



Care Partner Information

Tips for Providing Older Adult Care

Food Safety and Nutrition

Some changes with age affect hunger and eating. Some of these changes are normal. Some of these changes are caused by diseases that are common with aging. The table below lists some of these changes.

Less able to taste and smell	Dry mouth
It is hard to chew	It is hard to swallow
Heartburn	Less thirst

Some changes can be unsafe. If smell and taste are lower, it is hard to tell if food has spoiled. Eating spoiled food makes people sick. It is important to date and label foods, and check dates before eating. Throw out all old foods.

It is also unsafe when it is hard to chew and swallow. Choking is common for older adults. Dentures can make choking more likely. Older adults should take small bites and chew food slowly. If an older adult chokes, call 911. If trained, use the Heimlich maneuver when the choking person cannot speak or cough. Go to a doctor even after the person stops choking to make sure they are not hurt.

Many older adults also do not drink as much water as they need. This is because they do not feel thirsty. If the person drinks too little water they can feel dizzy and fall. It is important for older adults to drink water all day, even if they do not feel thirsty.

Quick Tips

- Be aware that some foods cannot be taken with some medications. Ask the doctor or pharmacist if the person should not eat some foods.
- Drink lots of water. Drink more water on hot days.
- Vitamin pills cannot replace healthy food. Eat lots of fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Take small bites and chew well to not choke.

This Care Partner Information page is part of a series on older adult caregiving tips. They are written to help family and community caregivers, direct care workers and community health representatives care for older adults. Available in English and Spanish at www.aging.arizona.edu

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Older adults should eat foods that are healthy, and are low in fat and sugar. An easy tip is to eat foods that have lots of natural color. These foods have more vitamins. For example, an orange yam has more vitamins than a white potato.

Food	Examples	Best Choices	Tips
Fruit	berries, apples	fresh, when possible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try not to add sugar • Eat many types with different colors • Fresh is best. Frozen and canned in juice are okay. • If it is hard to chew, cook or blend fruits to make them soft.
Vegetables	kale, broccoli, carrots, beets	fresh, when possible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eat many types with different colors • Fresh is best. Frozen and canned are okay. • If it is hard to chew, cook or blend vegetables to make them soft.
Grains	rice, oatmeal, pasta, bread	whole grain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try to eat cereals and grains that do not have added sugar.
Dairy	milk, cheese, yogurt	fat-free or low-fat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try plain yogurt and add fresh fruit. This will have less sugar than flavored yogurt.
Protein	beans, nuts, tofu, meat, fish, eggs	lean cuts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eat very little red meat or high fat meat. • Try more meals without meat. Use beans, lentils, nuts or tofu instead.
Fats	oils, nuts, avocado	unsaturated fats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose plant fats, like olive oil. • Eat less animal fats, like butter.

Vitamins taken as pills, liquids, or gummies do not replace of a healthy diet. But some older adults need more vitamin D and calcium, even with a healthy diet. Ask a doctor if extra vitamin D or calcium is needed.

Useful Websites

Choking, National Safety Council:

http://www.nsc.org/safety_home/HomeandRecreationalSafety/Pages/Choking.aspx

Food Poisoning, Medline Plus: <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/001652.htm>

Healthy Eating Tips for Seniors, National Council on Aging: <https://www.ncoa.org/economic-security/benefits/food-and-nutrition/senior-nutrition/>

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