

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Growing Older Eating Wiser

We're all getting older—this may not be earth-shattering news but the reality of aging can come as a shock when energy levels begin to fade and once-trim waistlines thicken. All the more reason to re-examine your changing nutritional needs. To start "eating your age," here are a few tips to consider:

Cutting down on calories. During the 30s, the metabolism starts to slow and continues to decrease by roughly two to eight per cent every decade. Yet many people continue to eat as if they're still a growing teen. This "youthful" diet and a less active lifestyle, can literally weigh you down, adding unwanted bulk to the body and sapping energy stores.

Whether 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. 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 declines with age—by incorporating resistance training into your exercise routine two to three times a week.

Boosting nutrient-rich food intake. As the body slows down, it also becomes less effective at absorbing minerals, vitamins and antioxidants. So, while cutting back on calories, it's vital that food choices are packed with nourishing nutrients. Most fruits and vegetables are high in nutritional necessities, but relatively low in calories.

Blueberries and grapes are well known for their youth-enhancing antioxidants. Green leafy vegetables are a good source of folic acid and iron. 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 the immune system remain at peak.

Eating lots of fiber. Fiber helps in avoiding bowel problems and can help lower cholesterol, keep diabetes at bay and decrease the risk of certain cancers. Keep fiber levels high by eating green, leafy vegetables, whole grains and legumes, such as beans, nuts and soy. Try taking small steps to increase fiber: eat fruit instead of drinking juice and keep skins on when snacking on vegetables and fruit.

Avoiding high-fat and processed foods. Junk food should be limited at any age, but the impact of high-calorie, high-fat, low-nutrient foods is even more noticeable as the body matures. Aside from making you feel sluggish and helping to pile on the pounds, processed foods are high in salt and refined sugars. Odds are that that burger and fry combo is also wreaking havoc on your arteries increasing the risk of heart attack. Make fast food the exception rather than the rule and when take out is the only option, select one of the healthier items that many chain restaurants are now offering.

Gulping down more dairy. Calcium keeps bones and teeth strong and resilient. Though most women understand calcium's role in preventing osteoporosis, many men don't realize that osteoporosis-related bone fractures happen to over one quarter of males over the age of 50. Avoid osteoporosis with calcium-rich foods including low-fat dairy products, salmon and tofu. Avoid 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 weight or energy issues with a detailed, realistic dietary plan of action.

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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.