



Senior Health Guide: How to Eat a Healthy Diet

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About this Guide

A healthy diet can help ensure your senior loved ones not only live longer, but also better. Food is the best medicine for many ailments and pains because it can help prevent and treat disease, improve mental well-being and is an important ingredient to live a long, healthy life. In this guide, we will discuss the importance of a healthy diet and provide recommendations for improving the food choices of your senior loved ones. Along with a healthy diet, there are other important factors to good health, such as exercise, medication and social interaction. To learn more about these, you can download our “Senior Health Guide: How to Improve Physical and Social Activity” from our website.



Why is a Healthy Diet Important for Seniors?

Good food feeds your whole body with the nutrients needed to improve and maintain good health. A well-balanced diet can help seniors have:

- The energy needed to accomplish tasks throughout the day.
- The clarity and mental sharpness of good mental health.
- A boosted immune system to resist disease and recover from illness, accident and surgery.
- Improved ability to manage chronic health problems.
- Better quality of life, mobility and independence.

In many cases, a healthy diet can prevent specific illnesses from ever occurring. However, don't consider food to be the only solution to a medical issue because other factors, such as medication, can be important as well. Please use this guide for information about healthy food choices and then consult with a doctor or pharmacist prior to making any dietary or supplement changes to make sure they are safe for your senior loved one. For example, drinking grapefruit juice is a healthy choice; however it can negatively interact with a number of medications.

Eating the right foods can help heal and prevent many illnesses and diseases. Below is a list of some healthy food choices and information about how they can help improve health.

- Lower cholesterol and boost energy levels with corn.
- Heal cuts and bruises, as well as prevent cancer and heart disease, with lemons and limes.
- Help prevent colon cancer and decrease the risk of stroke with parsnips.
- Lower cholesterol, high blood pressure and the risk of heart disease with grape juice.
- Help the body repair after being sick by increasing protein. Good sources of protein include eggs, cottage cheese, chicken and other lean meats.
- Alleviate nausea and vomiting with ginger tea.
- Strengthen the immune system with foods high in vitamin A and C. Good sources of vitamin A include carrots, spinach, mustard greens, kale, yellow and orange squash. Good sources of vitamin C include oranges, guava, red sweet pepper, kiwi, grapefruit juice, green sweet pepper, strawberries and Brussels sprouts.

Beyond this short list, there are many other fruits, vegetables, oils and supplements that can improve specific health issues. We recommend that you consult with the physician or health professionals caring for your senior loved ones and ask for specific items that would work best for their specific health needs.



Physical Changes that Seniors Experience



As seniors age, they face health concerns that are specific to their changing bodies and needs. According to the publication “Aging: What to expect as you get older” by staff from the Mayo Clinic, there are several common aging-related and food-related changes that seniors experience. Below is the information from this publication, along with additional recommendations from the National Institute on Aging.

Heart Becomes Less Efficient

- **Reason:** Over time, the heart has to work harder to pump the same amount of blood through the body. At the same time, blood vessels lose elasticity and fatty deposits can form in the artery walls, making it even harder for the heart to pump blood.
- **Solution:** Get plenty of physical activity such as walking, aerobics or swimming. Eat a healthy diet with fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Work with a doctor to quit smoking.

Bones Become Less Dense

- **Reason:** As we age, our bones shrink in size and density, and our muscles lose strength and flexibility. With poor balance and weakened muscles, there is an increased risk of falling, which can potentially result in bone fractures.
- **Solution:** Ensure there is enough calcium and vitamin D in the diet from food and supplements. Increase weight-bearing activities to help build bones. For example, walk 6-7 days per week and lift light weights 2-3 days per week. The added muscle and flexibility will combat the risk of falling, as well as build stronger bones.

