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## The Senior's Guide to Nutrition on a Budget

February 4, 2020



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As we age, what our body needs changes. With time, our activity levels tend to decrease along with our metabolism rates. So, we need to be more conscious of what we eat.

If you have chronic health conditions like arthritis or heart disease, your diet will play a pivotal role in managing your condition. But we know eating healthily can be costly, so we created a guide to eating healthy on a budget.

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a weakened immune system and complications with previously existing health conditions.

Eating healthily plays a critical role in:

- **Brain function:** Maintains memory and cognitive function.
- **Chronic illness:** Managing blood pressure, diabetes, cancer and dementia.
- **Muscle and bone health:** Prevents falls, fractures and staying mobile.
- **Immune system health:** Prevents illness and decreases recovery time.
- **Organ function:** Keeps Kidneys, eyes, digestion and liver functions healthy.

## What Does a Healthy Diet Look Like for Seniors?



Today's nutrition guidelines for seniors have moved from the conventional food pyramid to [The Plate Model](#).

**The Plate Model suggests that an older adult's diet should be comprised of:**

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- 20% Protein
- 5% Dairy



Some of the most important nutrients to get from our meals are:

**Protein:** Essential for maintaining muscle mass and providing energy to your body, protein should be sourced from lean meats like fish and chicken or beans and nuts.

**B Vitamins:** These vitamins play a key role in managing energy levels and recovery, along with red blood cell and bone health — all of which are things to be diligent about as you get older.

You can find B Vitamins in:

- B6 in whole grains and organ meats, like liver
- B12 in lean meats and some fish

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**Calcium and vitamin D:** Calcium supports strong bones and can be found in foods like yogurt, milk, and dark green vegetables like kale or broccoli. Vitamin D is typically sourced from the sun through spending time outside if you struggle with spending time outside look for foods with added vitamin D.

**Fiber:** Supports heart, digestive and glycemic health and can typically be found in whole grains, veggies, and beans.

**Healthy fats:** Limit your consumption of saturated and trans fats while focusing on sourcing healthy fats found in nuts, olive oil, avocados and fish.

**Potassium:** Potassium helps with managing blood pressure along with being a critical electrolyte to prevent cramping. You can find potassium in bananas, potatoes and yogurt.

### What Foods Should Seniors Avoid?



When choosing a balanced diet it can be confusing to figure out what's good for you and what's bad, even if the portions fit into the suggested daily consumption. The first step to improving your diet is reducing the number of processed foods you eat on a daily basis.

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While on the subject, sugar, fat and sodium levels all need to be monitored as too much of each can cause issues with managing diabetes, heart disease and weight. Eating healthy doesn't mean you have to give up your favorite foods or dishes, but rather that you focus on quality and how you prepare your food.

A few foods seniors may want to avoid include:

- **Caffeine:** Caffeine is a diuretic that can increase your blood pressure, which in turn can cause heart issues and increased anxiety.
- **High-Sodium Foods:** If you have a history with hypertension or heart disease, high sodium foods should be avoided.
- **Alcoholic Beverages:** Alcohol should be avoided because it can interfere with medications, which can lead to serious health issues.
- **Raw or Undercooked Poultry, Eggs or Meat:** Undercooked food can cause food poisoning, which may lead to sepsis and shock.

## 5 Easy Ways to Eat Healthy as You Age



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It's not always easy to get all the required vitamins and minerals in your diet. The supplements below are a great way to give your diet and nutrition a boost without breaking the bank, but be sure to consult with your doctor first.

- **Vitamin D and Calcium:** If you are unable to spend much time outside or eat dairy, Vitamin D and Calcium supplements are a great way to maintain bone mass as you age.
- **B12:** As you age, your levels of stomach acid decline which makes the digestion and intake of B12 difficult, which can help improve red blood cell health and with memory. Taking B12 supplements are an easy way to make sure your levels are healthy.
- **Omega 3's:** Omega 3's improve brain function and mood by increasing your DHA levels, which decline over time.
- **Probiotics and Fiber:** Both probiotics and fiber help with digestive and bacterial health to aid in the absorption of critical nutrients.

## 2. Drink Plenty of Fluids

Dehydration is a common cause of hospitalization for seniors due to our sense of hydration diminishing as we age. Especially when we are taking prescribed medications, it's easy to fall behind on water levels.

Besides drinking more water, consume foods that are high in water content like watermelon, pears, celery and tomatoes. If you still struggle with hydration, try dietary aids like Pedialyte or Electrolit. While there isn't a set amount of water one should drink each day, 8 glasses a day is a good benchmark.

## 3. Fat Can Be Your Friend

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monounsaturated fats have high amounts of vitamin E, a critical vitamin for seniors.

Often found in liquid form at room temperature, polyunsaturated fats are high in Omega 3 and 6 which help support cell growth and brain functions.

Foods that are high in these healthy fats include:

- **Avocados**
- **Fish**
- **Dark Chocolate**
- **Nuts**
- **Cheese**
- **Yogurt**
- **Chia Seeds**

#### **4. Power in Protein**

Recent studies show that seniors who consume more protein are up to 30% less likely to lose basic life function skills like getting out of bed, getting dressed or walking up a flight of stairs. Since protein is key to maintaining muscle mass and function, it should be a core part of your diet, but how you get your protein should also be considered.

