

Alberta Healthy Living Program (Diversity, Mandarin, and Cantonese)

- ✓ **Project: Tentative pre-recorded interview in Mandarin with the host at Fairchild Radio, FM 947**
- ✓ **Total airtime: 20 minutes**
- ✓ **Pre-recording date: 2025 July**
- ✓ **Broadcasting month: August and September 2025**
- ✓ **Suggested topic: Aging Well While Staying Strong!**

Introduction:

As people age, they naturally experience a decline in muscle mass and strength. Eating well, especially when combined with physical activity can help you feel stay strong, healthy and independent - it is never too late to start!

As you age, your nutrient needs will change, your calorie (energy) needs decrease, so you will need to eat smaller portions of food to stay at a healthy weight.

Even if you eat a wide variety of healthy foods, as you get older some vitamins and minerals become harder for the body to absorb, or you may need a different amount of calcium, iron and vitamin B12 than when you were younger.

What common changes can I expect as I get older?

As you get older, you may notice changes like:

- Slowly losing muscle mass and function. This happens naturally, as early as in your 40s. You might also notice changes in your weight. Being physically active, eating nutritious foods and getting enough protein can help
- Having a smaller appetite. Not being able to eat as much makes it even more important to make snacks and mealtimes nutritious and enjoyable
- Not feeling thirsty as often. Try to get into the habit of drinking fluids regularly so you stay hydrated, even if you do not feel thirsty
- Being constipated more often. Fluids, physical activity and fibre can help.

What nutrients are important as I get older?

- **Protein:** helps maintain muscle mass and supports recovery from illness and injury. As you get older, it may become harder to meet your protein needs.

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- Calcium and vitamin D: The need for both calcium and vitamin D increases after age 50. Vitamin D helps your body absorb and use calcium for healthy bones, teeth and muscles.
- Fibre: helps keep you regular. It also may help lower your cholesterol and blood glucose levels. Add more fibre to your diet gradually to avoid gas and bloating. As you slowly increase your fibre intake, drink plenty of fluids. They work together to help with constipation.
- Healthy fats: provides energy, helps absorb nutrients, and is important for brain and nerve function.
- Water: Drinking fluids throughout the day is very important. Sometimes older adults may not drink enough or may not notice thirst.
Dehydration can lead to dizziness, fainting and low blood pressure. These may put you at higher risk for falling. Having enough fluid can help with regularity. Fluids also move nutrients through the body and cushion your joints and organs.
If your urine is light yellow or clear, it usually means that you're getting enough to drink. If your urine is dark yellow and has a strong smell, you likely need more fluids.

Are your clothes fitting loose? Are you losing weight?

It is natural for your weight to change from day to day. However, sometimes older adults lose weight quickly and without trying. Fast weight loss is not healthy. When you lose weight quickly you can lose muscle and this can affect your health.

In Canada, the latest statistic, shows that 1 in 3 older adults (individuals above 65 years old) living in the community are at nutrition risk. Older adults, who may have difficulties eating, a decreased in appetite, limited ability to cook or prepare food or access to nutritious foods. People with chronic health conditions such as cancer, diabetes who have higher nutritional needs.

If you have lost weight, especially without trying, speak with your family doctor.

Here are some practical tips to help stop unwanted weight loss:

- Eat smaller amounts of food more often, it may be helpful to set an alarm on your smartphone or clock as a reminder to eat, every 2 to 3 hours.
- You may find it easier to think of eating as medication or supplements. Eat at the same time each day as you would take medication or supplements.
- Eat more food when your appetite is best.
- Drink between meals or at the end of your meal. This will leave more room (space) in your stomach for food.
- Have a snack before bed at night. Try a yogurt or a glass of milk/ soy beverage.

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- Use oral nutrition supplement drinks as a snack.
- Avoid smoking, it lowers appetite and limits taste.

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Better choices, better health (BCBH) for chronic disease management and BCBH-chronic pain that are offered in Cantonese, and they can register for this 6-week program (one 2.5-hour session per week) by calling one toll-free: 1-844-527-1160. These services have no charge and are covered by Alberta Health. You do not need a referral from a health care provider - you can just call to book an appointment.

How do we screen malnutrition?

There are simple and easy to use tools that can be used by your Primary Health Care providers such as physicians, pharmacists, dietitians and other clinicians, to identify individuals that are at nutrition risk.

SCREEN 8 (8 questions, quick identification of nutrition risk and can help providers identify who needs resources or a referral to a dietitian). It only takes 5 to 10 minutes and helps to identify nutrition problems early on with the individual.

- Weight changed in the past 6 months?
- Do you skip meals?
- How would you describe your appetite?
- Do you cough, choke, or have pain when swallowing fluids?
- How many pieces or servings of *vegetables* and fruits do you eat in a day?
- How many cups of fluid do you drink in a day?
- Do you eat one or more meals a day with someone?
- How are your meals being prepared (self / others)?

Additionally, we would recommend following up with two other questions:

- financial hardship.
- Food access such as ability to get groceries.

What about protein? I heard from my friends that protein helps build muscle and this is especially important for seniors.

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Protein helps build and maintain muscle tissue and keep the immune system healthy. As you get older, it may be harder to meet your protein needs. Each individual needs can vary based on factors like activity level, age, and health conditions.