Constipation Becomes More Frequent

- **Reason:** A low-fiber diet, too little fluids, medications, medical conditions (such as diabetes and irritable bowel syndrome) and lack of exercise all contribute to increased issues with constipation. Seniors may decide not to eat due to the loneliness of eating alone or cooking for one. The lack of food and nutrients can result in chronic pain and digestive issues. There is also a natural decrease with age in the movement of food and enzymes through the digestive system, which allows food to remain in the intestines longer and produce harder stools.
- **Solution:** Drink plenty of water, eat a diet high in fiber from fruits, vegetables and whole grains, increase physical activity and “go” to the bathroom when needed. If taking medications that can contribute to constipation, ask a doctor about alternatives.

Bladder Becomes Difficult to Control

- **Reason:** Regardless of gender, bladder control is an increasing problem with age, and health problems such

as obesity, menopause, enlarged prostate, frequent constipation and chronic cough only make matters worse.

- **Solution:** “Go” more often... even if you don’t think you have to! Work to lose weight and strengthen the pelvic muscle exercises with Kegel exercises. Kegel exercises are when you tighten your pelvic muscles as if you’re stopping your stream of urine. Aim for at least three sets of 10 repetitions a day, then gradually increase the sets and reps.

Memory Becomes a Little Fuzzy

- **Reason:** As we age, the number of cells in the brain decrease, which makes memory less efficient. This means it can be difficult to remember names and can take longer to learn something new. It is also estimated that 30% of seniors lose their ability to make stomach acid, which means it can lead to deficiencies in nutrients such as vitamin B12 and folic acid. The result can be neurological changes such as memory loss, decreased alertness and numbness in the arms and legs.
- **Solution:** A daily routine with physical activity, social interaction and a healthy diet can keep memory sharp. Add supplements to boost absorption of important vitamins.

Weight Becomes Difficult to Manage

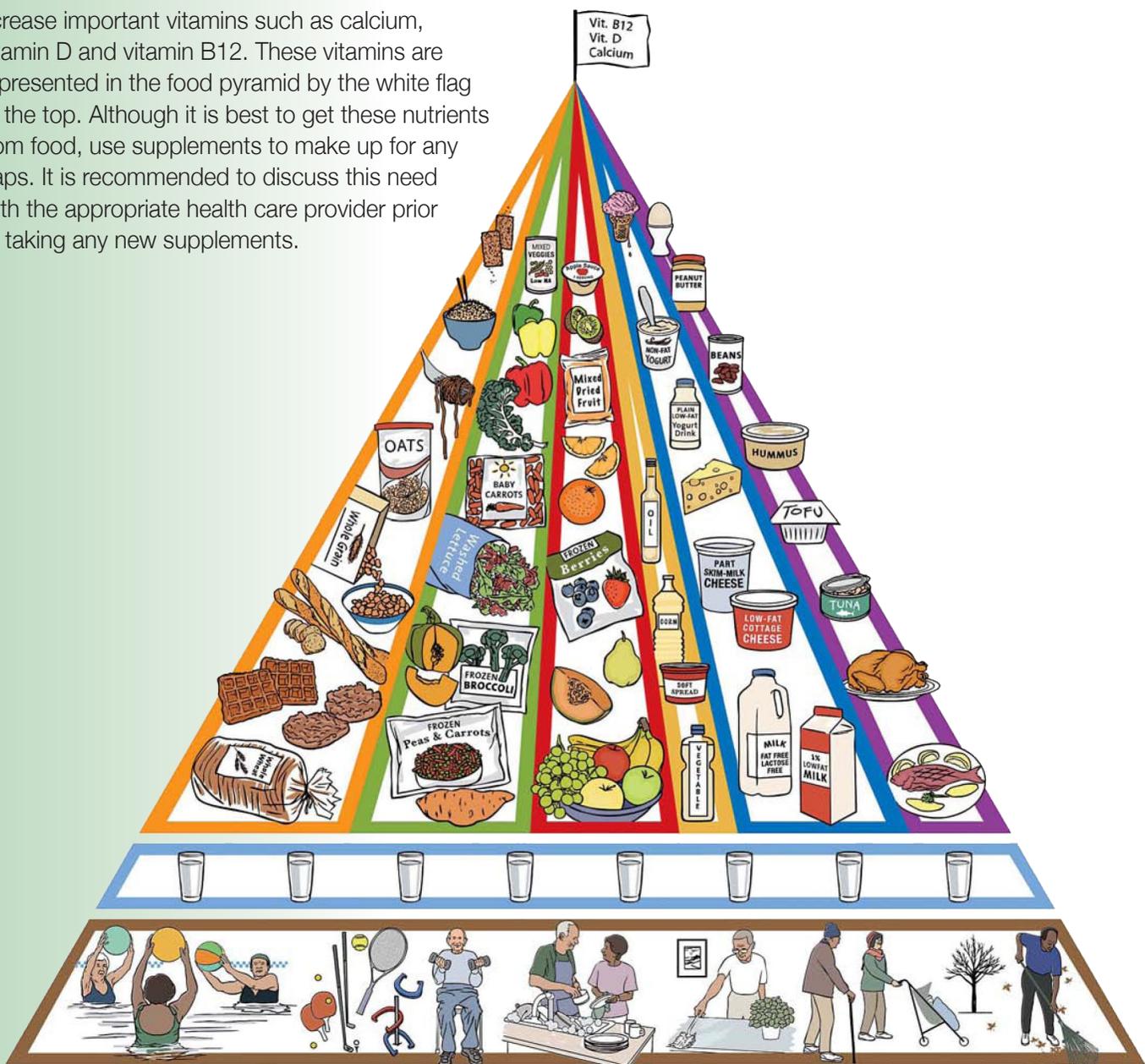
- **Reason:** It is more difficult to maintain or lose weight with age. As we age, there is a decrease in metabolism, saliva and enzyme production and muscle mass. As the muscle turns to fat, the new fat tissue requires fewer calories, which means fewer calories need to be consumed. At the same time, the sense of taste can diminish and lead to over-use of salt and sugar, which can lead to type 2 diabetes and poor heart health.
- **Solution:** Increase physical activity and watch the diet. Consult with a nutritionist about the amount of calories needed, and adjust portion sizes and food choices accordingly. Although no one likes it, your senior loved one might not need to eat as much as they are used to! They also may need to eat different foods that have specific nutrients that can be properly digested by their changing system.