Depending on dietary restrictions or health conditions, you may have limited protein sources or a wide variety of choices. A few foods to incorporate more protein to your diet include:

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- **Beans**
- **Grilled Chicken Breast**
- **Cheese**

## **5. Load Up on Fruits and Veggies**

Fresh produce should comprise 50% of your diet (according to recent standards) and provide a significant amount of key vitamins and minerals for healthy senior adults. Frozen, fresh, canned or dried; fruits and vegetables are tasty, cost effective and abundant. Be sure to place emphasis on eating produce deep in color, since it has the highest nutritional value.

If you happen to be a picky eater, have oral health problems or have a hard time incorporating more fruits and vegetables in your diet, try:

- **Soups**
- **Smoothies**
- **Sauces**

## **16 Tips for Seniors Eating Healthy on a Budget**



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Whatever your budget may be, having a high nutrition diet for seniors can be accomplished with a bit of planning and preparation. You will quickly find that it's easy to meet the suggested nutrition standards by mostly eating fruits and vegetables along with protein and whole grains.

Produce is quite cost-effective compared to a meat-based diet, and reducing the amount of red meat you consume will make your budget easier to manage. Store brands are another way to save money and get the same quality goods without the marketing budget that raises their prices. If you follow these steps below, eating healthy on a budget will easily be accomplished.

- **Plan ahead.** The first step to sticking to your budget is planning out your meals while also accounting for your suggested nutrition needs. Planning around your needs and budget makes the process simple.
- **Make simple swaps.** Remove unnecessary or unhealthy foods and replace them with a suitable substitute. An example would be switching to sweet potatoes instead of russets as they are high in fiber and low in starch.
- **Meal prep.** One way to keep a healthy and budget-conscious diet is by meal prepping. Cook your meals (or key ingredients) in advance to save important time and energy.

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What you buy and how you buy it is a major determining factor in your diet, which can easily be managed by having a plan before you go into the store and leveraging coupons and sales.

Using a grocery list is an easy way to stick to a healthy diet and reduce overspending. It helps you stay laser-focused on what you need versus what you can buy.

- **Take advantage of sales.** Sales and promotions are one of the easiest ways to shave dollars off your bottom line.
- **Coupons.** Can be a great route to save money, but can also get you off track of your diet if you find yourself just chasing a deal. So use caution!
- **Senior discounts.** Most grocery stores offer senior discounts either daily or on specific days.
- **Stick to the perimeter.** The healthiest foods in a grocery store are placed on the outer perimeter, so stick to it to avoid temptation.
- **Check the label.** Look for the nutrition label on the back of food goods to understand calorie, protein, fat and sodium content.

## 2. Cooking

As mentioned above, heavily processed foods are to be avoided. Besides, they are often more expensive — for both your pocketbook and your health. Cooking your meals gives you control of the quality of ingredients.

When you have tasty meals already prepared, unhealthy snacks and fast food are less tempting.

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and avocado oil.

- **Bake and roast.** Instead of pan frying your food, bake or roast it to reduce the grease content.
- **Check your seasoning.** Seasoning can be high in sodium so be sure to check the label.

### 3. Make it last

When buying groceries on a budget, the name of the game is foresight. Having an overview of what you need will open the door to savings.

For example, if you incorporate cheese into your meals frequently, why not opt for an amount that will last the whole month and save you a few dollars vs. buying a fresh supply each week? Over time, these minute differences in cost add up to hundreds of dollars annually.

- **Use versatile ingredients.** By using whole foods and raw ingredients, their applications for dishes increase drastically.
- **Freeze your food.** Freezing food that you got on sale or have prepared is a great way to reduce food waste and cost.
- **Seal it up:** Vacuum sealers are one of the best ways to preserve food for years.

### 5 Tips for Healthy Eating Out on a Budget

Eating at restaurants while sticking to a budget can be done, and with the many senior discounts offered almost every day of the week there is a deal to be had.

By picking healthy dishes, you can stick to a nutritious diet and still enjoy dinner out. Check the nutrition information provided on the menu (if available) as things like salads can be

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**Skip coffee, tea and soda.** Often high in sugar and low in nutrition, these drinks are almost pure profit for restaurants and can shave valuable dollars off of your bill.

**Consider how it's cooked.** The way food is prepared can change the number of calories it has, so look for foods that are roasted, steamed or grilled and avoid foods that are fried or sauteed.

**Choose a healthier side.** Substitute unhealthy sides like french fries for vegetables and salads for zero to little additional cost.

**Give the menu a gander.** Look over the menu before you visit the restaurant. This prevents you from being tempted by spur of the moment choices while also allowing you to find healthier options at your leisure.

**Split your meals.** With restaurant portions often being large, share an entree with someone and avoid overeating and spending.

As we get older our nutritional needs and requirements change. If you follow the [USDA nutrition guidelines](#) for older adults, you'll quickly be on the right path to a healthy diet. The guidelines are also quite cost-effective thanks to their emphasis on eating fruits and vegetables, which are some of the cheapest items in the grocery store. With a bit of planning, shopping, and cooking, one can stay on a path of longevity and health while also sticking to a budget and while you're at it check out these coupons from the [Vitamin Shoppe](#).

**Sources:** [Eat Right](#) | [NHS](#) | [AARP](#) | [Mayo Clinic](#) | [Choose My Plate Budget](#) | [The Senior List Groceries](#) | [Capital One Shopping](#) | [Choose My Plate Older Adults](#) | [NCBI](#) | [Academic](#) |

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