

TE KAI TŌTIKA E ORA AI TE HUNGA KAUMĀTUA

Eating for Healthy Older People





Good nutrition is essential for good health

To stay healthy as you get older, it is important to eat well. You may have a smaller appetite than when you were younger, so you need to choose healthy food to get the best nutritional value.

This pamphlet includes information on healthy food choices, how to maintain a healthy weight, the benefits of including physical activity in your day, and other aspects to help you be a healthy older person.



Healthy Food Choices

Choose a variety of healthy foods every day from the following four food groups:

1. Vegetables and Fruit

Vegetables and fruit provide carbohydrates (sugar and starch), fibre, vitamins and minerals and are low in fat.

- Eat plenty of vegetables and fruit. Choose fresh, ripe varieties when they are in season. Frozen or canned varieties are also healthy options.
- Limit fruit juice and dried fruit – they are high in sugar.
- To get the best nutritional value from cooked vegetables, cook them quickly until they are just soft enough to eat. Steaming or microwaving is best. Go easy on butter or margarine.



Eat at least five servings of vegetables and fruit each day – at least three servings of vegetables and two servings of fruit (no more than one serving of fruit juice or one serving of dried fruit).

Serving size examples

Vegetables

- 1 medium piece of potato, kumara, pumpkin, carrot, taro, kamokamo or yam (135 g)

Fruit

- 1 apple, pear, banana or orange (130 g)
- 2 small apricots or plums (100 g)



Vegetables

- ½ cup cooked vegetables, eg, puha, watercress, silverbeet, taro leaves, bok choy, Chinese cabbage, broccoli, cabbage, corn or peas (50–80 g)
- ½ cup salad or mixed fresh or frozen vegetables (60 g)
- 1 tomato (80 g)

Fruit

- ½ cup fresh fruit salad
- ½ cup stewed fruit (fresh, frozen or canned) (135 g)
- 1 cup fruit juice (250 mL)
- 2 tablespoons dried fruit

2. Breads and Cereals

Breads and cereals provide carbohydrates (sugar and starch), fibre, and nutrients such as B vitamins and minerals.

- Eat plenty of breads and cereals, including rice, pasta, breakfast cereals and other grain products.
- Choose wholegrain varieties – they provide extra nutrients and fibre and also help prevent constipation.

Choose **at least six** servings of breads and cereals each day.

Serving size examples

- 1 bread roll (50 g)
- 1 muffin (80 g)
- 1 medium slice rēwena (26 g)
- 1 medium slice bread (26 g)
- 1 cup cornflakes (30 g)
- ½ cup muesli (55 g)
- ½ cup cooked porridge (130 g)
- 1 cup cooked pasta (150 g)
- 1 cup cooked rice (150 g)
- 1 cup cassava or tapioca (150 g)
- 2 plain sweet biscuits (14 g)

3. Milk and Milk Products

Milk and milk products provide protein, vitamins, calcium and other nutrients.

- Choose reduced or low-fat milk, yoghurt and cheese if you need to lose weight.
- Choose whole-milk products if you are underweight or need additional energy.
- Milk and milk products provide most of the calcium you need. (For more information, see the section on calcium on page 8.)

Choose **at least three** servings each day of milk or milk products.

Serving size examples

- 1 large glass milk (250 mL)
- 1 pottle yoghurt (150 g)
- 2 slices cheese (40 g)
- 2 scoops ice cream (140 g)
- 1 large glass calcium-fortified soy milk (250 mL)





4. Lean Meats, Chicken, Seafood, Eggs, Beans, Peas and Lentils, Nuts and Seeds

These foods give you protein, iron, zinc and other nutrients. For advice on how to choose or prepare these foods, see the section on page 7.

Beans, peas, lentils, nuts and seeds provide protein, fibre, vitamins and minerals. They are important to eat if you don't eat meat, chicken or fish.

Try to have fish (fresh or canned) at least once a week.

Choose **at least one** serving of these foods each day.



