



Feed Your Body Right

A Decade-By-Decade Guide to Optimal Nutrition

By Linda Formichelli

Think your nutrition needs stay the same your whole adult life? Think again: Every decade has its own pitfalls and concerns, from weight creep to heart disease, and this changes what—and how much—you need to eat during each life stage. Check out our handy guide to figure out which foods will help boost your health no matter your age.

20s: High Energy

No couch potato you! In your 20s, you're likely in college or working in your first job after graduating, and your spare time is filled with sports, hiking, and other active pursuits. Savor the decade, because it means you can get away with downing more calories than your older brethren without piling on weight. "But just because you can eat a lot of calories doesn't mean they should be empty calories," says Keith Ayoob, Ed.D, RD, FADA, a former Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Spokesperson. "If you're going to snack on high calorie foods, go with things like nuts, dried fruit, and cheese over cookies, chips, and sodas. Yes, they're still high calorie but you get a lot more nutrition with them."



Active guys need to be sure they're getting enough protein. Choose a variety of protein foods, which include seafood, lean meat and poultry, eggs, beans and peas, soy products, and unsalted nuts and seeds. Since heart disease begins early, Dave Grotto, RD, also suggests that men in their 20s eat two to three servings of fatty fish per week to protect their ticker.

30s: Weight Doesn't Wait

This decade, you may be married and have kids, and you're probably ensconced in a 9-to-5 job, which means you're likely not out trekking in the woods or playing touch football with your buddies as much. But even though your activity slows down, your appetite doesn't, and this can lead to weight gain if you don't alter your eating habits.



Instead of eating three (or fewer) big meals per day, nosh on five or six small meals daily, says Grotto. Eating frequent meals means you won't be starving come dinnertime and scarf down all the food you can get your hands on. But see what works best for your body; some people do best with three main meals, and a snack if needed, while others do best with more frequent, but smaller meals.

40s: Fiber Fail

The 40s is when you start to see heart disease rear its head. Fiber, especially soluble fiber, which works like a sponge to soak up cholesterol, can help keep your heart healthy. "The goal for most guys is to try to work their way up to about 35 grams of fiber per day," says Grotto. "The average guy is probably getting somewhere between 12 and 15 grams."



Beans are the fiber-phile's best friend, and veggies, fruits and whole grains are also fiber-rich foods.

You're probably not getting out in the sun as much as you did in younger years, which means you could also be low on Vitamin D, which is manufactured from sunlight. But you can also get Vitamin D from some foods. Most of it in this country is obtained from fortified foods, especially fluid milk and some yogurts. Some other foods and beverages, such as breakfast cereals, margarine, orange juice, and soy beverages, also are commonly fortified with this nutrient. Natural sources of Vitamin D include some kinds of fish (such as salmon, herring, mackerel, and tuna) and egg yolks.

Adequate Vitamin D also can help reduce the risk of bone fractures. If you think you're not getting enough Vitamin D, talk to your doctor.

50s: Busting Disease

Disease control—heading off cancer, heart disease, and other diseases—becomes a major focus in your 50s. That's why noshing on antioxidants is key; these compounds bust the free radicals that react with components of the cell and that increase your risk for chronic diseases. To keep free radicals in check, Grotto recommends eating plenty of anything ending in -erry, such as blueberries, strawberries, cranberries, and raspberries. Other colorful plant foods work too.



If you have high cholesterol or if high triglycerides kick in, "In addition to exercise you may need to cut back on things like added sugar and added fat, and keep desserts to a minimum," says Ayoob. Craving something sweet? Try an ounce of heart-healthy dark chocolate. "Does it have fat in it? Yes, but most of the fat is stearic acid, which is cholesterol neutral," Ayoob says. "And the flavonols tend to increase blood flow, so that's good for you."

Men in their 50s and beyond should also consume foods fortified with Vitamin B12, such as fortified cereals.

60s and Beyond

"The 60s and 70s is where your body is really keeping score," says Ayoob, meaning that poor eating habits in earlier decades will start showing up now. The focus, like in your 50s, is disease prevention. You want to be eating the same antioxidant-rich, fiber-full foods that you did in your 40s and 50s.

Another heavy-hitter for your health arsenal? Eggs. "Eggs are high in lutein and zeaxanthin, which can help prevent age-related macular degeneration," says Ayoob. Leafy green vegetables can help as well.

In the 60s and beyond, men also start losing muscle mass, so protein is important. Replace protein foods that are higher in solid fats with choices that are lower in solid fats and calories or are sources of oils, such as fish (salmon and tuna). Also look at beans and peas. Because of their high nutrient content, they are considered both a vegetable and a protein food.

The eggs that help with macular degeneration are also a great source of high-quality protein. Eat whole eggs and yolks in moderation to keep your cholesterol intake under the recommended 300 milligrams a day. Since the fat and cholesterol in an egg is found in the egg yolks, you can use egg whites in place of the yolks.

Each life stage has its own nutritional requirements to keep your body running in peak form. Eating right at every age will help you sail through the decades feeling great.