What Should Seniors Eat?



In 2007, the Health and Research Center of Tufts University updated their Food Guide Pyramid for Older Adults to highlight food choices and liquids to meet the needs of seniors. This food pyramid is endorsed by AARP. (You can download the pyramid as a PDF at <http://nutrition.tufts.edu/documents/ModifiedMyPyramid.pdf>.) Some of the important points about their recommendations for seniors include:

- Use fresh, frozen, canned and dried fruits and vegetables to make meal preparation and portions easier to manage. Frozen, canned and dried foods last longer and make for fewer trips to the store. Frozen vegetables are easy to single portion, reseal and refreeze for future meals. Dried fruits are easy to incorporate into a meal or snack and keep in the fridge much longer than fresh.
- Drink more glasses of water and consume foods with high fluid content (such as vegetables and soups) to remain hydrated. With age, the feeling of thirst can diminish and result in drinking less than needed.
- Increase important vitamins such as calcium, vitamin D and vitamin B12. These vitamins are represented in the food pyramid by the white flag at the top. Although it is best to get these nutrients from food, use supplements to make up for any gaps. It is recommended to discuss this need with the appropriate health care provider prior to taking any new supplements.



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What Should Seniors Eat?

FRUIT • FRUIT • FRUIT



Eat 1.5 to 2 servings of fruit a day. Instead of drinking fruit (as a smoothie or juice), eat from a variety of whole fresh, frozen, canned or dried fruits (grapes, prunes, apples, oranges, berries, melon) to get the benefits of the higher fiber and vitamin content.

