

# 6

## Healthy eating



Healthy eating and being physically active are keys to a healthy lifestyle. But just what does ‘healthy eating’ mean?

## Introduction

Eating a range of nutritious foods is as important as staying active. As we get older, we have to get smarter about eating better. Dietary requirements could change as your need for energy may decrease, while your need for nutrients, such as proteins, vitamins and minerals, may stay the same or even increase. This chapter gives tips for healthy eating, getting enough fluids, eating out and dietary supplements.

The Australian Government’s *Dietary Guidelines for Australian Adults* recommends that for a healthy diet, you enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods and:

- Eat plenty of vegetables, legumes and fruits with at least two serves of fruit and five serves of vegetables everyday.
- Eat cereals (including breads, rice, pasta and noodles), preferably wholegrain.
- Include lean meat, fish, poultry and/or alternatives such as eggs, legumes and nuts.
- Include milk, yoghurts and cheeses and/or alternatives. Reduced fat should be chosen where possible.
- Drink plenty of water.

### Older Australians should try to enjoy:

- three meals a day.
- meals in a social setting.

Take care to:

- Limit saturated fat and moderate total fat intake.
- Choose foods low in salt.
- Limit your alcohol intake if you choose to drink.
- Consume only moderate amounts of sugars and foods containing added sugars.

The guidelines also encourage maintaining a healthy body weight by balancing physical activity and food intake.



### For more information

Go to the National Health and Medical Research Council’s website at [www.nhmrc.gov.au](http://www.nhmrc.gov.au)



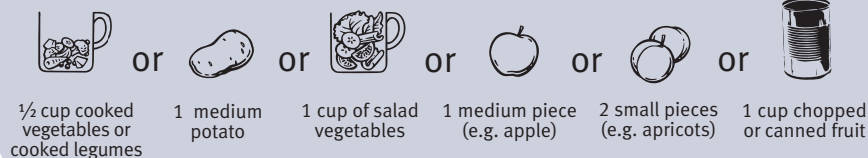
### Quick tip

The information in this chapter will not address certain nutritional needs such as, if you:

- have been ill
- are undergoing surgery
- have lost weight recently without trying
- have a poor appetite
- are on a special diet.

In these cases it is recommended that you speak to your doctor or health professional and seek a referral to a dietitian.

### What is a serve of vegetables or fruit?



(Department of Health and Ageing and the National Health and Medical Research Council)

## Tips for healthy eating

### Eat a variety of fruits and vegetables every day

- Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables of different colours to give your body a wide range of valuable nutrients, including fibre, folate, potassium and vitamins A and C.
- Leave skins on your fruits and vegetables where possible. For example, eat the skin when you have a baked potato, and snack on washed unpeeled apples, pears and peaches.
- Don't forget to rinse fruits and vegetables before cooking or eating.
- Keep some tinned or frozen fruits and vegetables on hand; these are good choices, convenient and easy to prepare. Choose fruit tinned in natural juice not syrup.

### Eat a diet rich in foods with fibre

- High-fibre foods include dried beans, fruits, vegetables and whole-grain foods.
- Breakfast is a good time to enjoy foods with fibre. For example, try unsweetened whole-grain cereals, and add fruit, such as bananas, stewed fruit in natural juice and berries.

### Choose lean cut of meat and poultry

- Trim away extra fat and remove the skin from chicken before cooking.
- The best cooking methods are to steam, microwave, boil, grill, roast/bake on baking paper with a little spray-on olive oil, or use a non-stick frying pan with a little spray-on oil.

### Season your foods with lemon juice, herbs or spices instead of butter and salt

- For example, coriander, ginger, garlic, chilli and lemongrass are great in a vegetable stir fry; or top steamed vegetables with a dash of olive oil and mixed herbs, such as parsley, basil, thyme and oregano (fresh or dried).

### Avoid foods that are high in fat, especially saturated fat

- Saturated fat is mostly found in foods that come from animals such as fatty meats and butter and from processed foods such as biscuits, cakes, pastries and takeaways.

### Choose healthy fats and oils

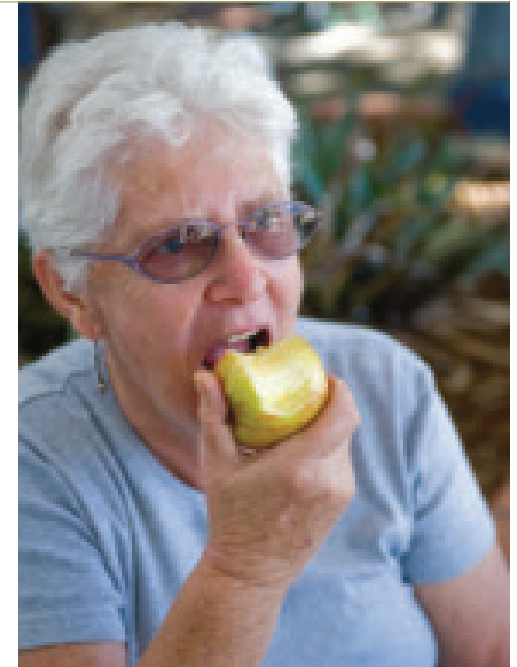
- Canola, olive, sunflower, soy and peanut oils as well as polyunsaturated and monosaturated oils and spreads are the healthiest options.

