

# Eating Well



A Nutrition Resource for Older People and their Carers



Good nutrition is always important, especially as we get older. Good nutrition helps to maintain weight, muscle and bone strength and independence.



Central Coast  
Local Health District

## Eat a wide variety of foods to help provide your body with protein, energy, vitamins and minerals

It is important to eat enough to prevent weight loss. Weight loss can lead to malnutrition.

Each day try to eat foods from each of the following food groups:

- Meat, fish, poultry, eggs, nuts and legumes
- Milk, cheese, yoghurt, custard and ice cream
- Bread, cereals, rice, pasta and noodles
- Vegetables
- Fruit

Fats and oils are also part of a nutritious diet.

Fresh, frozen, canned, dried, UHT and other processed foods may all be included.



## Eat three meals a day

To obtain the nutrients your body needs and to help prevent weight loss, try to eat three meals a day.

Each meal should include sufficient protein rich food. For people with small appetites it may be advisable to eat the protein food first.

Nourishing desserts and snacks provide extra nutrients and energy.

Any older person who is underweight and eating very little can rapidly lose weight and muscle. Sufficient protein and high energy foods need to be eaten at main meals and snacks throughout the day. Choose foods on the shopping list in this brochure.



## Are you on a special diet?

If you are on a diet for health reasons such as diabetes, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, talk to your doctor to see if the diet is still required or if it needs to be modified. This is especially important if you are underweight or losing weight.

Low fat diets are not appropriate for frail older people.

## The importance of protein

Protein helps to prevent muscle loss. Older people need more protein for their size than younger adults.

Muscle loss leads to loss of strength and increases the risk of falling.

Muscle is continuously broken down and rebuilt. Eating 25g – 30g of protein at each meal, 3 meals a day, supports maximum rebuilding. Small amounts of protein throughout the day will not have the same muscle building effect.

Each of the following will provide 7g of protein – one egg, 200mL milk, 30g of cooked meat (enough to fill a matchbox).

Include energy foods (carbohydrates, fats and oils) in each meal or the protein will be used for energy instead of muscle building.



Resistance training helps to reduce muscle loss and increases muscle strength. Ask your healthcare professional for more information on resistance training exercises.

## The value of dairy foods

Try to have four serves a day. A serve is

- 1 cup of milk (250mL) – fresh, UHT, made-up powdered milk
- Small tub yoghurt (200g)
- 1 cup of custard (250mL)
- 2 slices of cheese (40g)
- 3 scoops ice cream

Dairy foods provide protein, energy and nutrients such as calcium. Having enough calcium is important to help reduce calcium loss from bones. Calcium loss from bones increases the risk of breaks and fractures (for both men and women).

Calcium fortified soy milk is available for people unable to drink cow's milk.



## Vitamin D

Vitamin D helps absorption of calcium into bones and may have other health benefits. Direct sunlight on skin is the main source. Try to get out in the sun for about 15 minutes a day (not at the hottest time).

Talk to your doctor if you think you may need calcium or vitamin D supplements.

## Make sure you have enough fluid each day

Drinking enough fluid each day is important at any age. Aim for a total of 6–8 cups each day. Fluids include water, milk, fruit juice, cordial, soft drink, vegetable juice, coffee, tea, custard, jelly, soup and ice cream.

Have regular drinks in both summer and winter even if you don't feel thirsty.



## What about alcohol?

As people age their liver is less able to deal with alcohol. There is no safe level of drinking alcohol to prevent harm.

For healthy adults, it is advisable to have no more than ten standard drinks a week and no more than four standard drinks on any one day. The less you drink, the lower your risk of harm from alcohol.\*

A standard drink is a middy of beer or a 100ml glass of wine or a nip of spirits.

\*Source: National Health and Medical Research Council, "Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol", 2020

## What if you are overweight?

It is better for older people to carry a little extra weight.

Unintentional weight loss of 3–5 kg (1/2–1 stone) over a six-month period is a concern. Talk to your doctor if this happens. Weight loss can lead to poor health outcomes.

If you need or want to lose weight, talk to your doctor or a dietitian first.