Serving size examples

- 2 slices cooked lean meat or poultry (approximately 100 g)
- 2 drumsticks or 1 chicken leg (110 g)
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup mince or casseroled meat (195 g)
- 1 medium fillet of cooked fish (100 g)
- 1 egg (50 g)
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup nuts or seeds
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup cooked dried beans, peas or lentils (135 g)

Choose and Prepare Foods Low in Fat, Salt and Sugar

- Choose polyunsaturated or monounsaturated margarine rather than butter or dripping and spread it thinly.
- Choose foods rich in polyunsaturated fat and omega-3, including, nuts and seeds, oily fish either canned or fresh (tuna, sardines, salmon, mackerel, warehou and eel) and oils (soybean, canola, flaxseed and walnut).
- Choose lean meats – trim off the fat, skim fat off stews and the top of boil ups, remove skin from chicken after cooking – and eat more grilled, baked, poached or steamed fish.
- Limit sausages or processed meats (such as ham, bacon and salami), which can be high in fat and salt – and grill rather than fry those you need to cook.
- Grill, steam, microwave, boil or bake foods without adding fat.
- Reduce the amount of sugar or salt you add when cooking foods and eat meals without adding extra salt.
- Buy frozen or canned fruit and vegetables with no added salt or sugar.





Many fast foods, takeaways and processed snacks are high in fat, salt and/or sugar. These include fish and chips, fried chicken, hamburgers, pies, salami, chocolate bars, muesli bars, potato chips or other salty snacks, doughnuts, cream cakes, lollies and fruit leathers. Cordials and soft (fizzy) drinks contain a lot of sugar. Choose these foods and drinks only occasionally.

Calcium

Calcium is an important mineral that helps keep bones strong and reduces the risk of osteoporosis. Food is the safest, cheapest and most effective way to get calcium.

Three or more servings of milk or milk products per day will provide the calcium you need. Calcium-rich milk, yoghurt, cheese, ice cream, canned salmon or sardines (including the bones) are excellent sources of calcium.

If you are unable to eat calcium-rich milk or milk products, talk to your doctor or dietitian before taking any supplements.



Drink Plenty of Fluids Every Day

Older people need to drink plenty of fluids to reduce the risk of constipation. Drink at least eight cups of liquid each day to replace the fluid that is lost from the body.

- Water is refreshing – keep a jug of water in the fridge or maybe have a cup of warm or hot water instead of tea or coffee.
- Tea and coffee add flavour, but don't overdo the caffeine. Limit your daily intake to six cups of tea or four cups of coffee.
- Drink more water when the weather is hot and humid or when you are doing a lot of physical activity.
- If you find getting up during the night is a problem, try having most of your fluid earlier in the day.





Preventing Constipation

You can prevent or reduce constipation by eating high-fibre foods, drinking plenty of fluids and being physically active.

- Eat plenty of high-fibre foods, such as wholemeal or wholegrain breads, breakfast cereals, vegetables and fruit. Prunes and kiwifruit are particularly useful.
- Increase daily fluid intake to 8–10 cups. This includes tea and coffee.
- Have some regular activity every day, such as walking.



Healthy Weight in Older People

If you need to lose weight

High blood pressure, diabetes*, heart disease and arthritis are common among older people. If you are overweight, losing a little weight can help to keep these conditions under better control.

- Fresh fruit and vegetables and bread and cereals are lower in energy (calories) than high-fat, high-sugar foods. Seasonal vegetables and fruit are usually good value for money.
- Eat regularly (three meals a day) but avoid high-energy snacks. Follow the suggestions for choosing and preparing foods low in fat, salt and sugar.



- Increase your physical activity. Aim to be physically active for at least 30 minutes every day. (You can break this into three 10 minute spells.)
- Drink less alcohol – it is high in energy.

** If you have diabetes, ask your doctor to refer you to a dietitian for further advice about food. Your local Diabetes Centre is also able to help.*

If you are underweight or have a small appetite

Small regular meals and nutritious snacks are recommended if you are underweight or your appetite is small.

- Thin older women are at greatest risk of bone fractures. If you are at risk, have plenty of milk and milk products to keep your bones healthy.
- Eat often – include breakfast, morning tea, lunch, afternoon tea, dinner and supper.
- Nutritious snacks include sandwiches or toast with a topping, yoghurt, milk puddings, a milk drink, soup, a scone or a muffin.





