

# STAY NOURISHED

Be happy and healthy as you age

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2016



# Healthy eating in older age



As we age physical changes to our bodies occur which can affect the way we think and feel about food. These changes can prevent us from having access to a healthy diet and can also make us believe we are less hungry, resulting in us eating less. The changes may include:

- Reduced mobility which means shopping for food becomes more difficult or a chore rather than an enjoyable activity.
- Our taste buds are renewed less frequently and our sense of smell reduces meaning an older person's appetite can decline, reducing the intake of food.
- Surgery, illness and medication may all have a direct impact on appetite.
- Changes in our mouth may include producing less saliva and changes to teeth and jaw shape may mean dentures no longer feel comfortable or fit correctly.
- Having long term conditions such as dementia can cause cognitive impairment leading to problems with eating and drinking.

But it isn't just physical changes which affect an older person's attitude to food. Social isolation is a major factor in making seniors feel unmotivated to cook for one or they may lack the cooking skills.

Stressful events such as family issues and bereavement may create a ripple effect and can cause a reduction in appetite.

On top of this, elderly individuals could potentially have lower food budgets leaving them feeling they cannot afford to eat healthily.

# Top 10 myths

## About ageing and eating a healthy diet

### 1. Your stomach reduces as you get older

Although appetite and capacity to eat may change, stomach size does not shrink when we get older. Our bodies change as we age and there is usually a decrease in lean body tissue and an increase in fat tissue, but the stomach stays the same size.

### 2. You need to eat less when you get older

People often wrongly believe that as energy requirements reduce, we need to reduce our food intake but this isn't the case. Our metabolism may slow down when we age but eating good food is what protects and fuels our bodies and is key to ageing well.

### 3. Weight loss is healthy

Unfortunately, this is not the case when we get older. Instead, dieting and unintentional weight loss should be avoided in later years unless advised by a GP or dietician. Instead, an eating plan packed with essential nutrients and vitamins should be followed.

### 4. You should only eat when you feel like it

The ageing process can affect the usual triggers that tell us if we are hungry or full. An outright loss of appetite is not normal and could be a symptom of an underlying health problem. If eating a large meal feels too much, try to introduce more regular smaller meals, even if you don't feel particularly hungry.

### 5. You need a low-fat diet

Contrary to popular opinion, a low-fat diet is not always the best approach, especially for older people. Some fats are important as a source of calories and some older people may need to eat more to maintain a healthy weight.



### 6. Eat more vegetables

Nutrient-rich vegetables are essential in any diet, but should be eaten as part of a balanced diet including protein, carbohydrates and fluids. Protein is in fact more important as we age as it protects our muscles, immune system, body organs and brain. So it is essential to eat a balanced diet. The Eatwell Guide guidance from Public Health England is a good reminder of what should be included in our diet.

### 7. You only need to drink water when you're thirsty

If you feel thirsty, chances are it is your body telling you that you are low on hydration. Dehydration can cause confusion and hampers normal kidney function. It may also worsen other conditions that commonly affect older people.

### 8. Meal supplements are sufficient

Our bodies cannot live off meal supplements and vitamins alone. Some supplements can interact with medication and some just don't work the way they claim to. Meal supplements also cut out the opportunity to enjoy food with other people, family and friends.

### 9. You must always eat 3 square meals a day

Making sure you eat regularly is essential to remaining healthy and well, but eating three satisfying meals a day can be a struggle if your appetite is affected. If three good sized meals are too much of a challenge, by eating 5 or 6 smaller meals or well proportioned snacks. Make sure that the food you eat throughout the day contains different sources of energy such as protein, carbohydrate, vegetables, fats and dairy.

### 10. Malnutrition is a symptom of getting older

Malnutrition can affect anyone at any age and is not a normal aspect of the ageing process. Malnutrition can occur in bodies of any size, large or small, but older people are particularly at risk. Don't dismiss the warning signs of malnutrition as being par for the course.

# The 10 warning signs

someone may be affected by poor diet



**Make every effort to sit and enjoy food together with your loved one. Eating together should be purposeful and enjoyable.**

**1. Depression and emotional wellbeing** - Struggling with depression can cause a change in appetite. A level of stress can also affect our appetite. If you suspect someone is depressed or struggling to cope, be sure to raise awareness with their doctor.

**2. Sudden weight fluctuation** - A sudden weight change, over the past 6 months is another sign that something could be amiss. Warning signs include ill fitting clothes and jewellery.

**3. Poor concentration, feeling tired a lot and lacking energy** - Tiredness can be a sign that the individual is not getting the essential nutrients for the body to generate enough energy.

