

Healthy eating for men aged over 70

Being in good health in your later years allows you to spend more time doing the things you enjoy such as travelling or simply catching up with friends and family.

During this life stage, you may find it challenging to access and cook healthy foods or stay active. Other factors such as finances, health conditions, medications or issues with teeth or dentures may also affect your nutritional intake or requirements.

Why eat healthily?

It's important to eat healthily to enhance your physical, mental and social wellbeing during this life stage.

Research shows that along with healthy eating, it's also important to exercise for at least 30 minutes a day to maintain optimal health. Include physical activities that involve fitness, strength, balance and flexibility.

Find out more about [Australia's Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines](#).

See [Choose health: be active](#) for some suggested physical activities.

It's also important to get enough vitamin D for the health of your bones. Sunlight is a natural source of vitamin D.

Healthy eating guidelines for men aged over 70

The [Australian Dietary Guidelines](#) outline what is a healthy diet for men aged over 70 with average height and an inactive (sedentary) to moderately active lifestyle..

Australian Dietary Guidelines serving recommendations by food group

Food group	Example serving size	Serves per day	Example of essential nutrients
Grains (cereal) foods	1 slice of bread or ½ a medium roll or flat bread (40 g), ½ cup cooked rice, pasta, noodles, ½ cup of cooked porridge or polenta, 2/3 cup breakfast cereal flakes (30 g) or ½ cup muesli	4½ serves	Fibre, carbohydrates, protein, iron, zinc, magnesium, B group vitamins, vitamin E
Vegetables and legume/beans	½ cup cooked vegetables (75 g), 1 cup salad vegetables, 1 small potato, ½ cup cooked dried or canned beans, chickpeas or lentils (no added salt)	5 serves	Fibre, carbohydrate, vitamin C, vitamin E, magnesium, potassium, folate, protein, iron

Food group	Example serving size	Serves per day	Example of essential nutrients
Fruits	1 medium piece of fresh fruit (150 g), 30 g dried fruit (e.g. 4 dried apricot halves), 1 cup canned fruit (150 g)	2 serves	Fibre, carbohydrate, vitamin C, vitamin E, magnesium, potassium, folate
Lean meats and poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts, seeds, legumes/beans*	65 g cooked lean red meat (e.g. beef, lamb, pork, venison or kangaroo) or ½ cup of lean mince, 2 small chops, 80 g cooked poultry, 100 g cooked fish fillet or 1 small can of fish, 2 large eggs, 170 g tofu, 30 g nuts or seeds	2½ serves	Protein, essential fatty acids (found in fish, e.g. omega 3 and omega 6), iron, vitamin B12, iodine, zinc
Milk, yogurt, cheese and/or alternatives, mostly reduced fat*	1 cup (250 ml) milk, 200 g tub of yoghurt, 40 g or 2 slices of cheese, 120 g ricotta cheese	3½ serves	Calcium, protein, vitamin A, vitamin B12, iodine, zinc, riboflavin
Saturated oils and fats (e.g. butter, cream, lard, coconut and palm kernel oils)		use in small amounts	

* If you follow a vegetarian or vegan lifestyle, **plan your diet** to be sure it includes all the essential nutrients.

If you are taller or more active, you can have an additional 0–2½ serves per day, selected from:

- foods from any of the **five food groups**, or
- unsaturated spreads or oils (such as olive oil, canola oil, nut butters or avocado paste), or
- **discretionary choices**. However, discretionary choices are not needed as part of a healthy diet and, if eaten, should only be eaten occasionally.

Eating for a healthy weight

In this life stage, it's not unusual to have less of an appetite, but this can mean that you eat less than what you need. It's important to achieve or maintain a healthy weight by balancing the energy you take in (from foods and drinks) with the energy you burn (energy out).

To find out more about the relationship between food and energy, see **Balancing energy in and energy out**.

How to start healthy eating habits

It's never too late to improve your diet. Here's how you can.

Protein – maintain your muscles

Eating food with adequate protein is important to help you maintain muscle mass and strength, and reduce your risk of muscle wasting.

For food that is high in protein, see 'Lean meats and poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts, seeds, legumes/beans' and 'Milk, yogurt, cheese and/or alternatives, mostly reduced fat' in the Australian Dietary Guidelines table.

