

# eating for later life

choosing food to  
help you stay  
healthy and active



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Eating a varied and balanced diet is important for everyone. It helps to make eating more enjoyable and will help you to stay healthy and active. This booklet contains practical advice to help you make some healthy food choices.

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### Q What should I be eating?

- A Make sure you're eating plenty of all the following types of food.

#### Foods rich in starch and fibre

Bread, rice, pasta, cereals and potatoes are all good sources of starch and fibre. As well as being low in fat, these foods are good sources of other essential nutrients: protein, vitamins and minerals.

The fibre from these foods helps to prevent constipation, which also reduces the risk of some common disorders in the intestine. It's not a good idea to sprinkle raw bran on your food to increase the fibre you eat, because this may prevent you absorbing some important minerals.

Oats, beans, peas, lentils, fruit and vegetables are also sources of fibre.



### Foods rich in iron

Iron-rich foods help maintain the iron store in your body. The best source of iron is red meat. It can also be found in pulses (peas, beans and lentils), oily fish such as sardines, eggs, bread, green vegetables and fortified breakfast cereals.



### Foods and drinks rich in vitamin C

These help the body to absorb iron, so you could have a glass of fruit juice with an iron-rich meal. Fruit, especially citrus fruit, green vegetables, peppers, tomatoes and potatoes are all good sources of vitamin C. Avoid drinking tea with meals containing iron because this can reduce the amount of iron your body can absorb.



### Foods containing folic acid

These help maintain good health in older age. Good sources of folic acid are green vegetables and brown rice, as well as fortified bread and breakfast cereals.

### Calcium-rich foods

Osteoporosis can be a major problem for older people, particularly women. When someone has osteoporosis, the density of their bones is reduced, so they are at a greater risk of bone fractures. So, it's important to keep up your bone strength by eating foods rich in calcium. The best sources of calcium are dairy products, such as milk, cheese and yoghurt. Remember to choose lower-fat varieties. Calcium is also found in fish containing edible bones, such as sardines.



## Q Is vitamin D important?

A Like calcium, vitamin D is important for good bone health. Most vitamin D comes from the effect of sunlight on our skin, but good food sources include oily fish, fortified cereals and soft spreads such as margarine.

These food sources are particularly important if you are housebound. If you don't get outdoors much or if you tend to be covered up when you are outside, you may need a vitamin D supplement (see page 5). Ask your GP for advice.



## Vitamin D supplements

You should consider taking 10 micrograms (mcg) of vitamin D each day if:

- you rarely get outdoors
- your skin doesn't get exposed to daylight because you always wear clothes that cover almost all your skin when you're outdoors
- you don't eat meat or oily fish

## Q Should I be worried about my weight?

A Try to keep your weight at a healthy level. As you grow older, being overweight could reduce your mobility, which can affect your health and quality of life. Being overweight also increases your risk of developing diseases such as heart disease and diabetes.

It's not healthy to lose weight suddenly and this could mean either that you're not eating enough food or that you're not well.

If you are concerned about your weight, check with your GP. He or she may refer you to a dietitian, who can give you advice about changing what you eat to meet your current needs.

## Q Is it normal to eat less as I get older?

- A As you get older, it's natural to start eating less because you tend to become less physically active, which means your body might need less food.

You might find it difficult to eat the meals you used to eat. Try having smaller, frequent meals, with nutritious snacks in between. You should also make sure you drink plenty of liquids.

It's important to eat regularly, at least three times a day. You might not always feel like cooking, so you could eat more tinned, chilled and frozen ready-prepared meals.

It's a good idea to keep a store of foods in the freezer and cupboard in case you can't go out.

Always make sure you heat chilled and frozen food until it's piping hot all the way through.

You might be eating less because you're finding it more difficult to buy or prepare food, or because you're finding it harder to get around. You might be able to get help with these sorts of problems through your GP.



## Don't forget your teeth!

Make sure you visit your dentist regularly to keep your teeth in good condition. If you're having problems chewing, then you could try eating tinned fruit and vegetables or stewed fresh fruit. These are good sources of nutrients.

## Q Should I cut back on salt?

- A Blood pressure appears to increase with age and this could be related to the amount of salt we eat. High blood pressure increases the risk of stroke.

On average, you should aim to keep your salt intake to less than 6g per day (about 2g sodium).

Most of the salt we eat is already in foods when we buy them, and so it's important to be aware of the salt content of ready-prepared foods, which can be a major source. Also, avoid adding salt to your food when cooking and at the table.

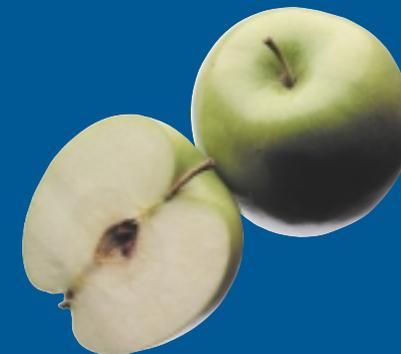
Potassium has a beneficial effect on blood pressure. Fruit and vegetables such as bananas, tomatoes and avocados are good sources of potassium.



## Q How can I find out more?

A If you have any concerns, contact your GP. Or you could call NHS Direct on 0845 4647 or visit [www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)

You can find out more about food at [www.food.gov.uk](http://www.food.gov.uk)



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