

Menu for longer life



Nutritional needs change as people get older, putting more emphasis on dairy, fibre and fluids.
By Amber Beaumont

@DAA_feed

Good nutrition is paramount throughout life; however, needs change with each life stage. As we age, different nutrients become more important to support what's happening physically and to maintain health, independence and quality of life.

People over 70 usually need fewer kilojoules because they're less active. They need more calcium and protein to maintain bone and muscle strength and need to focus more on their fluid and fibre intake as things start to slow down. To achieve this, the Australian Dietary Guidelines (ADG) recommend older adults continue to eat widely from all food groups to ensure they get all required nutrients.

This sounds good in theory but certain challenges come with ageing that can make achieving these recommendations difficult.

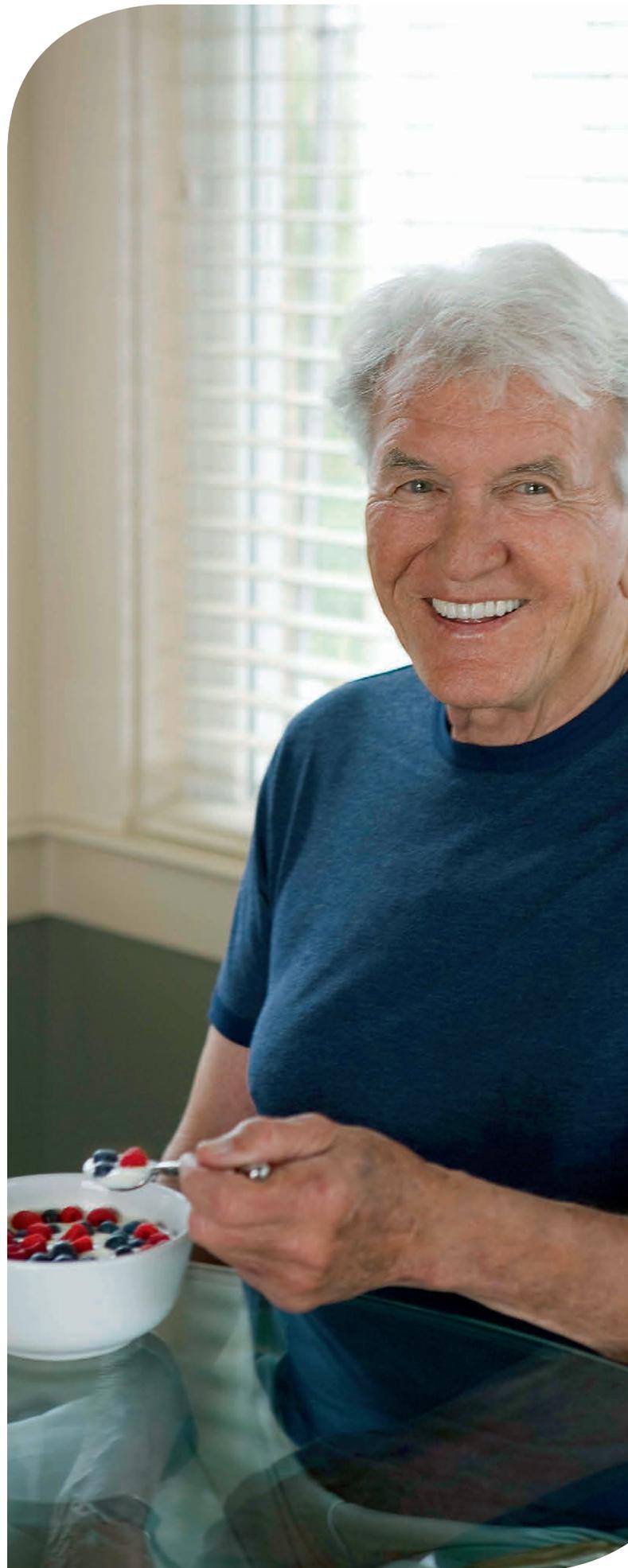
Physical abilities can change – including chewing and swallowing difficulties, taste changes, dexterity challenges – making it harder to prepare meals and open food packages. Living and social situations can also change; partners or friends may not be around anymore to share a meal, finances may tighten, resulting in less money for groceries. Ageing might also mean moving to a care facility or in with family who prepare the food. All these factors can influence someone's intake and ultimately their health.

As carers or health professionals, how can we support older adults in achieving dietary recommendations to optimise health and wellbeing?