Example Servings:

- 1 medium apple, peach or banana
- 1/2 cup berries or sliced melon
- 1/4 cup dried apricots or raisins
- 3/4 cup 100% orange juice
- 2 plums
- 15 grapes

VEGETABLES • VEGETABLES



Eat 2 to 2.5 cups of fresh, canned or frozen vegetables daily with a variety of colors, from dark leafy greens to oranges and yellows.

Example Servings:

- 1 cup romaine lettuce
- 5 broccoli florets
- 10 baby carrots
- 1/2 cup winter squash or sweet potato
- 3/4 cup 100% vegetable juice
- 1/2 cup cooked spinach
- 1 ear of corn

GRAINS • GRAINS • GRAINS



Eat 6-7 ounces of grains every day (1 slice of bread = 1 oz) through pasta, bread and cereals that have "whole grain" or "whole wheat" in the ingredient list.

Example Servings:

- 1/2 cup raisin bran or oatmeal
- 1 slice whole-wheat bread
- 1 cup ready-to-eat cereal
- 1/2 cup cooked rice, pasta or cereal

PROTEIN • PROTEIN



Eat half your body weight in protein every day. (For example, if you weigh 140 pounds, eat 70 grams of protein daily.) Eat from a variety of protein sources throughout the day and week, including fish, eggs (egg whites are best), beans, seeds, peas, nuts, milk and cottage cheese.

Example Servings:

- 1-1 1/2 cup cooked lentils or dry beans
- 1 1/2 cup chili
- 4 Tbsp peanut butter
- 2-3 oz. fish, skinless poultry or lean meat - baked, broiled or grilled
- 1/2 cup canned tuna
- 1 egg or 1/4 cup egg substitute
- 1 serving Greek yogurt

WATER • WATER • WATER



Drink eight, 8-ounce glasses of water or beverages such as fruit or vegetable juice, milk, reduced sodium soup, or decaffeinated tea or coffee each day.

Example Servings:

- 8 oz. water
- 8 oz. juice
- 8 oz. reduced sodium soup
- 8 oz. nonfat milk

VITAMIN D • VITAMIN D



With increasing age, the skin becomes less efficient at using vitamin D from the sun. So it is important to eat vitamin D from food or supplement.

Example Servings:

- Fish (salmon, tuna, sole, flounder)
- Egg yolk
- Fortified milk

The Guidelines

The Modified MyPyramid for Older Adults highlights the need for seniors to consume fruits, vegetables, calcium, grains, proteins, water, and vitamins B and D every day. The specific recommendations for daily intake are included on this page.

CALCIUM • CALCIUM



Eat or drink 3 or more servings of calcium every day from quality food choices such as milk, yogurt, cheese, broccoli, almonds, kale and tofu. (Various sources recommend seniors have 1,200-1,500 mg of calcium per day.) If you have issues with milk, try lactose-free products or almond milk.

Example Servings:

- 1 cup low fat, skim or chocolate milk
- 1 1/2 oz. of low fat or fat free cheese
- 1 cup or low fat or fat free yogurt
- 6 sardines with bones
- 1 cup of low fat or fat free pudding or custard

VITAMIN B • VITAMIN B



After 50, it can be difficult for the body to absorb vitamin B-12. Get the recommended daily intake (2.4 mcg) of B-12 from food or supplement.

