

## Tips to help you gain weight

It is not unusual for seniors to lose weight. Add calories by:



- Drinking whole milk or eating higher-fat yogurts
- Adding extra butter or sour cream to dinners
- Eating high-calorie snacks, such as nuts, between your main meals

## Healthy eating habits for seniors

The foods you eat have been part of your lifestyle for a long time. As we age, however, our bodies and eating habits can change. The introduction of a new medication or life-altering circumstances, such as the loss of a spouse, can cause us to lower our food intake. Continuing to eat wisely is important and has been shown to slow the signs of aging by keeping arteries soft and providing important nutrients to our major organs. It also helps fuel our bodies for everyday activities.

When your total food intake decreases, your intake of vital nutrients is less, resulting in lower energy and weight. Eating less can be due to a natural decline in metabolic rate, or a loss of appetite caused by a decrease in physical activity. Keep reading for sugges-



tions on maintaining adequate nutrition levels, planning menus and incorporating antioxidants and omega-3s into your diet—because maintaining healthy eating habits is also about maintaining a good quality of life.

## Eat, drink and be social!



It has been shown that seniors who enjoy meals together eat more. Invite a neighbour for a home-cooked meal and bring delight into someone's life, and your own. Local church groups and senior centres often host social events that will provide good company and help promote healthy eating habits.

## You can trust We Care

At We Care, our compassionate caregivers understand the importance of family and of living at home for as long as possible. Our staff are specially trained to help with Alzheimer's and dementia, diabetes, acquired brain injury and end-of-life care. Services include:

- Personal Care
- Home Making
- Companion Services
- Nursing
- Foot Care
- Live-in Care
- Caregiver Relief
- Accompanied Visits

**All this 24 hours a day,  
7 days a week, 365 days a year**

### INSIDE

Planning healthy meals	<b>2</b>
Be aware and learn	<b>2</b>
Don't be fooled by "food"	<b>3</b>
Choose healthy alternatives	<b>3</b>
Practice safe cooking	<b>4</b>
Ask our experts	<b>4</b>



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# Planning healthy meals

Most people agree that eating alone and figuring out what to eat are often the hardest parts. Caregivers should encourage seniors to share meals with friends or relatives and help arrange these events when possible. Creating a weekly menu with new healthy recipes and local ingredients might also be worth considering. A plan can serve as a great base for a weekly grocery shopping list that concentrates on lowering sodium intake and cutting down on fast foods.

Try to include a wide variety of fibre-rich foods—and at least five servings of fresh fruit and vegetables each day. It is hard to argue with their health benefits, including a lowered blood pressure and reduced risk of heart disease and stroke. Find budget-stretching and imaginative ways to cook enough to last for a few delicious meals.

Check out our favourite chicken recipes, such as succulent roast chicken, in the “Get Eating” section of the *Get Going To Keep Going* booklet. Download your guide from [www.wecare.ca](http://www.wecare.ca), under the resources tab.

## Free tips and advice

Dietitians of Canada, in collaboration with the Senior Friendly Program, has developed a series of 12 free tip sheets to help seniors with planning, shopping and preparing healthy meals for one or two people. They can be printed out at home or at the library. To get your tip sheets, see the “Get Eating” section of the *Get Going To Keep Going* guide at [www.wecare.ca](http://www.wecare.ca).

## Find it hard to eat fruits and veggies?

Sneak more into your day by keeping a fruit bowl out where you can see it. Try filling half your plate with vegetables at every meal. Keep track of what you are eating and get out of the same old rut by hunting down a new recipe that includes something new. You will find some health-wise recipes on our website at [www.wecare.ca](http://www.wecare.ca).

## Adding vitamins and nutrients

Include calcium-rich foods such as milk and cheese to promote strong bones and teeth. Those over 65 years of age require 1,500 mg of calcium and 400–800 mg of vitamin D daily. Think about small, regular meals with nutrient-dense snacks such as cheeses and peanut butter between meals. Limit caffeine and alcohol intake.

