

Senior Scene



Seniors can look to various foods to eat a more nutritious diet

The right foods and beverages fuel the body and provide the nutrients necessary to maintain health. But it's worth noting that the foods a person enjoys during much of their life may not be ideal for them as they age.

Dietary needs change as a person gets older. MedlinePlus says the best foods for older adults prioritize nutrient-dense, easy-to-chew foods that are gentle on digestion. These foods also should incorporate a balance of lean proteins to help maintain muscle mass, fiber that promotes regular digestion, and healthy fats to support the brain and heart.

Here are some foods seniors can incorporate into their daily diets that may provide that extra spring in their step, courtesy of the National Council on Aging and Healthline.

- **Dark, leafy greens:** Foods like kale and spinach are rich in carotenoids, which may protect the eyes against oxidative damage. Spinach is particularly high in vitamins A and C, which help moderate blood pressure to protect the heart. Vitamin K is another important nutrient in leafy greens that plays a role in osteoporosis prevention.

- **Lean protein:** Seniors need adequate protein to slow down or prevent the natural loss of muscle that occurs as one ages. A person can use the U.S. Department of Agriculture calculator to figure out how much protein to eat based on their age and other factors. Good sources of protein include lean meat and poultry, seafood, eggs, lentils, beans, nuts, and seeds.

- **Cruciferous vegetables:** These vegetables like cabbage, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, and turnips are great sources of fiber, vitamins, and cancer-preventing phytochemicals.

- **Whole grains:** Whole grains provide lasting energy the body needs throughout the day. Quinoa, brown rice and oatmeal are some examples of whole grains.

- **Healthy fats:** Some seniors may have grown up thinking that fats are something to avoid. However, healthy unsaturated fats are important for heart and brain health. They also are excellent for adding calorie density for those with smaller appetites. Olive oil, nuts and peanut butter are good choices for healthy fats.

- **Seeds:** A 2022 study found that the nutrients in chia seeds can help prevent cancer, GI

tract-related diseases, and cardiovascular disease. Chia seeds also may help people manage their type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol.

Seeds, including flax and hemp, also are high in inflammation-fighting omega-3 fatty acids.

- **Fruits:** Seniors should enjoy around 1.5 to 2 cups of fruits

each day. Fruits are an important source of potassium, fiber, vitamin C, folate, and vitamin A. Avocado is loaded with nourishing fats, antioxidants and other

nutrients that support health.

Dietary choices are important as people get older, and seniors should aspire to maximize the nutrients they consume.

Promising advancements in Alzheimer's disease management

Alzheimer's disease has touched the lives of millions. Tens of millions of people have Alzheimer's disease worldwide, accounting for 60 percent to 70 percent of the total number of people living with dementia globally, according to the World Health Organization. However, when including early, pre-symptomatic stages like prodromal and preclinical phases, estimates indicate 400 million people across the globe are affected by brain changes linked to Alzheimer's, says the National Institutes of Health.

Expanding medications and clinical trials

For decades, medical interventions for Alzheimer's were limited to managing symptoms. Today, the treatment landscape is undergoing a profound transformation. Therapeutic strategies now directly target the biological drivers of the disease, supported by expanded drug offerings, advises Alzheimer's Research UK.

The Alzheimer's Association says that analysis of global clinical trials points to positive results of a growing body of medications. There are now 158 novel agents currently being evaluated across 192 clinical trials. While amyloid-targeting drugs once comprised 33 percent of the clinical studies, that share has dropped to 20 percent, as therapies targeting neuroinflammation and tau protein tangles have increased.

The Alzheimer's Association also says approximately 35 percent of drugs currently in development are repurposed therapies previously approved for other conditions. This helps speed up the pathway of important medications for clinical availability.

Earlier diagnoses Disease-modifying medications show the highest efficacy when administered during early stages. That means that early detection of Alzheimer's disease is critical. The Alzheimer's Impact Movement says high-accuracy

blood tests prescribed in primary care settings can enable clinicians to screen for amyloid pathology using a simple blood draw.

Targeting genes Researchers supported by the NIH are exploring gene therapy approaches to reduce amyloid accumulation early on and quiet brain inflammation. These include delivering protective APOE-e2 gene variants.

GLP-1s, shingles vaccines and promising findings

Observational and real-world studies show that taking GLP-1 medications for type 2 diabetes or obesity is associated with a lower risk of developing Alzheimer's and cognitive decline, according to the Cleveland Clinic. Similarly, major published studies show that adults over age 65 who receive the two-dose shingles vaccine have signifi-

cantly reduced risk of Alzheimer's and vascular dementia compared to unvaccinated individuals. Both of these treatments can reduce brain inflammation associated with dementia development.

Lifestyle changes Medications and other therapies are just the tip of the iceberg. Non-pharmacological interventions also are successful at reducing Alzheimer's disease prevalence. Findings published in the Journal of the American Medical Association demonstrate that targeted exercise, dietary changes and cognitive training significantly preserves brain function. This can yield memory performance equivalent to being one or two years younger.

Alzheimer's disease research continues, and various developments in prevention and treatment are going beyond symptom management.



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