Examples of protein foods include meat, chicken, fish, shellfish, eggs, milk, yogurt, legumes (such as beans, lentils), peas, tofu, nuts and seeds are excellent sources of protein, iron and B-vitamins.

1 serving size of protein includes:

- 75 grams (2.5 oz) cooked meat, about the size of our palm.
- 175 grams (3/4 cup) tofu, cooked beans
- 2 large eggs
- 1/4 cup nuts and seeds

If you find it hard to get enough protein from food, an oral nutrition supplement such as protein powder or drink may be helpful. Protein powders are dairy, or plant based. If you choose to add protein powders into your diet, choose a simple protein powder with no extra ingredients such as artificial sweeteners, vitamins, minerals or herbal products. The amount of protein may vary between each product. It is important to read food labels of the product.

What eating patterns can support my health as I get older?

Food is medicine. Eating enough and well can keep our strength up. When our bodies do not receive enough nutrients from our food, our body systems do not function properly.

There is no one-size-fits-all eating pattern for healthy aging. Many styles of eating can support your health. The most common healthy eating patterns include Canada's food guide and the Mediterranean style of eating.

In general, aim to:

- Fill 50% of your plate with colourful vegetables and fruits.
- Include protein food from animals and plants sources, at most meals and snacks.
- Include whole grains and healthy fats in your meals and snacks
- Drink fluids throughout the day, aim 6 to 8 cups (1500 to 2000ml) each day. Do not wait to feel thirsty!

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Most older adults do not eat enough vegetables and fruit. Try these tips to help you eat more:

- Top your breakfast oatmeal or yogurt with fresh, dried or frozen fruit
- Add frozen or canned vegetables to your soups, meats, eggs or noodles.
- Add slices of avocado on your bread.
- Have a plate/ bowl of washed fruit on your dining table at home for an easy to grab snack.

Are there any nutrients that I need to limit?

Limiting sodium, sugar, saturated fat and alcohol can help manage or lower the risk of chronic conditions such as high blood pressure, heart disease and type 2 diabetes.

- Sodium: You need some sodium to be healthy, but too much can increase the risk of heart disease and high blood pressure.
- Sugar: Having too many sugary foods and drinks can fill you up and take the place of more nutritious foods. It can also lead to dental issues like gum disease which can make it hard to eat and enjoy food.
- Saturated fat: When it comes to fat, the type of fat eaten over time is more important for health than the total amount eaten.
- Alcohol: According to Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health, no amount or kind of alcohol is good for you. Alcohol increases the risk of falls, injuries and many chronic diseases, including heart disease, cancer and gastrointestinal diseases.
- Even at low levels, alcohol can impair your brain function, balance, reaction time and judgment, and have long-term effects. Aging slows down the body's ability to break down alcohol, making it more likely to cause harm.
- If you drink alcohol, consider limiting to one to 2 drinks per week as a lower risk option. Or consider not drinking for benefits like better overall health and better sleep.

Should I take vitamin and mineral supplements to make sure that I am getting what I need when I am not eating right?

It is not necessary except for vitamin D supplement. Alberta Health Services recommends a daily supplement of 1000 IU of Vitamin D for both men and women over the age of 50.

In short, you can get most nutrients you need by following the recommendations in Canada's Food Guide.

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Vitamin and mineral supplements do not provide the benefits of food such as fibre, carbohydrate, fat, protein and calories. However, low-dose multi-vitamins can help if your daily calorie intake is low. If you do use a multi-vitamin, pick one that is specially made for people aged 50+ (it will say on the package).

If you're concerned about whether you are getting enough nutrients, please speak to your dietitian or health care provider. Many times, taking more supplements do not mean it is good for our health.

With changes in food prices and trying to save some money on food can sometimes leave us to feel like we have to compromised on nutrition. **Eating healthy does not have to cost more. Some of the tips to eat healthy on a budget:**

- (1) Look for senior discount days and shops flyers to compare prices between similar food items and brands. Some grocery stores (Save-On-Foods, Real Canadian Superstore, No Frills) price match items.
- (2) Go shopping with family and friends and split large packages.
- (3) Make a list and take stock of items you already have in your pantry, fridge or freezer before you shop. With the list for groceries that you need to purchase and stick to the list when you are at the grocery store.
- (4) Finally buy foods that are in-season, frozen vegetables and fruits and canned low-sodium/ low-sugar vegetables and fruits.

If you are experiencing challenges travelling to and from the grocery store, there are some helpful tips to access healthy foods with and without transportation:

- (1) Check if a community program offers rides to grocery store
- (2) Order your grocery by phone or online for home delivery
- (3) Ask a family member or friend who drives if you can go together to grocery store
- (4) Split the cost of taxi or ride share program with a friend

What else can I do to support healthy aging?

- Be active every day: Regular physical activity can help maintain independence in older adults. It can also lower the risk of falls, fall-related injuries, and age-related conditions such as heart disease and dementia.
- Ask for help when you need it: Aging comes with many changes. These changes can make things challenging. You may have a hard time:
 - Accessing groceries or preparing food.
 - Eating food. For example, you may have a smaller appetite, trouble chewing or find that foods taste different.
 - Scheduling medications and remembering which medications interact with food.

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- Maintaining your weight.
- Finding opportunities to connect with others. Part of eating well is about making mealtimes enjoyable. Eating with others can help.

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