

Personal Health

Growing Older, Eating Wiser

As every minute passes, we're all getting older. While this may not be earth-shattering news, the reality of aging can come as a shock when you discover your energy levels fading and your once trim waistline thickening. If this is the case, then it may be time to re-examine your changing nutritional needs. Start 'eating your age' by:

Cutting down on calories. During your 30s, the metabolism starts to slow down by roughly two to eight per cent for every decade. And yet many people continue to eat as if they're still a growing teen. Unfortunately, this kind of 'youthful' diet, in combination with a less active lifestyle, can literally weigh you down, adding unwanted bulk to your body and sapping your declining energy stores.

But whether you're 35, 47 or 58 that svelte, youthful vigour doesn't have to be a thing of the past. You can lower calorie consumption by reducing serving sizes, skipping seconds and cutting out nutrient-empty snacks. Then you can kick that slacker metabolism into action by increasing your daily level of physical activity, whether it's walking to the store, taking the stairs at work or joining a gym. You can also maintain muscle mass—which gradually declines as you get older—by incorporating resistance training into your exercise routine two to three times a week.

Boosting nutrient-rich food intake. As your body slows down, it also becomes less effective at absorbing important minerals, vitamins and antioxidants. So while you're cutting back on calories, it's vital that the food you're eating is packed with nourishing nutrients to keep you in tip-top shape. The good news is most fruits and vegetables are high in these nutritional necessities, but relatively low in calories.

Blueberries and grapes are well known for their youth-enhancing antioxidants while green leafy vegetables have the added perk of being a good source of folic acid and iron. Though these are especially vital for pregnant women, they're important for everyone. Folic acid helps prevent heart disease and keeps aging minds functioning at a high level while iron builds the body's energy-packed red blood cells. Micronutrients in fruits and vegetables also help your immune system remain at its most powerful peak.

Eating lots of fibre. Not only will fibre help you avoid bowel problems associated with aging, it can also help lower cholesterol, keep diabetes at bay and decrease the risk of certain cancers. Keep your fibre levels up by eating lots of green, leafy vegetables, whole grain products as well as legumes. You can also take smaller steps to increase fibre: eat fruit instead of drinking juice and keep skins on when snacking on vegetables and fruit.

Avoiding high-fat and processed foods. Though junk food should be limited at any age, the impact of high-calorie, high-fat and low-nutrient food is even more noticeable as the body matures. Aside from making you feel sluggish and helping to pile on the pounds, processed foods are typically high in salt and refined sugars. And there's a good chance your favourite deluxe burger and fry combo is also wreaking havoc on your arteries: a growing concern for men and

women alike as they age and the risk of heart attack increases. Make fast food the exception rather than the rule and when take out is the only option select one of the healthier menu items many chain restaurants are now offering.

Gulping down more dairy. Calcium keeps bones and teeth strong and resilient to breakage. Though most women understand calcium's role in preventing osteoporosis, most men don't realize that osteoporosis-related bone fractures happen to over one quarter of males over the age of 50. Avoid osteoporosis by boning up on calcium-rich foods including low-fat dairy products, salmon and tofu, while avoiding calcium 'antagonists' such as coffee and soft drinks which prevent the body from absorbing calcium.

Consulting a professional. If you're stuck in a nutritional wasteland and don't know where to start, it might be time to seek out nutritional advice. Your doctor or dietitian can uncover vitamin or mineral imbalances and help resolve any weight or energy issues with a detailed, realistic dietary plan of action.

By understanding and responding to your body's evolving nutritional needs, you may not be able to eat your way to the fountain of youth, but you *can* boost the way you look and feel at every age and stage.

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