**4. Taking a long time to recover from infections** - A lack of vitamins and nutrients will slow down the recovery process.

**5. Skin tone and nails** - If someone is eating properly, skin should look bright and well hydrated and nails should be healthy.

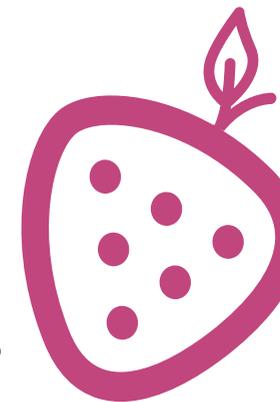
**6. Forgetfulness** - Seniors who live alone may forget to eat. Dementia and cognitive problems can lead to nutritional deficiencies.

**7. Difficulty in keeping warm** - With reduced muscle and tissue mass, people become more susceptible to not being able to regulate their temperature.

**8. Persistent bowel problems** - Malnutrition can irritate the stomach and the lining of the intestine, causing problems such as constipation, nausea and diarrhoea.

**9. More than three medications** – Medication can influence both appetite and weight. Check with the GP if you suspect medications could be the culprit.

**10. Expired or spoiled food** – Check the fridge for use by or best before dates. This will help identify when food is at risk of spoiling and is no longer safe.



# How you can help to tackle malnutrition



There are a variety of ways in which you can monitor nutrition when people are living in their own home. Our role is to help share knowledge and to be able to recognise those at risk so that families or those providing care and support can take action.



## Here are some ways of **preventing** malnutrition:

- Take personal food preferences into account when planning meals. As our tastes differ as we age, the food choices a person may have made in the past may not be the same as they are now.
- Keep mealtimes interesting. Aromas can help to stimulate the appetite. Encourage your loved one to get involved in the selection, preparation and serving of meals wherever possible.
- Make the dining area comfortable, remove distractions and create a nice atmosphere.
- Think about portion sizes; If appetite is a problem, it is better to introduce smaller portions more often instead of a large plate of food 3 times a day. Offering finger foods is also a good way to encourage people to eat if someone doesn't want a traditional meal.
- Ensure healthy snack options are available and make sure food and drinks are easily accessible throughout the day.
- Avoid calorie-free or low-fat products unless your loved one has specifically been advised to eat them by their GP.
- Always prioritise mealtimes and try to create a mealtime routine. Avoid rushing and coercing someone to eat. Gentle persuasion is better.

## Additional things **you** can do for older people:

- Make a shopping list for the person or help them with their shopping journeys.
- If home cooking is not possible, assist with access to prepared meals via a home delivery service.
- Is there any support available to assist with meal services such as benefits or financial support?
- Ensure any family members, friends or anyone providing care and support are kept up to date with the person's wishes about food.
- Avoid using the term 'malnutrition' with older people who may become frightened or associate it with negative issues such as neglect or poverty. Instead refer to 'keep well'.
- Confront the myth that weight loss is a normal process with ageing as our bodies become less active. Weight loss is not a normal part of the ageing process.

# Healthy **body**, healthy **mind**

In addition to a healthy diet, exercise is an important part of any routine to protect and work muscles. You can rebuild and repair your muscles by doing exercises that include weights or resistance.

Encourage your loved one to keep moving; even simple tasks such as getting up and out of the chair, standing and stretching, using the stairs or walking instead of driving. In fact, most activities of daily living use your muscles. Maintaining muscles plays an important part in preventing falls.

Swimming, yoga and other activities can be good to keep up the heart rate. Keep your mind active. Your brain uses up to 20% of your body's total energy supply and requires a constant access to blood sugar (glucose).



Eating the right food, keeping physically active and mentally stimulated is vital to protecting yourself as you age. Ensure you make eating as social as possible and try to make mealtimes happy, healthy and an important part of your daily routine.

# Help and support

is never far away

Although families may want to help, many lack the time and capacity every day, to ensure their loved one is eating a healthy balanced diet throughout the day.

If you are not able to monitor food intake and there are warning signs, then raise your concerns with the individual's GP and ask for a dietician appointment.



If you are feeling under strain and need a helping hand or a bit of respite time, **Home Instead Senior Care** can help. Our CAREGivers can provide help around the house as well as assistance with meal preparation, shopping and errands. Get in contact with your local office to find out more about the services we provide.

If you or your loved one need support, please contact us today:

**Tel:** 01925 730 273

**Website:** [www.homeinstead.co.uk](http://www.homeinstead.co.uk)

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