, sodium and saturated fat
  - 20% or higher is high
    - this would be optimal in dietary fiber, calcium, iron and vitamin D.

Nutrition Facts

8 servings per container

Serving size **2/3 cup (55g)**

Amount per serving

Calories **230**

	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 8g	**10%**
Saturated Fat 1g	**5%**
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 0mg	**0%**
Sodium 160mg	**7%**
Total Carbohydrate 37g	**13%**
Dietary Fiber 4g	**14%**
Total Sugars 12g	
Includes 10g Added Sugars	**20%**
Protein 3g	
Vitamin D 2mcg	10%
Calcium 260mg	20%
Iron 8mg	45%
Potassium 240mg	6%

* The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.

BE ACTIVE



Physical activity is a great way to keep our muscles strong and our body's healthy. Regular movement can help to

- minimize fall risks
- improve our mental health,
- reduce pain
- manage chronic disease conditions such as diabetes or heart disease.
- improve sleep

Remember, healthy eating does not need to be a chore

MAKE IT WORK FOR YOU!

- 1 small change each day can make a big difference!
- Try and explore new recipes that include plant sources such as vegetables, legumes and fruit
- Eating healthy is always more fun with other people! Try sharing meals with friends and families - or look for group meals at your local senior centers.
    - Find resources about local meal options at:
        - Spectrumgenerations.org
        - Peopleplusmaine.org



INTERESTED IN PERSONALIZED NUTRITION THERAPY?

Spectrum Generations is excited to be offering 1:1 nutrition counseling with a Registered Dietitian. If you are interested in learning more about how diet can improve your overall health and wellbeing, feel free to call or email.

To schedule 1:1 nutritional counseling or get more information:

Call (207) 620-1648 or email

Ksolomon@spectrumgenerations.org

spectrum generations