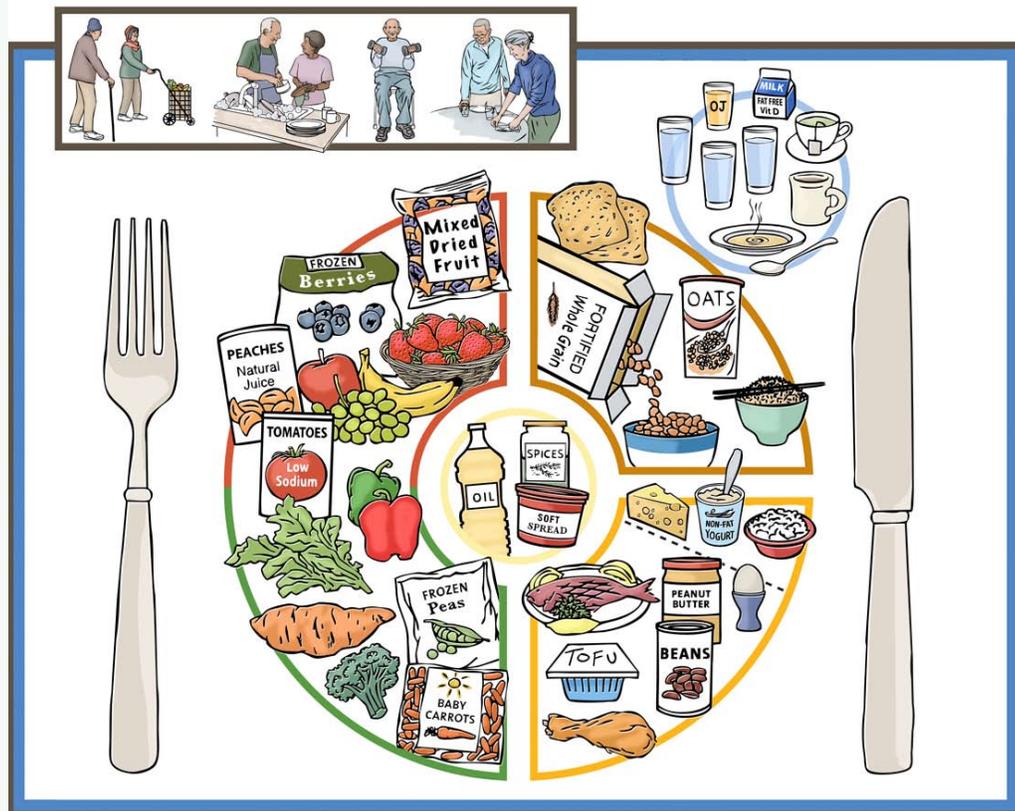
Example Servings:

- Fortified breakfast cereals
- Fish
- Meat
- Poultry
- Eggs
- Milk and milk products

What Should Seniors Eat?



MyPlate for Older Adults



(For more information, you can visit <http://nutrition.tufts.edu/research/myplate-older-adults>.)

Example Plate

Because the food pyramid can be overwhelming, the pyramid is broken down into an example plate to help demonstrate how to get all the needed nutrients into daily meals. In 2011, nutrition scientists at the Jean Mayer USDA Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging (USDA HNRCA) at Tufts University introduced the “MyPlate for Older Adults” to call attention to the unique nutritional and physical activity needs of aging seniors.

Track Your Meals

Use the SuperTracker online web program provided by the USDA at www.choosemyplate.gov/SuperTracker/default.aspx to help track your nutrition. When you visit the website, you enter your age, gender and daily activity level and goals (example goals: maintain or lose weight, minutes exercising per week, vitamins to track, etc.), and the program provides a personal pyramid with food suggestions and calorie allowance just for you. Get sample meal plans, track food and exercise throughout the day, watch your results, and print PDF reports of your results.

How Much Should Seniors Eat?

The calories needed to maintain a healthy weight is another element that changes with increasing age. Below are guidelines from the National Institute of Aging for the approximate number of calories needed per day based on gender, age and physical activity.

A woman over 50 who is:

- Not physically active needs about 1600 calories a day.
- Somewhat physically active needs about 1800 calories a day.
- Very active needs about 2000 calories a day.

A man over 50 who is:

- Not physically active needs about 2000 calories a day.
- Somewhat physically active needs about 2200-2400 calories a day.
- Very active needs about 2400-2800 calories a day.

Eating Tips for Seniors

To help follow the guidelines for healthy eating, below are 16 tips to help seniors stick with a healthy diet.

