

Your Care Instructions

Good nutrition is important at any age, but it is especially important for older adults. Eating a healthy diet helps keep your body strong, and it can help lower your risk for disease.

As you get older, your nutrition needs change — your body needs more of certain nutrients, such as vitamin B12, calcium and vitamin D. However, it may be harder for you to get these and other important nutrients; this could be for many reasons, such as lack of hunger, teeth or chewing problems, or limited time to plan or prep meals.

Now that you need to get all your nutrients from less food, it is important to plan what you eat. The suggestions below can help you get the nutrition you need. If you still need help, talk with your doctor, and they may recommend that you work with a dietitian, who helps you plan meals.

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor or nurse call line if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

How can you care for yourself at home?

To stay healthy

- Eat a variety of foods. The more you vary the foods you eat, the more vitamins, minerals and other nutrients you get.
- Take a multivitamin every day. Choose one with about 100% of the daily value (DV) for vitamins and minerals. Do not take more than 100% of the daily value for any vitamin or mineral unless your doctor tells you to. Talk with your doctor if you are not sure which multivitamin is right for you.
- Eat lots of vegetables and fruits. Fresh, frozen, no-salt canned vegetables and fruits in their own juice or light syrup are good choices.
- Include foods that are high in vitamin B12 in your diet. Good choices are fortified breakfast cereal, skim or low-fat milk or other dairy products, meat, poultry, fish and eggs. Older adults who don't eat a variety of foods may need to take a daily supplement to get enough B12.

- Get enough calcium and vitamin D. Good choices include skim or low-fat milk, cheese and yogurt. Other good options are tofu, orange juice with added calcium and some leafy green vegetables, such as collard greens and kale. If you don't use milk products, talk to your doctor about calcium and vitamin D supplements. If you are 50 or older, Health Canada recommends taking a supplement with 400 IU of vitamin D each day.
- Eat protein foods every day. Good choices include lean meat, fish, poultry, eggs and cheese. Other good options are cooked beans, peanut butter, nuts and seeds.
- Choose whole grain foods. Look for foods including whole grain bread, whole grain cereals, brown rice, quinoa and oatmeal.

If you have constipation

- Eat high-fiber foods every day. These include vegetables, fruits, cooked dried beans and whole grain foods.
- Drink plenty of fluids, enough so that your urine is light yellow or clear like water. If you have kidney, heart or liver disease and have to limit fluids, talk with your doctor before you increase the amount of fluids you drink.
- Ask your doctor if stool softeners may help keep your bowels regular.

If you have mouth problems that make chewing hard

- Pick canned or cooked vegetables and fruits, as these are often softer.
- Chop or shred meat, poultry and fish. Add sauce or gravy to the meat to help keep it moist.
- Pick other protein foods that are soft, such as cheese, peanut butter, cooked beans, cottage cheese and eggs.

If you have trouble shopping for yourself

- Ask a local food store to deliver groceries to your home.
- Contact a volunteer center and ask for help.
- Ask a family member or neighbor to help you.

If you have trouble preparing meals

- If you are able, take a cooking class.
- Use a microwave oven to cook TV dinners and other frozen or prepared foods.
- Join group meal programs — you can find these through senior citizen programs.

- Have meals brought to your home. Your community may offer programs that deliver meals, such as Meals on Wheels.

If your appetite is poor

- Try eating smaller amounts of food more often. For example, eat 4 or 5 small meals a day instead of 1 or 2 large meals.
- Eat with family and friends, or join group meal programs offered through volunteer programs. Eating with others may help your appetite, and it helps you be more social.
- Ask your doctor if your medicines could cause appetite or taste problems. If so, ask about changing medicines.
- Add spices and herbs to increase the flavor of food.
- If you think you are depressed, ask your doctor for help. Depression can affect your appetite, and it can make it hard to do everyday activities, such as grocery shopping and cooking.

When should you call for help?

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor or nurse call line if you have any problems.

For 24/7 nurse advice and general health information, call Health Link at 811.

Current as of: November 7, 2018

Author: [Healthwise Staff](http://www.healthwise.org) (www.healthwise.org)

Medical Review: Adam Husney MD — Family Medicine & Kathleen Romito MD — Family Medicine