Emily Nichols
County Extension Agent - Family & Consumer Sciences
Rockwall County
ednichols@ag.tamu.edu

Nutrition Fact Sheet

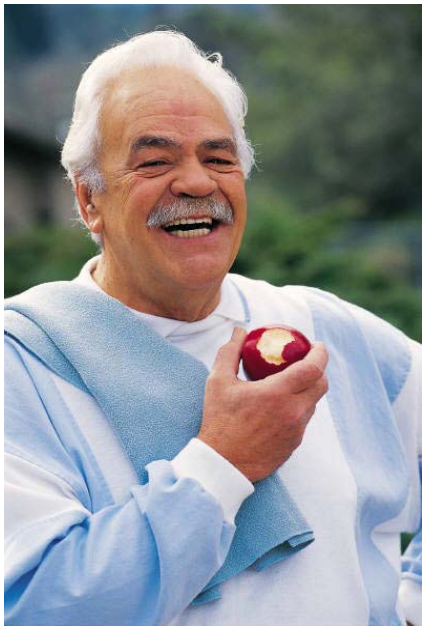
Growing Older Presents New Nutrition Challenges

With age, fewer calories - but more nutrients - are needed.

As people grow older, they need fewer calories. One reason is that, in general, people expend fewer calories in physical activity as they age. But also, even the most active aging body gradually loses lean muscle tissue, and less muscle translates to a lower calorie requirement.

At the same time, however, the need for several nutrients goes up – or at least remains the same. It's the only way the body can run at its peak efficiency as the decades pass.

Following is a guide to which nutrients adults need more of (or fall short in) in later years; why those nutrients are important; and how to ensure getting enough of them in the diet. It comes down to packing more vitamins and minerals into fewer calories, which means eating more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low and nonfat dairy foods, and lean meats; and fewer high-calorie, nutrient-poor snacks and desserts.



Calcium

Role in the Body: Keeps bones and teeth as strong as possible. Also appears to play a role in regulating blood pressure, which tends to rise with age.
Recommended Amount: Until age 50, adults are suppose to get 1,000 milligrams. After age 50, the goal is 1,200 milligrams.
Shortfall in Older Adults: Adults of all ages consume, on average, 400 to 600 milligrams daily, roughly half the requirement.
Why Older Adults Need More: The body's ability to absorb calcium declines with age. Also, bone lose calcium more quickly with age.
Food Sources: Dairy products like milk and yogurt, canned salmon and sardines with bones, calcium-fortified orange juice, broccoli, kale, and beans.

Riboflavin

Role in the Body: Helps keep oral tissues and skin healthy. Needed for normal eye health. Lets enzymes release energy from food.
Recommended Amount: 1.1 milligrams for women of all ages; 1.3 milligrams for men of all ages.
Shortfall in Older Adults: One in three older adults regularly consumes less than two thirds the recommended amount.
Why Older Adults Need More: Requirements stay the same throughout adulthood.
Food Sources: Milk, dark green vegetables, meat, whole-grain and enriched grain foods.

Folate

Role in the Body: Helps reduce blood levels of homocysteine, a substance that has been associated with increased heart disease risk. Also necessary for red blood cell formation and protein synthesis. May help brain function.
Recommended Amount: For adults of all ages, 400 micrograms.
Shortfall in Older Adults: By one estimate, some 10 percent of adults get fewer than 400 micrograms daily.
Why Older Adults Need More: They don't need more, but since heart disease risk rises with age, folate becomes increasingly important for keeping down homocysteine levels.
Food Sources: Beans, green vegetables, fortified grain foods (like bread, cereal, pasta and rice).

Vitamin B 6

Role in the Body: May help maintain brain function. Essential for formation of antibodies as well as protein and fat metabolism
Recommended Amount: 1.3 milligrams for adult to age 50; 1.5 milligrams for women older that 50; 1.7 milligrams for men older than 50.
Shortfall in Older Adults: Fifty to 90 percent of older adults reportedly take in too little.
Why Older Adults Need More: Age-related changes in metabolism.
Food Sources: Baked potato with skin, bananas, chicken, beef, canned tuna, whole-grain foods.

Vitamin B 12

Role in the Body: Necessary for mental dexterity, balance, and muscular function. May prevent heart disease by keeping down homocysteine levels.
Recommended Amount: 2.4 milligrams throughout adulthood.
Shortfall in Older Adults: Twenty percent of those over 60 and 40 percent of those over 80 don't absorb enough B12 from food because of age-related gastrointestinal changes.
Why Older Adults Need More: They don't need more. But to make up for absorption problems in later years, people over 50 should take a supplement with B12 or regularly eat B12 fortified cereal no matter how much B12 thy get from other foods.
Food Sources: Meat, fish, poultry, cheese, fortified cereal products.

Vitamin D

Role in the Body: Can't adequately absorb and metabolize calcium without it.
Recommended Amount: 200 International Units through age 50; 400 units from ages 51 through 70; 600 units for people ages 71 and older.
Shortfall in Older Adults: Older Americans average 100 to 125 units a day.
Why Older Adults Need More: Skin gradually loses ability to synthesize vitamin D from sunlight.
Food Sources: Milk (which come fortified with the nutrient), some fortified cereals (check labels), fatty fish, including salmon, sardines, herring, and mackerel.

Source – Tufts University Health & Nutrition Letter, October, 2003.

Extension programs serve people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, religion, disability, or national origin.
The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating