



# Nutrition tips for the elderly

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## Include nutrient-rich foods in the diets of the elderly for health and wellness

**Rationale:** To remain healthy and active, elderly persons need foods rich in vitamins and minerals along with adequate physical activity.

- Healthy food habits and regular physical activity are required to maintain good health and improve the quality of life
- As age advances people become less active, their metabolism slows, and their energy requirement decreases.
- Aging is often accompanied by a loss of appetite and changes in taste and smell, which can lead to lower intake of required foods.
- For healthy ageing the elderly need nutrient dense foods that are rich in vitamins and minerals with adequate amounts of good quality proteins, complex carbohydrates and dietary fibre.
- Ensure adequate water intake to avoid dehydration, which is common among elderly.
- Eat a variety of nutrient-rich foods.
- Ensure regular physical activity.
- Avoid HFSS and UPF foods with high amounts of salt, sugar and fats.

## Who is an elderly person?

An elderly person is an individual of 60 years and over. As per the census 2011, the absolute number of elderly population has crossed the 100 million mark constituting 8.6 percent (Men: 8.2% and Women: 9%) of the total population of India and this number is expected to increase to 323 million by 2050, constituting 20% of the total population

population.

## **What are the reasons for special nutritional needs for the elderly?**

The body of an ageing adult undergoes multiple physiological changes such as impaired digestion, and protein utilization, altered body composition, insulin resistance, inflammation and decreased bone density. The metabolism slows down after 60 years of age. Recent study found a 0.7 percent decrease in metabolism per year (i.e. energy expenditure). An elderly person needs fewer calories but more micronutrients than someone in mid-life. Hence, elderly people require less energy but more micronutrient rich foods such as vegetables, fruits, beans, nuts, eggs and fish.

## **What are the health benefits of nutritionally adequate diets (balanced diet) and physical activity?**

In the elderly population, regular physical activity, healthy food choices and balanced diets have the potential to reduce the risk of most of the diseases like osteoporosis, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases (stroke and heart diseases), and certain neurological problems like parkinson's, dementia as well as muscle wasting (sarcopenia) that may occur due to ageing. For healthy ageing and to reduce health risks, minimize or avoid highly or ultra-processed and HFSS foods.

## **What type of diet should the elderly consume?**

Elderly population is advised to consume foods rich in proteins, calcium, micronutrients and fibre. Every day, apart from cereals (with at least one-third as whole grains) and pulses, at least 200–400ml of low-fat milk or milk products, a fist full of nuts and oilseeds and 400–500g of vegetables (including leafy vegetables) and fruits are recommended. Such a balanced diet has the potential to provide essential macronutrients, micronutrients, antioxidants and fibre. Inclusion of pulses, legumes, milk, fish, minced meat or egg increases protein quality and micronutrient intake. It is recommended to consume well cooked, soft food preparations with less salt and moderate amounts of spices. Minimizing or avoiding highly or ultra-processed and HFSS foods will delay age-related diseases. Adequate water (two litres/day) should be consumed to avoid dehydration and constipation.

## **Why is regular physical activity important?**

Regular physical activity along with moderate exercise is an integral part of maintaining healthy life. Regular physical activity helps to maintain muscle mass, bone density, maintains body weight, improves brain function and also reduces risk or progression of degenerative diseases. Yoga, meditation and other indoor/outdoor physical exercises are advisable. Exercise schedule should be decided in consultation with a physician.

**Source:** [ICMR - National Institute of Nutrition, Hyderabad - Dietary guidelines for Indians 2024](#)

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**Source:** <https://data.vikaspedia.in/short/lc?k=EYXIRJRlzuBLNxKRLFUdXA>

