

How nutrition changes as you age



Healthy eating is important for everyone, but you may need to be even more mindful of what you eat as you get older.

In order to age well, you need to eat well. The aging body experiences many changes that can adjust the way a person eats.

Change 1: Metabolism slows¹

As you get older, your metabolism may slow down, leading to weight gain.

Bottom line: If you continue to eat the same amount as you did when you were younger, you may gain weight! To help counteract a slowing metabolism:

- **Find out how many calories you need.**² Use the chart below to estimate how many calories you need, based on your gender and activity level.

Approximate calories needed per day per activity level:

Age 50+	Women	Men
Not active	1,600	2,000
Somewhat active	1,800	2,200
Very active	2,000	2,400

- **Keep track for a couple of weeks to see where you are.** Keep a written food journal or use an online calorie tracker.
- **Eat fewer calories if you need to, but focus on nutritious options.** Staying within your calorie limits may help you prevent sneaky weight gain, but make sure your calories are coming from nutritious sources.
- **Exercise to burn calories.**¹ Aerobic exercise helps burn calories while you're doing it. Strength training helps build muscle to increase metabolism.

Change 2: Taste buds change³

As you get older, your senses of taste and smell may fade. This is because taste buds tend to decrease in size and number and nerves in the nose begin to deteriorate. Salty and sweet go first, bitter and sour remain the longest.

Bottom line: Decreasing senses may make you more likely to overdo the salt, reach for sweets more often and lead to other problems.³ To help deal with diminishing taste:

- **Try to stay below 1,500 milligrams of sodium per day.**⁴ The USDA recommends adults age 51+ keep their daily sodium intake to less than 1,500 mg, or about two-thirds of a teaspoon.
- **Limit added sugar to 6 teaspoons per day for women and 9 teaspoons per day for men.**⁵ This recommendation, from the American Heart Association, will help you reign in your sugar intake.
- **Experiment with herbs and spices.** Different seasonings work best with different foods. Use the chart below to help you season without salt.
- **Choose foods that are naturally sweet.** Instead of adding sugar to your meals, or eating foods with lots of added sugars, try to increase sweetness with naturally sweet foods like fruits, peppers or yams.
- **Engage your other senses at meal times.** Choose brightly colored foods to satisfy your eyes and use a variety of textures to keep things interesting.

If you're making	Try seasoning it with	
Beef	Bay leaf, marjoram, nutmeg, onion, pepper, sage, thyme, garlic, onion	
Lamb	Curry powder, garlic, rosemary, mint	
Pork	Garlic, onion, sage, pepper, oregano, basil, sage, thyme	
Poultry	Ginger, marjoram, oregano, paprika, rosemary, sage, tarragon, thyme, garlic, lemon juice	
Fish	Basil, bay leaf, chives, dill, marjoram, oregano, parsley, tarragon, ginger, garlic, lemon juice	
Fruit	Cinnamon, anise, cloves, ginger, mint, nutmeg, allspice	
Vegetables	Potatoes	Chives, rosemary, dill, garlic, paprika, sage, basil
	Carrots	Cinnamon, cloves, marjoram, nutmeg, rosemary, sage
	Corn	Cumin, curry, onion, paprika, parsley
	Green beans	Dill, lemon juice, oregano, marjoram, thyme
	Peas	Marjoram, onion, parsley, sage
	Broccoli	Mustard, nutmeg, sage
	Squash	Cardamom, ginger, nutmeg
	Tomato	Basil, cloves, cumin, marjoram, oregano
Grains	Rice	Turmeric, basil, oregano, sage
	Beans	Rosemary
	Bread	Sage, basil

Change 3: Your digestion changes⁶

As you get older, your digestive system may not work as well as it once did. The muscles of the digestive tract become stiffer and weaker, and slowing digestion may lead to constipation. Plus, medications and chronic health conditions can negatively impact digestion.

Bottom line: The various changes in the digestive tract make food choices more important than ever before. To help keep your digestive system healthy:⁷

- **Exercise may help.** Exercise increases blood flow to all of your organs, helps you to keep a healthy weight and keeps food moving through your digestive tract.
- **Reduce your stress levels.** Try to manage your stress by avoiding your stressors, exercising, and/or doing relaxation exercises like deep breathing and meditation.
- **Focus on fiber.** Fiber keeps food moving through your digestive system.
- **Know your triggers.** Figuring out what's causing your digestive issues can help you learn what to avoid in the future.
- **Stay hydrated.** Water helps keep stool soft and easy to pass.
- **Work with your healthcare provider to manage digestion problems.** Talk to your healthcare provider about any digestive problems you're experiencing.

References

¹Mayo Clinic

www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/weight-loss/in-depth/metabolism/art-20046508

²National Institute on Aging

www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/healthy-eating-after-50

³National Institute on Aging

www.nia.nih.gov/health/smell-and-taste

⁴United States Department of Agriculture

www.ars.usda.gov/ARSUserFiles/80400530/pdf/DBrief/sodium_intake_0708.pdf

⁵American Heart Association

www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-eating/eat-smart/sugar/added-sugars

⁶Everyday Health. How Aging Affects Your Digestive Health. Retrieved from

www.everydayhealth.com/digestive-health/dealing-with-a-sensitive-gut.aspx

⁷Everyday Health

www.everydayhealth.com/hs/healthy-eating/tips-for-better-digestive-health/

This is for informational purposes only and does not replace treatment or advice from a healthcare professional. If you have questions, please talk with your doctor. Talk to your doctor before beginning an exercise program or making any changes to your diet.