

Healthy eating tips for seniors

Smart food choices to keep you healthy longer

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When it comes to the food we eat, today's mature adults are much more discerning than previous generations. "Boomers are educated, well-travelled and sophisticated consumers. They know their food, their coffee, their wine," says Divakar Raju, Corporate Manager of Culinary Services for Delmanor retirement communities. "They're on their electronic devices and they understand about nutrition, quality and good food. Gone are the days when they'd be satisfied with a bland diet of meat and potatoes."

Food has a role in our emotional well-being

"Food is an important part of our lives, and eating should be a pleasurable experience. But we may not be able to eat the same in our senior years as we did when we were younger," explains Raju. Health issues must be considered, from heart disease and cholesterol to diabetes and acid reflux. "It's no longer just about what appeals to you, and today's well-informed seniors know that."

Flavourful foods with a creative touch

As people age, they may not be as responsive to taste, textures, flavours or even temperatures. "It's essential that food is easier for people to manage as they age, but taste is also important. In order to maximize flavour, we use a lot of fresh ingredients, which will generally be more flavourful. We also cook with more spices and herbs than salt, and we use less sugar."

Nutrient-rich foods for smaller portions

The older we get, the smaller the portions we need. Seniors tend to eat smaller meals and snacks more often throughout the day. "This means we have to provide all the nutrients in smaller portion sizes to not compromise on the nutritional value of the meal."

Raju suggests a few healthy eating tips and smart food choices:

1. Enjoy hearty soups as often as possible.

Good stocks and fresh, wholesome ingredients offer plenty of nourishment, and soups are comforting and easy to eat.

2. Choose fresh and local as often as possible.

From fish and eggs to meat and poultry to vegetables and fruits, focus on what is seasonally available and locally fresh and design menus around those foods.

3. Go for homemade.

Foods made from scratch are always tastier and are cooked without preservatives. They usually use less trans fat, sugar and sodium. If you do eat prepared foods, carefully look at labels.

4. Use a variety of nutrients.

When preparing meals, aim for 4 to 5 ounces of protein (such as meat, fish, eggs, legumes, cheese), 3 ounces of vegetables or fruit, 2 ounces of carbohydrates (bread, rice, pasta or potatoes, for example), and 1 ounce of sauce. This is a standard healthy mix of food groups but particularly important for this age group.

5. Don't skip dessert!

People love their sweets, and as we age, the sweet palate stays strong. Go for healthier options such as desserts with low or no sugar or smaller portions and fruit.

6. Have healthy snacks around.

Eat smaller portions and snack more often, be sure to keep a supply of grab-and-go fruit such as bananas, apples, pears, oranges and grapes, as well as dairy items like yogurts and cheese, to snack throughout the day.

7. Drink plenty of water.

It's important to drink six to eight glasses of water a day, so a good tip is to have a jug of water handy, infused with fruits for flavour.