Nutritional supplements such as Boost or Ensure are handy ways to increase your calorie intake and provide vitamins and minerals. If it is hard for you or your senior to shop or carry groceries, ask the grocery store



or a pharmacy that stocks the basics to deliver. For more nutrition information, visit these helpful websites:

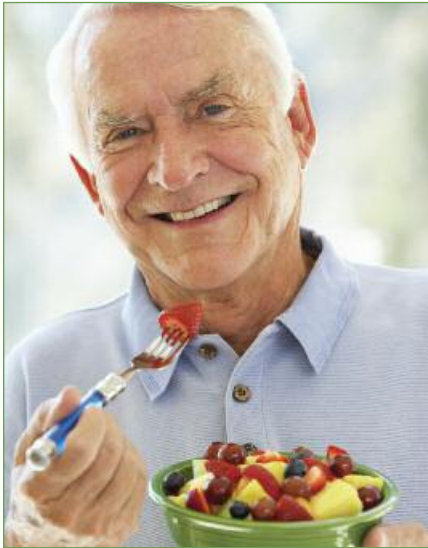
Organization	Website
Dietitians of Canada	<a href="http://www.dietitians.ca">www.dietitians.ca</a>
Canadian Diabetes Association	<a href="http://www.diabetes.ca">www.diabetes.ca</a>
Health Canada	<a href="http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca">www.hc-sc.gc.ca</a>
Heart and Stroke Foundation	<a href="http://www.heartandstroke.com">www.heartandstroke.com</a>
Osteoporosis Canada	<a href="http://www.osteoporosis.ca">www.osteoporosis.ca</a>
Nutrition Action Healthletter	<a href="http://www.cspinet.org/canada">www.cspinet.org/canada</a>



## Be aware and learn

Food labels provide us with valuable information that can help us select foods that meet our personal nutrition goals. Whether we are trying to limit saturated fat, sugar or salt, understanding what the label means makes it easier. Visit [www.wecare.ca](http://www.wecare.ca) and select “Get Eating” in the *Get Going To Keep Going* booklet to view a simple chart that will help you translate exactly what the product manufacturers mean when they say “low fat” or “high in fibre.”

# Don't be fooled by "food"



What are omega-3 fatty acids, nutrient-dense foods, superfoods and antioxidants? There are lots of new buzzwords and plenty of confusing advice. The following tips will help you maintain a healthy diet and an active, independent lifestyle.

## 1. Monitor your levels

Foods that are high in soluble fibre include fruits, vegetables, legumes (e.g., beans), oats and barley. These foods will help lower cholesterol and sweep it out of the body. An ideal total cholesterol level is below 180 mg/dL, but 180–199 mg/dL can also be considered acceptable. If you are concerned, it is best to discuss your cholesterol levels with your doctor.

It is not only the amount of fat but also the type of fat you eat that affects your heart. Low-fat eating means reducing saturated and trans fats by avoiding foods such as butter, doughnuts and potato chips. Only 20–35 per cent of daily calories should come from fat, preferably in the form of omega-3 fats from foods such as walnuts, broiled salmon and boiled cauliflower.

## 2. The bigger the belly, the bigger the risk

It is not only being overweight that matters, but also where you are carrying your extra weight. Belly

blubber significantly increases your risk of CAD (coronary artery disease). Men should maintain a waist measurement of less than 102 cm (40 inches) and women less than 88 cm (35 inches). Values for those of Asian descent are lower, with a waistline of less than 90 cm (35 inches) for men and less than 80 cm (32 inches) for women.

## 3. Unearth your family history

One uncontrollable risk factor that makes some people more likely to have CAD is a family history of the disease. If your parents or siblings had heart disease or any conditions predisposing them to heart disease then your chances of acquiring it are increased, even in the absence of all other risk factors. The best news is that heart disease is preventable and manageable—even with a family history—by maintaining a heart-healthy lifestyle.

## 4. Think about nutrient-dense superfoods

There is more to maintaining a healthy diet than just eating fruits and vegetables. It is also important to include foods that contain high amounts of vitamins and minerals, while being low in calories compared with other similar foods.

The phrase 'nutrient-dense' is used to describe foods that have a high number of nutrients per volume. For example, a cup of carrots has the same amount of calories as four saltine crackers, but the carrots contain more vitamins and nutrients.

Even better for you are nutrient-dense superfoods. These are not only rich in vitamins and minerals, but also have other added benefits such as fibre or essential fatty acids. Nutrient-dense superfoods to look out for include trout, soy, kale, cherries and pomegranate. They are a great addition to any meal.