A good place to start is understanding more about the ADG, especially given only 37 per cent of GPs are aware of the guidelines – not much higher than the rest of the population at 22.5 per cent.

The ADGs provide evidence-based information about the amount and kinds of foods required for good health. The table [on the facing page] specifically outlines recommendations for men and women over 70 years of age.

We know people over 65 years often have better health if they carry a little extra weight and have a slightly higher body mass index. Sometimes, too, people with chronic health problems can put themselves at risk of malnutrition by restricting what they eat. It's therefore important that the focus of nutrition advice for older adults is less on limiting fats, added salt and added sugars and more on eating and enjoying a variety of foods each day. For more personalised nutrition advice relevant to someone's specific needs, refer them to an accredited practising dietitian (APD).



FOOD GROUP

	Milk, yoghurt, cheese and/or alternatives (mostly reduced-fat)	Vegetables and legumes/beans	Fruit	Grains	Lean meats, poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts & seeds
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SERVES

WOMEN 70+	4	5	2	3	2
MEN 70+	3.5	5	2	4.5	2.5

ONE SERVE LOOKS LIKE

 1 cup milk or  ¾ cup yoghurt or  2 slices of hard cheese	 ½ cup cooked broccoli or  ½ cup canned beans or  1 medium tomato	 1 medium banana or  1 medium apple or  2 small apricots	 1 slice of bread or  ½ cup cooked porridge or  1 crumpet	 65g cooked lean red meat or  2 large eggs or  170g tofu
1 cup UHT long life, reconstituted powdered milk or buttermilk — ½ cup evaporated milk — ½ cup ricotta cheese — 1 cup soy or rice milk*	½ cup cooked spinach, carrots or pumpkin — ½ cup peas or lentils — 1 cup green leafy salad — ½ cup sweet corn — ½ medium potato	1 medium orange or pear — 2 small kiwi fruits or plums — 1 cup diced or canned fruit (no added sugar) — Occasionally ½ cup of fruit juice (no added sugar) — Occasionally 30g dried fruit (eg. 4 dried apricot halves)	½ medium roll or flat bread — ½ cup cooked rice, pasta, noodles or polenta — ⅔ cup wheat cereal flakes — ¼ cup muesli — 3 crispbreads — 1 small English muffin or scone	80g cooked lean poultry such as chicken or turkey — 100g cooked fish fillet or one small can of fish — 1 cup cooked legumes or beans such as lentils & chickpeas — 30g nuts or seeds

* With at least 100mg of added calcium per 100ml.

KEY AREAS FOR OLDER ADULTS

Optimising dairy food intake: Dairy intake recommendations jump for women at 50 and men at 70. Dairy foods, including milk, cheese and yoghurt, provide readily absorbable calcium for maintaining bone strength and high-quality protein for optimising muscle mass – both essential for healthy ageing. Luckily, these foods are also tasty, easy to eat and access, and include options to suit all budgets, such as long-life milk and powder.

Incorporating fibre: High-fibre foods help prevent constipation. Wholegrain cereals, wholemeal bread, fruit, dried fruit, dried peas, beans and lentils are excellent sources of fibre.

Ensuring adequate fluids: Fibre and fluids work together to help alleviate constipation. Fluids include fresh water and all other liquids, such as milk, coffee, tea, soup and juice. Milk and water are the best choices for hydrating. Aim to drink at least six times a day and more in warmer weather when active.

TOP FIVE TIPS TO HELP SENIORS FOLLOW THE GUIDELINES

- Encourage small, frequent meals to promote adequate nutrition as appetites reduce
- Offer nutrient-dense, not just energy-dense, meals and snacks; for example, swap cakes and chips for cheese and biscuits
- Don't focus on the bad stuff they're eating, praise them for the good stuff and get them eating more of it
- Make food presentable and appetising

- Create a pleasant environment for eating.

Beyond nutrition, food has an important role in bringing enjoyment and social connection to many older people's lives and we all deserve a piece of that pie. ■

FURTHER INFORMATION

Learn more about the ADGs for older adults at: goo.gl/w4Ay8C

For further information on all of the five food groups and a suite of health professional tools, patient resources and healthy recipe ideas, go to: foodsthatdogood.com.au

For more on maintaining healthy eating habits with age, go to: nutritionaustralia.org/national/resource/nutrition-and-older-adults

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To find an APD in your area, visit the 'find an APD' section of the DAA website at daa.asn.au or call 1800 812 942.