Eating well for an active, healthy retirement
Overview

It’s never too late to make healthy lifestyle choices. A well-balanced diet and regular exercise will help you celebrate your golden years by improving overall well-being and reducing risk of chronic diseases.

Food, healthy or not, is an integral part of our lives, our heritage and our cultural identities. But a healthy diet gives your body the energy to do what you love, can assist in prolonging your health, and is an opportunity to celebrate food that is actually good for you!

It’s important to understand that the natural aging process affects not only the way you eat and enjoy food, but your body’s ability to use nutrients. With help from Rebecca McCullough, Holiday Retirement’s director of nutrition, health and wellness, this eBook will show you how making healthy lifestyle choices as you age may be easier than you think!

What’s Inside

This e-book will address how physiological and perceptual changes affect our relationship with food. This resource will provide recipes and useful shopping lists, examine common obstacles to healthy living at home, and discuss the benefits to wellness of senior living communities.

You’ll find many helpful tips and resources along the way.

“I encourage seniors to enjoy eating the foods they love, just in the right way. It’s best to promote a balanced diet.”

Rebecca McCullough
Registered and licensed dietitian
Why Aging Changes the Way We Eat

The natural aging process changes how our bodies respond to food digestion and nutrient absorption. These changes are gradual, and they require eating a balanced diet in our senior years.

Foods to Improve Metabolism
- Almonds
- Asparagus
- Blueberries
- Coffee
- Fish
- Granola bars
- Grapefruit
- Green tea
- Spinach
- Sweet potatoes
- Water
- Watermelon
- Yogurt

Tip!
You still need to eat your veggies!
Physiological Changes

Metabolism

Your body’s metabolism transforms food and drink into the energy it needs to fuel bodily functions, even “hidden” functions you do while resting – such as breathing, digesting and blood circulation. As you age, your metabolism changes and you lose a small amount of muscle each year. Because muscles require more energy to maintain than fat, your body ultimately needs less energy (calories) to sustain itself.

In other words, your metabolism slows down. In fact, it started naturally slowing down in your 20s. A slower metabolism and less muscle mass means your body (and diet) needs a few hundred less calories than it once did. Continuing to eat the same amount of calories will cause you to gain weight. Healthy eating, though, isn’t as simple as just eating less. It’s about eating the right foods, in the right quantities.

Digestion

Your digestive system breaks down food and drink into substances your body uses to function. The digestive system naturally slows down with age, which affects your body’s ability to absorb important micronutrients like vitamin B12 and calcium.

Common medications for high blood pressure and antibiotics can also complicate the digestive process. Changes in the digestive system and a lowered metabolism mean seniors should concentrate on eating a variety of highly nutritious foods.

Without the proper intake of fiber, fluids, fruit and vegetables, seniors are more susceptible to digestive complications like indigestion, constipation, heartburn and ulcers. Healthy food and lifestyle choices will help combat digestive issues and might reduce your need for medications that affect nutrient absorption.
What Else Affects Physiological Changes?

We experience other bodily changes that may affect physiological functions. Dental health, in particular, dentures and complications from dry mouth, can drastically change our relationship with food.

Chronic diseases like diabetes, heart disease, obesity, and the medications used with these conditions, also impact our body’s ability to metabolize nutrients from food.

Tip!

Help support digestion naturally with foods like yogurt, coffee, senna tea, ginger, fiber, plums and lots of water.

“Digestion is a huge concern with seniors who may think they’ve developed lactose intolerance or celiac disease because their body isn’t breaking down food as well as it did 20 years ago.

Concentrating on foods that help with digestion and bowel movement are really important versus taking over-the-counter medicines like stool softeners, which may complicate the problem.”

Rebecca McCullough
Registered and licensed dietitian
Eyesight & Hearing

The sizzle of bacon hitting the skillet or the mouthwatering sight of a steaming plate of lasagna – what you see and hear can often make your mouth water or stomach growl. When these senses become diminished, so too can your appetite. Hearing and vision loss are common effects of aging. Hearing loss occurs when the tiny hair cells in the ear are damaged or die. Eyesight loss is due to a variety of factors, including damage to the retina, the breaking down of cells in the retina and diseases such as glaucoma or cataracts.