Calcium – keep your bones strong

As you age, your ability to build new bone decreases and the rate at which your bones break down speeds up, which can lead to osteoporosis.

For food that is high in calcium, see 'Milk, yogurt, cheese and/or alternatives, mostly reduced fat' in the Australian Dietary Guidelines table. Also see 'Bone health' on this page.

Vitamin D – keep on your feet

Together with calcium and protein, vitamin D strengthens bones. It also improves muscle strength and function. The best source of vitamin D is the sun, but it's important to follow safe sunlight exposure guidelines.

For more information about vitamin D and safe sunlight exposure, visit [SunSmart](#) and the [Cancer Council](#).

Foods that contain vitamin D are oily fish like salmon, tuna or mackerel, liver, egg yolks and some vitamin D-enriched foods such as breakfast cereals and milk.

Fibre and B-group vitamins – keep your heart and gut healthy

Your ability to absorb nutrients, particularly B-group vitamins, decreases with age. Wholegrains are a great source of B-group vitamins, and fibre. Fruit and vegetables are also a good source of fibre and vitamins.

Having enough fibre in your diet can help prevent constipation, which is common in older adults. A diet with sufficient wholegrains can also reduce your risk of heart disease.

See all five food groups in the Australian Dietary Guidelines table for more examples of foods high in fibre and B-group vitamins.

Fluid – keep your body hydrated

As you get older, the amount of water in your body decreases. The ability of your body to tolerate alcohol changes too.

Staying hydrated is important during this life stage and may help in preventing constipation. **Drink plenty of water** during both warm and cold weather and avoid sugary drinks. Aim for around 2.6 litres (approximately 10 cups) of fluid every day.

Common dietary issues for men aged over 70

Here are some of the more common dietary issues that can affect men in this age group.

Alcohol

At this stage of life your body does not metabolise alcohol well. This means that your risk of intoxication is greater when you drink alcohol. This, in turn, increases your risk of falls and other accidents. Alcohol may also affect the absorption, and therefore the effectiveness, of any medications you take.

Find out more, see [How alcohol affects your body](#).

Being underweight

If you are underweight, this can lead to a greater risk of injury and bone fractures. Try to eat at least three meals every day to ensure you get the nutrients and energy you need. You can also use food as an opportunity to socialise with family and friends such as sharing a meal together, or meeting for coffee and cake.

Malnutrition

It's common for men over 70 to eat less than what they need for good health. This may result in malnutrition, which can lead to muscle wasting or other health problems such as lung disease, heart failure, dementia or depression.

The signs of malnutrition may be similar to those of other health conditions, so it is not always easy to detect. If

you find that you are losing weight without trying it may be a sign that you are malnourished, but malnutrition can also occur without weight loss.

Being overweight does not protect you against malnutrition. If you are not eating a healthy balanced diet it is possible to gain excess body fat and, at the same time, lack the nutrients that are needed for your body to function at its best.

To maintain a healthy diet, refer to the Australian Dietary Guidelines table.

Bone health

According to **Osteoporosis Australia** a quarter of the people who have osteoporosis are men. Most risk factors for osteoporosis apply to both men and women, but men also have specific risk factors such as treatments for prostate cancer.

For good bone health it's important to include enough calcium in your diet. Adult men aged over 70 years old need about 1,300 mg of calcium every day. See 'Milk, yoghurt, cheese and/or alternatives' in the Australian Dietary Guidelines table.

To help your body absorb the calcium in your diet, you also need to make sure you get enough vitamin D. Sunlight is a natural source of vitamin D.

It's also important to prevent falls to minimise your risk of bone fractures. See **Older people – preventing falls at home**.

For more information on bone health, see **Osteoporosis in men**.

Dehydration

Men over 70 tend to drink less water and lose more fluids. This means that men in this age range are at greater risk of dehydration – and not just in the warmer months.

Dehydration can also happen in winter, so it's important to drink plenty of water all year round. Aim for around 2.6 litres (approximately 10 cups) of fluid every day.

Dehydration may cause constipation, low blood pressure and high body temperature.

For more information, see **Water – a vital nutrient**.

Note that this page does not apply to men with specific health conditions. For more information, please consult:

- your **GP (doctor)**
- a dietitian accredited with the **Dietitians Association of Australia**
- a nutritionist accredited with the **Nutrition Society of Australia**.

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