

Seniors and Healthy Diets

Understanding the Basics

Maintaining a healthy diet is very important throughout your life, especially as you age. Age-related changes in body composition and metabolism require seniors to focus more on healthy food choices in order to stay mentally and physically healthy.

At Premier Homecare of Indiana, we care about the health and safety of you and your loved ones. We also understand the confusion and concerns that can come along with beginning a new diet. Using this list of frequently asked questions can help assist in the everyday management of a healthy diet.

1. What are the dangers associated with an unhealthy diet?	✓ An unhealthy diet may increase your chance of developing many chronic diseases later in life, such as osteoporosis, obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, certain cancers, gastrointestinal problems, and chronic under nutrition. Additionally, an unhealthy diet can lead to prolonged recovery time from illnesses and may adversely affect quality of life.
2. Why is a healthy diet so important to the overall health of a senior?	✓ There are numerous benefits to a healthy diet throughout your life, some benefits specific to older adults are increased mental acuteness, resistance to illness and disease, higher energy levels, a more robust immune system, faster recuperation times, and better management of chronic health problems.
3. Are there any general guidelines to follow regarding a healthy diet for older adults?	✓ Some general guidelines to consider are, following a reduced sodium (salt) diet to help prevent water retention and high blood pressure, monitoring fat intake in order to maintain healthy cholesterol levels, and consuming more calcium and vitamin D for bone health. Additionally, focus on eating more fiber-rich foods to prevent constipation, cutting back on sugar and dry foods, making sure you get the recommended amount of important vitamins and minerals, increasing your water intake, and participating in regular physical activity.
4. What if I have no appetite?	✓ As people age, changes in their lifestyle and environment can cause a loss of appetite. Some older adults lose their appetite due to loneliness, a lack of motivation to prepare meals, or more simply, the feeling that foods no longer taste good. In order to prevent a loss of appetite, try eating with family and

	friends, taking part in group meal programs, ask your doctor if your medicines could be causing appetite or taste problems, and increase the flavor of food by adding spices and herbs.
5. Is exercise important to a healthy diet?	✓ Exercise is very important in maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Regular physical activity along with a healthy diet can help reduce and control weight, maintain and increase bone strength, and improve the functioning of the heart and lungs.

Healthy Food Choices

As we age, changes in our environment and physical abilities can contribute to unique nutrition management issues. Without proper nutrition, the risk of serious health problems increases. Use the list below to find examples of foods to eat and foods to avoid when on a healthy diet.

Foods to Eat:	Foods to Avoid:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Fruits: Include fresh, canned, pureed, dried, or cut-up fruits such as grapefruits, apples, bananas, watermelon, and oranges. ✓ Vegetables: Include a variety of types and colors of vegetables such as broccoli, spinach, turnips and collard greens, dark leafy greens, carrots, and sweet potatoes.⁶ ✓ Breads and cereals ✓ Milk and dairy: Include vitamin D rich foods such as low-fat or fat-free milk, yogurt, cheese, or tofu.¹ ✓ Protein: Meat, fish, or poultry – Choose lean beef, turkey breast, fish, or, chicken without the skin to lower the amount of fat and calories.⁵ Dry beans ✓ Include food that is high in fiber such as whole grain breads and cereals, beans, fruits, and vegetables. ✓ Drink plenty of water or water based fluids such as caffeine-free tea or coffee, soup, and low-fat milk products.⁵ ✓ Drink at least 8 (8 oz.) glasses of water daily.¹ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ High calorie and high-fat foods.⁶ ✓ High sugar and dry snacks such as candy, cookies, cakes or pastries.⁵ ✓ High sodium (salt) foods such as packaged meals and soups, and snacks like potato chips and popcorn.⁷ ✓ Reduce frequency of or eliminate alcohol intake.¹

1 “Nutritional Guidelines for Senior Citizens”. Seniors-Site. 11 March 2009. [<http://www.seniors-site.com>]

2 FDA.gov. Growing Older, Eating Better. U. S. Food and Drug Administration. 18 March 2009. [<http://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/default.htm>]

5 “Eating Well As You Get Older: Benefits of Eating Well”. NHI Senior Health. National Institute on Health. 13 Feb. 2009. [<http://nihseniorhealth.gov/eatingwellasyougetolder/benefitsofeatingwell/01.html>]

6 Young at Heart: Tips for Older Adults”. Weight Control-Information Network. 13 Feb. 2009. [http://win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/young_heart.htm]

7 Americanheart.org. Cutting Down on Salt. 18 March. [<http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/>]