Similarly, safe food preparation requires all your senses to ensure that the oven timer is heard, burnt food is smelled, and you can properly see vegetables when using the knife on the cutting board. If these senses are diminished, you might avoid cooking nutritious meals at home, and instead rely on sodium-heavy canned or frozen foods — which are not recommended. Hearing and vision loss can also affect your ability to enjoy social dining experiences at restaurants, as well as with friends and family. If the sensory and social pleasures of food are removed, you are less likely to receive proper nutrition.

Memory

You experience other sensory changes as you age.

Your perceptions of the surrounding environment and basic cognitive functions like attention span, memory, decision making and even language processing naturally change over time.

These changes are often expressed as complications from memory-loss diseases like Alzheimer’s and various forms of dementia, which can dramatically affect your relationship with food and eating.

Foods like broccoli, cabbage, dark leafy greens, blackberries, blueberries, salmon, bluefin tuna, and walnuts can help boost memory.
One of the great joys of food is the anticipation – the smell of garlic wafting in from the kitchen, the steam billowing off a hot pot of soup, the sensation of sweetness and savoriness on the tongue.

Your taste buds and sense of smell work together to give satisfaction in every bite. When you start to lose these senses, your enjoyment of food can decrease, just like it does when you have a head cold.

Your body’s ability to taste and smell food decreases as you age, and these senses work closely together in the body. Beyond age 50, the number of taste buds in your body gradually decreases, which affects your ability to taste different foods.

Medications may also affect the way food tastes. The loss of nerve endings and decreased mucus production diminishes your sense of smell, which not only affects the way foods taste, but your cooking routines.

With diminished taste and smell, you can lose appetite and enjoy eating less, which might lead to weight loss, fatigue and minimal nutritional intake. Often, seniors will eat higher amounts of sodium to compensate for the lack of taste, which may cause serious health complications like high blood pressure.

Eating nutritious food that still tastes delicious is important to fueling a healthier lifestyle.

**These Herbs & Spices Are Natural Flavor Boosters!**

- Basil
- Cilantro
- Mint
- Oregano
- Parsley
- Sage
- Rosemary
- Thyme
- Pepper
Nutrition for Seniors

A healthy lifestyle depends on making healthy choices. Whatever your age, strive to eat fresh, delicious foods and enjoy them with friends and family. The benefits of adopting a healthy diet include resistance to illness and disease, increased mental acuteness, higher energy levels, faster recuperation times and better healthcare management. Depending on your age and physical activity level, you may need more or fewer calories throughout the day. Regardless, it’s important to stay active with activities like walking and yoga to keep your metabolism functioning well.

Simple Advice For Eating Healthy

1. Drink plenty of liquids
2. Make eating a social event
3. Plan healthy, colorful meals
4. Know how much to eat
5. Vary your vegetables
6. Eat for your teeth and gums
7. Use herbs and spices
8. Keep food safe
9. Read the nutritional facts label
10. Ask your doctor about vitamins

“The most common questions I receive as a dietitian are about a new diagnosis, such as diabetes or hypertension. Or, once they are discharged from the hospital, they're unsure what they’re supposed to do to make smart choices at home.”

Rebecca McCullough
Registered and licensed dietitian
Eat Healthy While Living at Home

Just as your dietary needs and relationship with foods change over time, so do your experiences at the grocery store and in the kitchen. Eating healthy while aging doesn’t have to be difficult or time consuming. Instead, focus on smart shopping lists that include a variety of colorful fruits and veggies, whole grains and quality proteins.

Tip!

It’s OK to enjoy your favorite foods!

Senior Resource

MyPlate is a USDA organization that provides resources and tips to help people make healthier choices that meet their individual needs and improve overall health. For more information, visit choosemyplate.gov

Source: Tufts University

“ChooseMyPlate is a great resource seniors can use to create the building blocks for a healthy diet based on their age.”