- Keep some favourite toppings on hand, such as cheese, peanut butter, eggs, baked beans, avocado or canned fish. These all go well on bread or toast.
- Use standard or full-fat milk and full-cream yoghurts.
- Enjoy desserts such as custard, ice cream, fruit crumble, trifle or rice pudding.



As you get older, there may be times when it's harder to shop for, prepare and cook nutritious foods.

- Use frozen or ready-to-heat dinners (eg, from supermarkets) for quick and easy meals.
- When you do feel like cooking, make larger meals sometimes and freeze portions for another day.
- Try a protein or milk-based supplementary drink (commercial products are available from a supermarket, chemist or on prescription from your GP).



Eating meals with other people

Food and eating are part of social life, which also contributes to good health. You may enjoy a meal more if you eat with others, so take advantage of opportunities to share meals with family, friends, and social groups.

Alcohol and Your Health

As you get older, your body's ability to handle alcohol changes and you may need to limit how much you drink.

- If you are taking medication, check with your doctor. Alcohol can reduce the effectiveness of many medicines.
- You can reduce the alcohol content of your drink by mixing it with soda or mineral water or adding ice. Low-alcohol beer is also a good option.
- Alcohol is high in energy, so drink less if you need to lose weight.

Be Physically Active

Physical activity is just as important for older people as it is for everyone else. Physical activity keeps muscles toned and improves circulation and appetite. It helps you maintain a healthy body weight, sleep better and feel fit and well. It can also reduce your risk of falling.

Be physically active by taking every opportunity to move. Try to include 30 minutes of physical activity on most if not all days of the week.

You can break your 30 minutes into three spells of 10 minutes each.

Maintain or increase your regular daily activity – household tasks such as vacuuming, cleaning and gardening count here!





Walk whenever you can. Walking is excellent exercise – just make sure that you have comfortable well-fitting shoes. If you prefer to walk with others, walk with a friend or join a walking group or a tramping club.

Other activities, some of which give you social contact as well as physical activity, include:

- swimming or aqua aerobics (impact-free exercise in water)
- sports such as bowls, croquet, golf or tennis
- cycling – outdoors (remember to wear a helmet!) or indoors on an exercycle
- old time or line dancing
- tai chi or yoga.

Vitamin D

If you don't get outside every day, you may not be getting enough vitamin D. Vitamin D is absorbed from sunlight on the skin. It is also found in eggs, margarine, fish and seafood. In special cases, frail older people may need a Vitamin D supplement, but for most people it is better to have short regular exposure to the sun.

- Aim to be outside for about 30 minutes on most days (preferably before 11 am and after 4 pm, when the sun's rays are less harmful). If you are outdoors in the middle of the day during the warmer months, remember to wear a hat, cover up and use sunscreen.
- If you think you may not be getting enough vitamin D, talk to your doctor or dietitian before taking a Vitamin D supplement.

Food Safety

It is always important to keep food safe because food poisoning can have a severe effect. Think about food safety when you purchase, prepare, cook and store food.

- Keep cooked food and ready-to-eat foods separate from raw and unprocessed foods to avoid cross-contamination.
- Wash your hands, utensils and chopping boards thoroughly with hot, soapy water before preparing a different food to avoid cross-contamination.
- Wash raw vegetables and fruit thoroughly.
- Eat freshly cooked foods as soon as possible after cooking.
- Use cooked or prepared foods that have been stored in the refrigerator within two days.
- Take care to reheat cooked food thoroughly so that it is steaming hot. If you are using a microwave, make sure that the food is evenly cooked or heated.



For more information

Doctor or practice nurse

Community Health Centre of Public Health Service

Local community dietitian

National Heart Foundation

Cancer Society of New Zealand

New Zealand Nutrition Foundation

Diabetes New Zealand

Age Concern

Arthritis Foundation

Osteoporosis New Zealand

MAF

For website information

Ministry of Health www.moh.govt.nz

Health Education resources www.healthed.govt.nz



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