- 1. Drink at least eight (8 ounce) glasses of water** every day. (Coffee and tea do not count as water if they have caffeine because it dehydrates.) Drink water every hour throughout the day and with every meal to ensure proper hydration. Keep track throughout the day of how much water you drink.
- 2. Eat from 5 of the 6 food groups every day**, and vary your choices within each group throughout the week to ensure a variety of nutrients to maintain good health.
- 3. Eat more fiber** from whole grains and high fiber vegetables. Add fiber powders such as Metamucil to drinks at the recommended doses.
4. If it is difficult to eat dry foods, **try foods that are “moist”** such as spaghetti, soups and stews.
- 5. Avoid foods high in cholesterol**, such as potato chips, cheeseburgers, macaroni and cheese, ice cream, muffins and steak. These should be only “once in a while” foods.
- 6. Eat foods low in fat.** For example, if you like 2% milk, try ½% milk. Choose leaner meats, such as chicken and fish, and also buy 90%-99% lean ground beef rather than 80%. Don't assume “fat free” packaged products are the best option, because many fat free foods have added sugar.
- 7. Cut back on adding salt and sugar** in foods and drinks. Be especially careful of how much sugar you add to tea and coffee.
- 8. For breakfast, have high fiber bread or cereal, colorful fruit and protein** to keep full for the morning and get the energy needed for the day. Try cottage cheese with peaches, a protein shake with a fruit salad, an omelet with vegetables, oatmeal with raisins and pecans or toast with peanut butter.
- 9. For lunch, have protein and fiber** for the energy needed for the afternoon. Try a whole grain tuna sandwich with lettuce and tomato, vegetable soup with wheat noodles, roasted red pepper and mozzarella cheese sandwich or spinach salad with chicken and low-fat dressing.
- 10. For dinner, have more of the same... protein and high fiber...** to keep full through the night. Try grilled chicken with roasted vegetables, fresh baked fish with sweet potato, or homemade chili with lean beef or turkey.



- 11. Make mealtime special** with music, candles, mood lighting, flowers or a great view to enjoy the meal. Instead of eating in front of the television, try reading a book. Instead of eating while standing at the kitchen counter, sit at the table and listen to music.
- 12. When hungry between meals, opt for healthy snacks** such as dried or fresh fruit, nuts, cheese sticks and whole grain crackers, peanut butter on celery, cottage cheese, hummus and fresh vegetables.
- 13. Do not skip** breakfast, lunch or dinner. Skipping a meal will lower the metabolism and encourage “binge” eating later when feeling too hungry to prepare a healthy meal.
- 14. Variety is the spice of life...** and the dinner plate. Instead of always cooking the same 5 meals, try new foods and new recipes to keep it interesting.
- 15. Keep it simple** when planning meals. Don't overdo with complicated dinners. Simple 20-minute dinners and the crockpot can be great. Cook enough for a couple of meals, if you like left-overs, to make cooking time more effective.
- 16. Ask for help** if you need support with shopping, meal planning, cooking or cleaning the kitchen.

Eating Tips for Seniors



How to Get Support with Shopping or Cooking

If meal planning, shopping, cooking and/or cleaning become difficult, there are numerous possibilities for support. It is better to ask for help, than to suffer in silence by limiting meals to fewer options, skipping meals entirely or not cleaning the dishes. Depending on the situation, there are a number of options, including:

- **Offer to exchange services** with a friend or neighbor who can shop or clean in exchange for a good meal, “secret recipe” dessert, watching a pet or other service.
- **Order home grocery delivery** through grocery stores or deliver services.
- **Ask someone to live with you** to take care of the household responsibilities that you are unable to do.
- **Contact Meals on Wheels** to ask if you qualify for their lunch and dinner meals to be delivered to your door, free of charge. To find your local Meals on Wheels program, go to www.mowaa.org.
- **Hire a homemaker.** Find someone you know or hire a home care agency to provide any services you need.

Don't Allow Excuses to Get in the Way

Eating healthy is not always easy. It seems there are always “things” getting in the way. Below are tips to help alleviate some fears and excuses that might prevent seniors from eating healthy. Empower your senior loved one to take back control of their health!

Excuse 1: I don't like to eat alone.