Rebecca McCullough
Registered and licensed dietitian
Overcoming Common Obstacles

Are you having trouble making healthy choices? Always have nutritious snacks like almonds or applesauce on hand, and plan your meals ahead when possible. Planning ahead can decrease time spent at the grocery store and in the kitchen, and will ensure healthy options are available when you’re hungry, traveling or entertaining.

**Tired of cooking or eating alone?**
Plan a potluck, cook with a friend or enjoy a meal at a nearby community center or church.

**Problems chewing food?**
Consult your dentist, especially if you have dentures that are causing you difficulty chewing meat, fruits and vegetables. While the problem persists, eat healthy, soft foods like oatmeal or cottage cheese.

**Hard to swallow food?**
Drink plenty of liquids to ensure you have enough saliva for proper digestion. Consult your doctor to help remedy issues like dry mouth and difficulty swallowing.

**Just not hungry?**
Increase your physical activity level, and vary the color, texture and shape of the foods you eat, playing around with new spices and natural flavors. If the problem continues, ask your doctor to suggest other options if the medications you take affect your appetite or change your desire to eat.

**Having trouble getting enough calories?**
Add healthy and nutrient-dense snacks throughout the day to increase your caloric intake such as nuts, avocado or low-fat cheese. Speak with your doctor for protein and energy supplement suggestions or schedule a consultation with a dietitian.

**Do physical problems make it difficult to cook and eat?**
Consult your doctor to receive a recommendation for an occupational therapist who can help you with special exercises to increase muscle strength or provide you with special plates and utensils that will make meal prep and eating easier.
You can enjoy the benefits of a healthy diet without devoting too much of your time in the kitchen. Whether you no longer cook for yourself, or only cook occasionally for family or friends, healthy nutrition is all about making the right choices for your lifestyle.

**Meal Alternatives**

Most communities have home-meal delivery programs through Meals-On-Wheels, local senior centers or churches that deliver fresh, fully-cooked meals to seniors. Other companies like Freshly, Magic Kitchen, Schwan’s, Healthy Choice and Lean Cuisine provide home-delivery services of frozen meals that simply need reheating.

**Grocery Store Tips**

Everyone’s shopping list is unique. It’s important to choose fresh food whenever possible, but for seniors who don’t cook, healthy alternatives are still available in the canned goods or frozen section of the grocery store. Always make a shopping list before you go to guarantee you stick to your budget and healthy eating goals.

Guiding advice says to limit sugar and salt — especially in pre-packaged meals — and to eat a variety of colorful foods with both plants and protein.

“I call it ‘stealth health,’ which is the incorporation of new ingredients in recipes or daily routines that promote a balanced diet.”

Rebecca McCullough
Registered and licensed dietitian
Shopping List for Seniors Who Do Not Cook

Frozen Vegetables & Fruits
- Broccoli
- Peas
- Corn
- Green beans
- Spinach
- Asparagus
- Carrots
- Potatoes
- Blueberries (no sugar added)
- Raspberries (no sugar added)

Canned or Jar Fruit & Vegetables
(in juice or water)
- Pineapple
- Applesauce
- Peaches
- Fruit juice (low or no sugar added)
- Tomatoes
- Vegetable soups

Canned Beans & Legumes
(no salt added)
- Black beans
- Red beans
- Pinto beans
- Chickpeas/garbanzo beans
- Frozen proteins
- Ready-made fish fillets (unbreaded)
- Ready-made chicken breasts
- Garden or black bean burgers

Deli
- White meat chicken/turkey (without skin)
- Fish (not breaded)
- Beef, round or sirloin
- Extra lean ground beef

Refrigerated Dairy
- Low-fat milk
- Low-fat cottage cheese
- Low-fat cheese
- Low-fat yogurt
- Egg whites

Fresh Fruit or Vegetables
(little prep needed)
- Lettuce
- Carrot sticks
- Grapefruit
- Oranges

Breads, Cereals & Crackers
- Whole wheat or multi-grain bread
- Rice crackers or whole grain crackers
- Instant oatmeal (low sugar)
- Low-sugar boxed cereal

Condiments
- Olive oil
- Mustard
- Ketchup
- Salad dressing
- Jam, jelly or honey
- Peanut butter

Nuts, Seeds & Dried Fruit
(unsalted)
- Almonds
- Mixed nuts
- Peanuts
- Walnuts
- Raisins
Love to Cook?