## 5. Fish, flax and canola

Eating a diet rich in essential fatty acids (omega-3) raises high-density

lipoprotein (good) cholesterol levels and may help to prevent heart disease. Fish, flax and canola are great sources of essential fatty acids.

On the other hand, trans fats increase blood cholesterol levels and the risk of heart disease. These are found in some processed foods such as crackers, cookies, fried foods and baked goods.

## 6. Alcohol in moderation

There is some evidence that drinking a moderate amount of alcohol, particularly red wine, may lower the risk of heart disease. However, drinking more than a moderate amount does the opposite! Women should limit their intake to one standard drink per day and men to two per day for heart health.

## 7. Antioxidants

Antioxidants are known to protect and repair cell damage. Eating foods full of antioxidants can reduce your risk for many chronic diseases. Try berries (especially raspberries, blueberries and strawberries), broccoli and green tea to get their additional health benefits.

## Choose healthy alternatives!

It is not always easy to eat well when your cupboard is stocked with unhealthy options.

Next time you are out grocery shopping, avoid high-sodium (salt) processed foods and keep in mind some of these healthy alternatives:

- Sweet potatoes rather than white potatoes
- Fruit sorbet or sherbet instead of ice cream
- English muffins, not sugary cereals
- Olive oil for cooking rather than butter or canola oil
- Nuts instead of granola or energy bars



### Practice safe cooking

Older adults are more susceptible to food-borne illnesses because of reduced stomach acid and weakened immune systems. In addition, the sense of smell decreases rapidly as we age, so the ability to smell spoiled food can be hindered. Here are some ways to practice safe cooking:

- Clear leftovers from the fridge weekly
- Date food items
- Keep your freezer temperature at  $-18$  to  $0$  degrees Celsius and your fridge at  $0$  to  $4$  degrees Celsius.
- Keep meat in a separate bag on the bottom shelf of your fridge to prevent drippings from contaminating other food

### Visit these websites for more information:

[www.phac-aspc.gc.ca](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca)

[www.wecare.ca](http://www.wecare.ca)

[www.caregiversolutions.ca](http://www.caregiversolutions.ca)

## Ask our experts

*Forward your questions or comments, and we'll ask our experienced nursing team to provide you with the latest advice and information.*

*My mother is home recovering from hip replacement surgery, but she is having some difficulty. Can we get temporary help with grocery shopping and cooking?*

It is very difficult to recover from hip replacement surgery without some help. Depending on where your mother lives, she may be eligible for government-funded assistance. Contact the homecare service for your province to see if your mother is eligible.

If she is not eligible then there are still many options available. You can work with a reputable agency that will provide assistance to your mother for a fee. Usually a nurse will make a visit to determine your mother's needs and work with you both to develop a plan of care. This will ensure that the caregivers coming to help your mother are able to provide the care she needs. To find contact information for your provincial government homecare program and telehealth lines visit: [www.wecare.ca/gethelp](http://www.wecare.ca/gethelp)

*Since her stroke, my wheelchair-bound sister has gained extra weight. Will a homecare worker help her keep an exercise regime?*

It may be very difficult for your sister to keep the weight off if she is wheelchair bound. However, there are exercises that a homecare worker can assist her with. It would be best to utilize exercises that have been developed specifically for your sister by a physiotherapist. Ensure the exercises are beneficial.

*My father takes leftovers from our Sunday dinner to eat all week. How can I encourage him to cook for himself using fresh ingredients?*

It is wonderful that your father wants to take leftovers home—if you are cooking with fresh ingredients, you will know that he is getting the best out of what you are giving him. If he finds it difficult to prepare meals on his own, it is possible to arrange for someone to visit his home and make nutritious meals? If it was always your mother who did the cooking, it may be very difficult for your father to suddenly be responsible for his own meals. Cooking classes are available at most community centres, which might be another option for your father.

*For a copy of the We Care Get Going To Keep Going guide or the Independent Living Guide call 1-877-853-1195 or visit [www.wecare.ca](http://www.wecare.ca) to find the We Care office nearest you.*

### Attention caregivers

Ask for your complimentary copy of Caregiver Solutions® magazine, courtesy of your local We Care Home Health Services location. Visit [www.wecare.ca](http://www.wecare.ca) or call 1-877-853-1195.



Send your questions to Julia Sommers at [julia\\_sommers@wecare.ca](mailto:julia_sommers@wecare.ca)



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