## Caring for someone with dementia

Keeping people with dementia well nourished can be challenging as they may:

- Have a poor appetite or get too tired to finish a meal
- Forget how to eat or how to use cutlery
- Crave sweet food or always be hungry
- Refuse to sit down to eat

### **Ideas to help address some of the challenges include:**

- Serve one course at a time
- Serve favourite or familiar foods
- Remind to drink enough fluids across the day
- Meals with strong flavours may increase interest in eating
- Dessert can be enjoyed at every meal
- Nurture independence by providing special cutlery and plates
- Serve foods that are easy to manage including finger food

No cutlery is needed with finger foods. Examples include chunks of vegetables and fruit, small pieces of meat or small rissoles, party pies, vegetable fritters, hard-boiled egg, potato wedges and sausage rolls. Gravy and sauce can be served as a dip.



## Teeth, mouth and swallowing problems

These problems make eating difficult and can lead to reduced food intake, increased risk of dehydration, lack of energy and malnutrition.

Causes include tooth ache, poorly fitting dentures, mouth ulcers, sore gums and lips, reduced saliva and medical conditions such as Parkinson's disease, stroke and dementia.

### Signs of swallowing problems include:

- Taking a long time to chew and swallow
- Choking or coughing when eating or drinking
- Wet 'gurgly' voice after swallowing
- Drooling

Try to have regular dental checks and talk to a Speech Pathologist for advice if there is concern about chewing, swallowing or choking.

# Shopping list for nutritious and high calorie food

Encouraging frail older people to eat enough nourishing food can be challenging. The following shopping list will help to make sure that there is always some high protein and high calorie foods in the pantry, fridge or freezer.

## SHOPPING LIST

- full cream milk
- full cream long life milk
- full cream flavoured milk
- full cream powdered milk
- cream, sour cream
- pre-whipped cream
- ice cream
- cheese slices
- full cream custard
- full cream yoghurt
- dairy desserts (e.g. crème caramel)
- mousse, rice pudding
- eggs
- apple pies, custard tarts
- cake, fruit cake
- scones, muffins, donuts
- crumpets, pikelets
- peanut butter / nut spreads
- chocolate
- biscuits
- nuts/potato chips
- BBQ chicken
- quiche
- canned baked beans
- canned spaghetti
- (add grated cheese)
- canned soup (thick and hearty type)
- frozen meals
- frozen meat pies
- frozen sausage rolls
- frozen fish fingers
- frozen chicken nuggets
- frozen mixed veg
- milk enriching ingredients such as Milo™ / Sustagen™ / Ensure™
- nutritious breakfast drinks such as Up and Go™ / Up and Go Energise™
- commercial high protein bars
- protein meal replacements
- bananas
- tuna, salmon, sardines
- pork rind snacks/beef jerky
- canned fruit
- dried fruit
- canned soups
- dips

# Malnutrition Screening Tool (MST)

Eating poorly and losing weight will lead to malnutrition and loss of independence. Complete this malnutrition screening tool to see if you are at risk, and if so, talk to your doctor or dietitian.

<b>Have you lost weight recently without trying?</b>	
If No .....	0
If Unsure .....	2
<b>If Yes, how much weight (kg) have you lost?</b>	
From 0.5 to 5.0kg .....	1
From 5.0 to 10.0kg .....	2
From 10.0 to 15.0kg .....	3
More than 15.0kg.....	4
Unsure.....	2
<b>Have you been eating poorly because of a decreased appetite?</b>	
No .....	0
Yes.....	1
<b>Total .....</b>	
<b>Low risk:</b>	<b>MST = 0 – 1</b>
<b>At risk:</b>	<b>MST = 2 +</b>

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One stone is about 6kg.

## Are you a carer?

You are a carer if you care for a frail or disabled relative, spouse, partner or friend. Look after yourself and eat well. Being well nourished has a major role to play in your wellbeing. Healthy meals do not have to be complicated.

Some quick meal ideas include:

- Barbequed chicken, bread and margarine. Canned fruit and custard
- Scrambled eggs or omelette. Banana and custard
- Baked beans on toast. Milo™ milk and fruit
- Meat pie, salad. Canned fruit and yoghurt
- Fish and chips. Fruit and ice cream
- Ready-made fresh or frozen meals

### **For other information contact:**

My Aged Care - 1800 200 422



*For copies, please contact Bidfood Australia:*

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