Cooking should bring you joy. Whether you’re whipping up an old family recipe or entertaining family and friends for the holidays, incorporating healthy ingredients into your meals can be easy and fun.

Embrace the fact that comfort foods and kitchen rituals change over time! And remember to invite friends and family to enjoy with you!

The Home Cook

Everyone knows you shouldn’t go to the grocery store hungry, but it’s also important to make a list before you go.

A shopping list will remind you to look for nutritious foods and make it easier to stick to your budget.

Another grocery store tip is to spend most of your time and budget on the perimeter of the grocery store, where you will find the fresh vegetables, deli meats, and dairy – and practically no processed foods.

Whenever possible, purchase fresh food and low-calorie basics to restock your kitchen.

Tip!

Always ask yourself how you can make a dish healthier!

Meal Subscriptions: Recipes and Food Delivered to Your Door

Blue Apron (blueapron.com)

Plated (plated.com)

The Purple Carrot (thepurplecarrot.com)

Hello Fresh (hellosfresh.com)

PeachDish (peachdish.com)
# Shopping List for Seniors Who Cook

## Dairy
- Low-fat milk
- Low-fat cottage cheese
- Low-fat cheese
- Low-fat yogurt
- Eggs or egg substitute

## Breads
- Whole wheat or multi-grain bread
- Corn tortillas
- Rice crackers

## Cereals, Crackers, Pasta & Rice
- Raisin bran cereal (or high-fiber cereal)
- Brown rice
- Whole wheat pasta
- Couscous

## Nuts & Seeds
- Almonds
- Mixed nuts
- Peanuts
- Walnuts
- Sunflower seeds

## Vegetables
- Broccoli
- Peas
- Corn
- Cauliflower
- Cucumber
- Carrots or pre-cut carrot sticks
- Squash
- Green beans
- Spinach
- Kale, collard greens or chard
- Cucumber
- Asparagus
- Mushrooms
- Tomatoes
- Sweet peppers
- Sweet potatoes or yams
- Onions
- Garlic
- Potatoes
- Avocado

## Beans & Legumes
(If canned, no salt added)
- Lentils
- Black beans
- Red beans
- Pinto beans
- Chickpeas/garbanzo beans

## Meat Case
- White meat chicken and turkey (without skin)
- Fish (not battered)
- Beef, round or sirloin
- Extra lean ground beef

## Condiments
- Fat-free or low-fat salad dressings
- Mustard
- Ketchup
- Jam, jelly or honey
- Peanut butter
- Spices
- Salsa
- Hummus
- Soy sauce (low sodium)
- Bouillon cubes, chicken/veggie stock (low sodium)

## Fruits
- Apples
- Bananas
- Peaches
- Oranges
- Pears
- Grapes
- Grapefruit
- Apricots
- Dried fruits
- Plums
- Melons
- Lemons or limes

## Fats & Oils
- Butter or margarine
- Olive oil
Healthy Recipe Guide

### Breakfast Ideas

**Breakfast burrito**
- 1 flour tortilla (8-inch diameter)
- 1 scrambled egg
- 1/3 cup black beans
- 2 tablespoons salsa
- 1/2 large grapefruit
- 1 cup water, coffee, or tea

**Whole wheat French toast**
- 2 slices whole wheat bread
- 3 tablespoons fat-free milk
- 2/3 egg
- 2 teaspoons tub margarine
- 1 tablespoon pancake syrup
- 1/2 large grapefruit
- 1 glass fat-free milk