Eating with others is definitely a lot more enjoyable and also increases the chances of eating better. If living alone, create a list of opportunities to eat with company, such as:

- **Schedule regular lunch dates** with family, friends or neighbors on a rotating basis.
- **Share pot-luck dinners** with friends, neighbors or groups on a regular basis to add fun and variety to your diet.
- **Get involved in activities to find new friendships** by taking a class or volunteering.
- **Join an adult day care center** to enjoy companionship and nutritious meals.
- **Attend senior meal programs** at the local senior center, YMCA, congregation or high school.



Excuse 2: I'm not hungry.

Loss of appetite can be due to medication, depression, boredom, stress or illness. To find ways to increase interest in food and stimulate an appetite, try these ideas:

- Eat bitter melon or take herbal tablets such as astragalus herb, slippery elm bark, yarrow flower or dandelion. (Before trying any new foods or herbs, ask the doctor and/or pharmacist.)
- Make mealtime a special event to enjoy the experience.
- Make the meals more flavorful with onion, garlic, hot sauce, vinegar or spices.
- If medication or illness is the issue, ask your senior loved one's doctor for support and alternatives.



Excuse 3: I have a hard time chewing.

When chewing food becomes difficult, try easier foods such as yummy smoothies, cottage cheese, yogurt, fruit-filled JELL-O, steamed vegetables, soups, stews, rice and other soft foods. See a dentist if teeth are troublesome or dentures don't fit properly.

Excuse 4: I don't like healthy food.

If you're not used to eating healthy food, it can be difficult to get started. Try taking these small steps to help make the healthy change easier:

- Make a commitment to yourself that you want to be healthier.
- Make a list of healthy foods you don't eat or are scared to eat (include fruits, vegetables, proteins and grains in the list).
- From this list, try two new things every week.
- Before tasting the new food, focus on how you are helping yourself get healthier and allow yourself to be proud of your accomplishments.
- Keep going until you find a variety of new foods that you enjoy.

Excuse 5: I am bored with cooking.

Make a commitment to add variety and fun to your food. Get inspired to cook by:

- Watching cooking shows on television.
- Going to a farmer's market.
- Searching for recipes online and experimenting with recipes for 1 or 2 people.
- Buying new foods or flavors that you've never tried.
- Asking friends and family for new ideas.
- Combining leftover meats and veggies into a new meal.
- Trying foods at different times of day (for example, a sandwich for breakfast and an omelet for dinner).

Excuse 6: It doesn't matter if I eat healthy because I'm going to be sick anyways.

Following the Modified MyPyramid for Older Adults guidelines can help improve your health and maintain a healthy future. However, it is not a guarantee of being illness-free because health still depends on other "external factors" such as family, lifestyle, personality traits, mental health and more. Do not let these "external factors" be an excuse to give up on eating healthy.





Contact Us

We proudly provide in-home services throughout most of Michigan and we continue to expand our service area daily within the state.

Please feel free to contact us at **877-308-1212** or **www.CompassionateCareMi.com** with any questions, concerns or a request for a free in-home consultation.

A Compassionate Care representative is available by phone 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to answer your needs because your care is our priority.

Compassionate Care for Your In-Home Care Needs

A healthy diet is critical for healthy aging and the ability to live independently at home. To encourage your loved ones to eat a better diet, try the resources in this guide. If you need additional assistance, you can contact Compassionate Care Home Health Services for support in numerous areas, such as meal planning and preparation.

Compassionate Care Home Health Services, Inc. is your resource to promote health and independent living for your senior loved ones. We are dedicated to providing high-quality, personalized home health services including personal care, private duty nursing services, respite care, homemaking, therapies and more.

Whether your loved one is suffering from Alzheimer's, Dementia, cancer, COPD, stroke, diabetes and/or other illnesses, or needs some other form of support, Compassionate Care Home Health Services, Inc. is there for you. We take pride in building relationships of trust and compatibility between our caregivers and clients. Our caregivers are specifically trained to meet the individual needs of each client to ensure safety and comfort, wherever they call home.

