



Date: May 31, 2021



Topic: **Special Nutrient Needs of Older Adults**

Eating right and staying active are important no matter what your age. As we get older our bodies have different needs, so certain nutrients become especially important for good health.

**Calcium and Vitamin D**

Adults older than 70 need more calcium and vitamin D to help maintain bone health than they did in their younger years. To meet these needs, select calcium-rich foods and beverages and aim for three servings of low-fat or fat-free dairy products each day. 1 serving of dairy is equivalent to 1 cup of milk, yogurt or soy milk, or 1 ½ ounces of cheese. Other sources of calcium include fortified cereals and fruit juices, dark green leafy vegetables, sardines, and fortified plant-based beverages.

As we age, we are at an increased risk of vitamin D deficiency. The percent of older adults suffering from vitamin D deficiency ranges from 20 to 100 percent in the United States. Vitamin D is obtained through diet, supplements and sunlight. Sources of vitamin D include fatty fish, such as salmon, eggs and fortified foods and beverages such as many orange juices and milk. If you take a calcium supplement or multivitamin, choose one that contains vitamin D.

## **Vitamin B12**

Some adults older than 50 may not be able to absorb enough vitamin B12. Vitamin B12 deficiency is common among the elderly. It is estimated that up to 20 percent of people over age 50 may have a vitamin B12 deficiency. Lean meat and fish and seafood are good sources of vitamin B12. You can also obtain B12 from fortified cereals and supplements.

Symptoms of vitamin B12 deficiency can include:

- Pale or jaundiced skin
- Inflamed tongue
- Weakness and fatigue
- Tingling sensations in hands or feet
- Trouble walking
- Blurred vision
- Shortness of breath or dizziness
- Changes in thinking, memory and mood

These symptoms are common in seniors who don't have a vitamin B12 deficiency and can be caused by many other conditions, so it is easy for people, including doctors to miss that a deficiency is present. For this reason, if you or an elderly loved one has some of these symptoms, ask their doctor to

order a blood test to check whether their vitamin B12 levels are low. Some individuals can benefit from a vitamin B12 supplement. Check with your doctor to see if this is something that may benefit you.

### **Dietary Fiber**

Eat fiber-rich foods to stay regular. Dietary fiber also may help lower your risk for heart disease and reduce your risk for Type 2 diabetes. Eat whole-grain products, and more beans peas and lentils— along with whole fruits and vegetables which also provide dietary fiber. Women should aim for about 25g of fiber per day and men should aim for about 38g of fiber per day. This amount should come from food, not supplements.

By including certain foods into your diet, you can increase your fiber intake in no time. For breakfast, choose steel cut oats with nuts and berries instead of a low-fiber, refined cereal. At lunch, have a sandwich or wrap on a whole grain tortilla or bread and add veggies, such as lettuce, spinach and tomato. For a snack, have fresh fruit or vegetables with some hummus or whole grain crackers. With dinner, try a high fiber chickpea pasta or add a side salad.

When increasing fiber, make sure to do it gradually and with plenty of fluids.

### **Potassium**

Consuming adequate potassium, along with limiting sodium (salt) intake, may lower your risk of high blood pressure. Fruits, vegetables, beans and low-fat or

fat-free dairy products are all sources of potassium. Also, select and prepare foods with little or no added salt. Add flavor to food with herbs and spices.

### **Know Your Fats**

Most of the fats you eat should be polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats, which are primarily found in nuts, seeds, avocados, vegetable oils and fish. Choose foods that are low in saturated fat to help reduce your risk of heart disease.