**Cold cereal**
- 1 cup shredded wheat
- 1/2 cup sliced banana
- 1/2 cup fat-free milk
- 1 slice whole wheat toast
- 2 teaspoons all-fruit preserves
- 1 cup fat-free chocolate milk

**Creamy oatmeal (cooked in milk)**
- 1/2 cup uncooked oatmeal
- 1 cup fat-free milk
- 2 tablespoons raisins
- 2 teaspoons brown sugar
- 1 glass orange juice

### Lunch Ideas

**Roast beef sandwich**
- 1 small whole-grain hoagie bun
- 2 ounces lean roast beef
- 1 slice part-skim mozzarella cheese
- 2 slices tomato
- 1/4 cup mushrooms (cooked in 1 teaspoon oil)
- 1 teaspoon mustard
- Baked potato wedges
- 1 cup potato wedges (cooked in 1 teaspoon oil)
- 1 tablespoon ketchup
- 1 glass fat-free milk

**Tuna salad sandwich**
- 2 slices rye bread
- 2 ounces tuna
- 1 tablespoon mayonnaise
- 1 tablespoon chopped celery
- 1/2 cup shredded lettuce
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1 medium peach
- 1 glass fat-free milk
Dinner Ideas

Baked salmon on beet greens
- 4 ounce salmon filet
- 1 teaspoon olive oil
- 2 teaspoons lemon juice
- 1/3 cup cooked beet greens (cooked in 2 teaspoons oil)
- Quinoa with almonds
- 1/2 cup quinoa
- 1/2 ounce slivered almonds
- 1 cup fat-free milk

Hawaiian pizza
- 2 slices cheese pizza, thin crust
- 1 ounce lean ham
- 1/4 cup pineapple
- 1/4 cup mushrooms (cooked in 1 teaspoon oil)

Green salad
- 1 cup mixed salad greens
- 4 teaspoons oil and vinegar dressing
- 1 cup fat-free milk

Roasted chicken
- 3 ounces cooked chicken breast
- 1 large sweet potato, roasted
- 1/2 cup succotash (lima beans and corn)
- 1 teaspoon tub margarine
- 1 ounce whole wheat roll
- 1 teaspoon tub margarine
- 1 cup water, coffee, or tea

3-bean vegetarian chili on baked potato
- 1/4 cup each cooked kidney beans, navy beans and black beans
- 1/2 cup tomato sauce
- 1/4 cup chopped onion
- 2 tablespoons chopped jalapeno peppers
- 1 teaspoon olive oil (to cook onion and peppers)
- 1/4 cup grated sauce
- 1 large baked potato
- 1 glass water

Taco salad
- 2 ounces tortilla chips
- 2 ounces cooked ground turkey (cooked in 2 teaspoons oil)
- 1/4 cup kidney beans
- 1/2 ounce low-fat cheddar cheese
- 1/2 cup chopped lettuce
- 1/2 cup avocado
- 1 teaspoon lime juice (on avocado)
- 2 tablespoons salsa
- 1 glass water, coffee or tea
Eating a well-balanced diet requires commitment and focused energy on your lifestyle choices. When maintaining a healthy lifestyle while living at home becomes burdensome, many seniors choose to transition into senior living communities. These communities help take the guesswork out of maintaining a healthy diet, and offer resources like on-site nutritionists, regular chef-prepared meals and social dining experiences.

**Healthy Benefits of Senior Living**

Senior living communities offer expertise and convenience, so you can focus on the joys of healthy living. Most organizations partner with a dietitian who specializes in geriatric nutrition, in order to create well-balanced menus and special meal plans for residents with dietary considerations.

Varied food plans offer residents delicious and nutritious meals that maintain caloric intake.

“Senior living communities offer healthy food options you wouldn’t necessarily have or make for yourself at home … you might not cook an egg-white omelet with spinach and mushrooms for yourself at breakfast, but that’s what senior living communities can offer.”

