

Healthy Aging: How Senior Living Promotes Better Nutrition



PRESBYTERIAN
SENIOR LIVING





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Introduction

Good nutrition is important to healthy living at every age. For older adults, however, a well-balanced diet is even more essential. A [2018 study by The Ohio State University and Abbott Health](#) found that one-third of seniors aren't getting enough protein to maintain muscle health, prevent age-related weight gain, or protect against different types of medical conditions and diseases.

From falls to a vitamin D deficiency and type 2 diabetes, senior diets can lead to health issues and accidents. Much of this is linked to skipping meals or relying on packaged foods or fast-food restaurants.

Inside this Guide

Nutrition is an area where senior living communities truly make a difference in older adults' lives. Dietitians work with chefs to plan healthy, delicious meals. And well-balanced meals lead to healthier people.

In this guide, we'll explore what you should know about healthy eating as you age, and how senior living culinary teams make good nutrition happen. It all starts with listening to residents and developing delicious, healthy menus.



Benefits of a Healthy, Balanced Diet as You Age

Good nutrition is important at every age, but especially as we grow older. Because our bodies change with time, so do our nutritional needs. Eating a well-balanced diet is linked to a variety of wellness benefits:

- **Helps maintain bone strength and muscle mass:** According to the National Institutes of Health, muscle mass decreases approximately 3–8% per decade after the age of 30. After the age of 60, muscle mass deteriorates even faster unless you take steps to prevent it. A well-balanced diet rich in dairy foods, fish, fruits, and vegetables, can usually help you get enough of the necessary daily nutrients. [The Bone Health & Osteoporosis Foundation \(BHOFF\)](#) has a fact sheet and nutrition guide you may find useful in creating meal plans.
- **Improves mood and emotional health:** Nutrition impacts more than physical well-being. It also plays a role in mental health. When your diet consists primarily of nutrient-rich foods, you experience fewer mood swings and are better able to focus. Researchers also say that diets consisting of mainly whole, unprocessed foods, can help with symptoms of depression and anxiety. Sugar can be especially problematic as it causes highs and lows in blood sugar.

- **May help protect cognitive well-being:** While there is nothing conclusive yet, some in the scientific community believe a healthy diet helps to ward off cognitive decline. Some even suggest that Alzheimer's disease is linked to diabetes type 3. By eating healthy and avoiding sugary treats and foods high in carbohydrates, you might be able to protect your cognitive health as you grow older.
- **Lowers risk of fall-related injury:** Falls are the leading cause of serious injury among older adults. They are one of the top reasons seniors are sent to hospital emergency rooms every day. A nutrient-rich diet aids in protecting everything from vision health and core strength to muscles and bones. Each of these is essential for fall prevention, especially among older adults.
- **Aids in weight control which lowers disease risks:** Being overweight or obese increases a person's risk for a variety of chronic health conditions and life-limiting diseases. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), those include diabetes, heart disease, some types of cancer, high blood pressure, depression, stroke, and osteoarthritis. By eating a well-balanced diet, you are more likely to maintain a healthy weight.

Once you understand why nutrition is such an essential part of successful aging, it's also important to know how your dietary needs change as you age. Here's a closer look at what seniors should know.



Nutritional Needs Change as You Grow Older

As you are planning meals for yourself or an older family member, keeping these factors in mind will help you create well-balanced menus:

- **Eat fewer calories:** As we age, our metabolism slows down. That means most of us need fewer calories. This is usually because we are less active and have lower muscle mass. The general recommendation for seniors is that women consume between 1,600 to 2,200 calories per day and men consume 2,000 to 2,800 calories per day, but talk to your doctor for more personalized advice.
- **Monitor vitamin D and calcium:** The body metabolizes vitamins, nutrients, and even medications differently with age. Two nutrients that seniors are at risk of deficiency for are vitamin D and calcium. Foods that can increase these are white beans, spinach, sardines, kale, eggs, and yogurt. Fortified foods, such as cereal and orange juice, also help.
- **Make omega-3 fatty acids a priority:** Omega-3 fatty acids are an essential part of cell membranes throughout the body. They are the starting point for the development of hormones that regulate blood clotting, contraction and relaxation of artery walls, and inflammation. This helps prevent strokes and heart disease, while also aiding in managing some autoimmune diseases. Fish, nuts, leafy greens, and flax seed all contain omega-3 fatty acids.
- **Limit sodium consumption:** While your body does need a small amount of sodium to function properly, too much can put you at risk for heart disease, strokes, and high blood pressure. The CDC recommends Americans consume less than 2,300 milligrams (mg) per day. A senior's primary care physician might suggest even less for people with some health conditions.

At PSL, we understand that cooking for one or two can seem like too much work. That's especially true if you are trying to stick to a healthy diet that requires a lot of prep work. If this is a struggle you are experiencing, one solution might be to transition to a senior living community.



How PSL Dining Services Programs Support Good Nutrition

As we age, our bodies undergo numerous changes that can affect our nutritional needs. It becomes crucial to adopt a diet that supports optimal health and helps maintain a strong immune system. Adequate nutrition plays a significant role in preventing and managing various age-related conditions, including cardiovascular disease, osteoporosis, and cognitive decline.

PSL communities place a high priority on resident nutrition. It starts when our dining services teams ask each resident for input on menu items. They are encouraged to share their favorite foods including entrees, side dishes, and desserts.

Here are a few key considerations when it comes to senior nutrition:

- Balanced Diet
- Nutrient Density
- Calcium and Vitamin D
- Individualized Needs
- Hydration
- Fiber
- Limit Sodium and Sugar

Proper nutrition is a lifelong commitment, and with the right choices, we can promote healthy aging and enhance the well-being of beloved seniors.

The best way to learn more about the dining services program at PSL communities is to visit in person. Call a community near you to schedule a time for a private tour and to be our guest for lunch or dinner!

Schedule a Visit to a PSL Community

The best way to learn more about the services, amenities, programs, and mission of a senior living community is by visiting in person. We invite you to call the PSL community nearest you to schedule a visit today!



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