### Ensure you get enough calcium

- Eat foods high in calcium such as milk, cheese, yoghurt, tinned salmon or sardines. Reduced-fat dairy foods are preferable.
- These foods are important for strong bones and preventing fractures.

### Ensure you get enough protein

- Choose lean cuts of meat and poultry. Include fish, eggs and legumes.
- These foods help to maintain healthy muscles.





### Quick tip

Do you have a urinary control problem? If the answer is yes, don't stop drinking liquids. Talk with your doctors about treatment.



### Quick tip

Care for your food: prepare and store it safely.



### Choose and prepare foods with little salt

- Choose low-salt varieties of packaged foods (for example tuna in spring water rather than brine).

### Reach and maintain a healthy weight

- The secret is to balance your 'energy in' and 'energy out'. 'Energy in' comes from foods and beverages you have each day. 'Energy out' is what you burn for basic body functions and during physical activity. Your weight will stay the same when the energy you eat and drink is balanced with the energy you burn.
- Healthy eating and physical activity can help you reach and keep a healthier weight.
- Combining healthy eating and physical activity can help you reach and keep a healthier weight.

### Watch your portion size

- Controlling portion size helps limit energy intake, especially when eating foods that are high in energy.

### More advice

- Discuss the option of using low-fat or reduced-fat food options with your doctor, dietitian or health professional.

## Drinking enough fluids

It's important to drink enough fluids every day to keep your body working properly. This is particularly true for older adults as you may not feel thirsty even if your body need fluids. Drinking enough fluid is essential for everyone. Check with your doctor, however, if you've been told to limit how much you drink.

Have small amounts of fluids often over the day. While water is the best option, other fluid sources include reduced-fat milk, 100% juice, tea, coffee and foods with high moisture content such as fruits, vegetables, custard, ice-cream and reduced-salt soups. Limit your intake of drinks with added sugar.

## Reducing your alcohol intake

The 2009 *Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol* recommends that people who drink alcoholic beverages should do so in moderation, which means no more than two standard drinks per day for men or women. Try to have alcohol-free days each week.

### How many standard drinks are in a typical drink?



1.8  
180ml  
Average  
restaurant Serve  
of Wine 12%  
Alc./Vol



1.5  
375ml  
Full Strength  
Beer 4.9%  
Alc./Vol



1.5  
375ml  
Pre-mix  
Spirits 5%  
Alc./Vol

## Eating out

Eating out can be enjoyable, but restaurants often serve large meals which can be high in energy, fat, sugar and salt. Here are a few tips to help make your meal both delicious and nutritious.

- Skip the ‘super sizes’; ask for ‘small’, share a portion or ask for an entrée-sized meal as a main dish.
- Order lean meats, low-fat cheeses and low-fat or fat-free dressings and sauces.
- Ask for sauces on the side so you have control of how much you enjoy.
- Choose a tomato-based sauce instead of a cream-based or white sauce.
- Minestrone or vegetable soups are good choices rather than creamy soups.
- Choose foods that are baked, grilled, steamed, sautéed or boiled instead of fried.
- Order meals with high protein and plenty of nutrients (for example, lean meat with vegetables).
- Choose food with a bread base instead of pastries.
- Ask for baked or steamed potatoes, a side salad or fruit, instead of hot chips.
- Order extra steamed vegetables without butter or a salad with low or fat-free dressing to help fill you up.
- Taste your food before automatically adding table salt.
- Drink water, reduced-fat milk or other drinks without added sugars.
- Beware of extras such as butter with bread, chips with meals and creamy sauces.



### Quick tips

- **Beware of diets that make big promises about losing weight, regaining youth or achieving high energy.**
- **If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.**
- **To maintain and improve your health, follow the dietary guidelines and be physically active every day.**

## Healthy snacks

We all like to have a snack between meals sometimes. So we need to have healthy snacks on hand to avoid choosing packets of chips or sweet biscuits. Try these healthy snacks:

- a piece of fresh, canned or stewed fruit
- wholemeal or wholegrain toast, fruit toast or a toasted sandwich
- high-fibre muffin with fruit or grated vegetables
- yoghurt or custard
- vegetable sticks, such as carrots, celery and capsicum with a non-cream-based dip, such as mashed-up avocado and lemon juice.



## Dietary supplements

Dietary supplements are sometimes used to add nutrients to your diet. Some advertisements for dietary supplements claim to make you feel better, keep you from getting sick or even help you live longer. Sometimes, there is little, if any, good scientific research to support these claims.

### Are dietary supplements safe?

Although certain dietary supplements may help some people, sometimes supplements can be harmful.

- Taking a combination of supplements, using supplements together with prescription or over-the-counter medications, or using them in place of medicines prescribed by your doctor can lead to harmful, even life-threatening side-effects. Be alert to any warnings about these products.
- Some supplements can have unwanted or harmful effects before, during or after surgery.

## Do I need a supplement?

Eating healthy foods is the best way to get the nutrients you need. For example, fruits and vegetables provide a variety of important nutrients, including fibre, folate, potassium and vitamins A and C.

People who eat a varied diet with the recommended amount of food and who do not have problems absorbing a particular nutrient will not gain any additional health benefit by taking the nutrient as a supplement. For example, people who eat enough fruits and vegetables don't need extra vitamin C.

Talk with a registered health professional or a dietitian to find out if you need to take a supplement.

### Best recipe for healthy active ageing:

- Stay physically active.
- Stay socially active.
- Eat a wide variety of nutritious foods.