Rebecca McCullough
Registered and licensed dietitian
How Senior Living Communities Promote Healthy Lifestyles

- Chef-prepared meals
- Flexible, varied food menus with resident input
- Special dietary considerations for disease diagnosis or religious affiliation
- Menus approved by on-site dietitians or nutritionists
- Healthy snack bars with fruits and yogurt
- Healthy beverage bars with coffee, tea, juice and smoothies
- Restaurant-style community dining
- Private dining rooms for special events or entertaining
- Social food events and cooking classes
- Organized health and wellness events
- Community fitness rooms and exercise classes
- Dog-walking paths or parks so you can get outside with your furry friend!
Community Living Healthy Choices

Senior living communities offer carefree dining experiences, but you still need to be mindful to make healthy lifestyle choices, especially regarding calorie intake/output and portion control.

Healthy Snacks

- Raisins
- Unsalted almonds
- Frozen yogurt
- Hummus
- Whole wheat crackers
- Low-fat popcorn
- Hard-boiled eggs
- Fruit

Tip!

When snacking at home or going out to eat, ask yourself, “how much is on my plate and is it the right amount?”

The Importance of Drinking Water

Always keep your water glass full during meals. Keep a water bottle with you throughout the day and sip constantly! Finish the bottle of water every day so you know how much you consumed. Ensure you drink a glass of water before and after exercise. Make a habit of drinking a little water before bedtime and when you wake up.

Weigh yourself every morning, and if you lose more than two pounds overnight, be sure to drink more water throughout the day!
Meals should be celebrated with friends and family. But as you age, loved ones may be further away, which makes it difficult to get everyone around the table. Senior living communities provide a welcoming environment for residents to dine with peers and neighbors, making mealtimes a social time again. Dining is one of the best excuses to meet new people, especially if you are new to a community.

**Benefits of Eating With Friends**

1. Decreases feelings of isolation or loneliness
2. Makes meals joyous, especially for seniors with physical problems eating
3. Decreases risk of malnutrition
4. Encourages healthy dining habits
5. Encourages mental stimulation through conversation

**Tip!**

Food tastes better when enjoyed with others!

“At Holiday Retirement, we really promote that social aspect of food in our community dining rooms, and organize social and educational events around food to make it fun.”

Rebecca McCullough
Registered and licensed dietitian
Summary

As you age, your body requires less food to sustain itself. Physical changes may even affect the way you smell, taste and digest food, which is why it’s critical to get the proper nutrients to prevent fatigue, malnourishment and chronic diseases. Maintaining a proper diet is all about making consistent healthy choices to ensure your meals are well-balanced, satisfying, and of course, delicious. It’s OK to indulge in your favorite foods. It’s even better to share them with friends and family!

If you’re concerned about your diet or weight, meet with your primary care doctor, who may suggest supplements or a consultation with a dietitian. If shopping, cooking and cleaning up have become chores, contact a senior living community to see if senior living is right for you. When you start making healthier choices, you will be on your way to a happier, better you!

Rebecca McCullough is a professional in the field of dietetics with an emphasis in geriatric nutrition. She has extensive clinical background experience in long-term care settings and senior living communities, including her current position as director of nutrition, health and wellness at Holiday Retirement, where she develops and implements innovative wellness strategies for all Holiday Retirement communities. She is a certified dementia care practitioner, a registered dietitian licensed through the Commission on Dietetic Registration, and a licensed dietitian in the states of Florida, Texas and Oregon. In 2014, McCullough was recognized as an influential food service professional under the age of 30 by FoodService Director Magazine.

e-book SOURCES:
Health.gov
U.S. National Library of Medicine
EatRight.org
ChooseMyPlate.gov
Arthritis Foundation
Since 1971, Holiday Retirement has endeavored to provide its signature “Holiday Touch” to residents and their families. Today, Holiday is a trusted name in senior living and provides security, comfort, and value to independent seniors seeking a fulfilling lifestyle. Holiday operates more than 300 retirement communities, making it the second largest senior housing operator in the United States. For more information about Holiday Retirement, please call 800-322-0999 or visit www.holidaytouch.com