

# Your Healthy Eating Questions Answered



## Having Problems with Food?

Does your favorite chicken dish taste different? As you grow older, your sense of taste and sense of smell may change. Foods may seem to have lost flavor. Also, medicines can change how food tastes. They can also make you feel less hungry. Talk to your doctor about whether there is a different medicine you could use. Try extra spices or herbs on your foods to add flavor.

As you get older, you might not be able to eat all the foods you used to eat. For example, some people become *lactose intolerant*. They have symptoms like stomach pain, gas, or diarrhea after eating or drinking something with milk in it, like ice cream. Most can eat small amounts of such food or can try yogurt, buttermilk, or hard cheese. Lactose-free foods are available now also. Your doctor can test to see if you are lactose intolerant.

Is it harder to chew? Maybe your dentures need to fit better, or your gums are sore. If so, a dentist can help you. Until then, you might want to eat softer foods that are easier to chew.

## Do I Need to Drink Water?

With age, you may lose some of your sense of thirst. Drink plenty of liquids like water, juice, milk, and soup. Don't wait until you feel thirsty. Try to drink several large glasses of water each day. Your urine should be pale yellow. If it is a bright or dark yellow, you need to drink more liquids.

Be sure to talk with your doctor if you have trouble controlling your urine. Don't stop drinking liquids. There are better ways to help bladder control problems.

## What about Fiber?

Fiber is found in foods from plants—fruits, vegetables, beans, nuts, seeds, and whole grains. Eating more fiber might prevent stomach or intestine problems, like constipation. It might also help lower cholesterol, as well as blood sugar.

It is better to get fiber from food than dietary supplements. Start adding more fiber slowly. That will help avoid unwanted gas. Here are some tips for adding fiber:

- Eat cooked dry beans, peas, and lentils often.
- Leave skins on your fruit and vegetables if possible.
- Choose whole fruit over fruit juice.
- Eat whole-grain breads and cereals.

Drink plenty of liquids to help fiber move through your intestines.

## Should I Cut Back on Salt?

The usual way people get sodium is by eating salt. The body needs sodium, but too much can make blood pressure go up in some people. Most fresh food contains some sodium. Salt is added to many canned and prepared foods.

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People tend to eat more salt than they need. If you are over age 50, about 2/3 of a teaspoon of table salt—1500 milligrams (mg) of sodium—is all you need each day. That includes all the sodium in your food and drink, not just the salt you add when cooking or eating. If your doctor tells you to use less salt, ask about a salt substitute. Some contain sodium. Also, don't add salt during cooking or at the table, and avoid salty snacks and processed foods. Look for the word sodium, not salt, on the Nutrition Facts panel. Choose foods labeled "low-sodium." Often, the amount of sodium in the same kind of food can vary greatly between brands.

**Here's a tip:** Spices, herbs, and lemon juice can add flavor to your food, so you won't miss the salt.

## What about Fat?

Fat in your diet comes from two places—the fat already found in food and the fat added when you cook. Fat gives you energy and helps your body use certain vitamins, but it is high in calories. To lower the fat in your diet:

- Choose cuts of meat, fish, or poultry (with the skin removed) with less fat.
- Trim off any extra fat before cooking.
- Use low-fat dairy products and salad dressings.
- Use non-stick pots and pans, and cook without added fat.
- Choose an unsaturated or monosaturated vegetable oil (check the label) or a nonfat cooking spray.
- Instead of frying, broil, roast, bake, stir-fry, steam, microwave, or boil foods.

## Should I worry about food safety?

Older people must take extra care to keep their food safe to eat. As you get older, you are less able to fight off infections, and some foods could make you very sick. Be sure to fully cook eggs, pork, fish, shellfish, poultry, and hot dogs. Talk to your doctor or a registered dietitian, a nutrition specialist, about foods to avoid. These might include raw sprouts, some deli meats, and foods that are not *pasteurized* (heated to destroy disease-causing organisms), like some milk products and juices in the refrigerated section of the grocery.

Before cooking, handle raw food with care. Keep it apart from foods that are already cooked or won't be cooked, like salad, fruit, or bread. Be careful with tools—your knife, plate, or cutting board, for example. Don't cut raw meat with the same knife you will use to make a salad. Rinse raw fruits and vegetables before eating. Use hot soapy water to wash your hands, tools, and work surfaces as you cook.

As you get older, you can't depend on sniffing or tasting food to tell if it has gone bad. Try putting dates on foods in your refrigerator. Check the "use by" date on foods. If in doubt, toss it out.

**Here's a tip:** Make sure food gets into the refrigerator no more than 2 hours after it is cooked—whether you made it yourself or brought it home from a restaurant.

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