

# Nutrition for the golden years

IN CONSULTATION WITH  
SERENE TAY, PRINCIPAL DIETITIAN

Age brings about many changes, including dietary needs. Find out how to overcome the challenge and meet evolving nutritional demands to stay strong, sharp and energised

By Louisa Foo



As we age, changes in our bodies and activity level mean nutritional needs change as well. In fact, caloric needs decrease with age and by 80, we require about 20 per cent fewer calories than we do when we are 30.

According to Serene Tay, Principal Dietitian, JurongHealth, many age-related factors affect changes in nutritional intake. These include a less active lifestyle, poorer digestion, lower levels of sensory perception (taste, smell and sight), dental issues, discomfort due to dentures and swallowing problems. "These factors mean seniors are not able to take in the recommended serving sizes and thus fail to meet daily requirements of calorie, protein, fibre, vitamins and minerals," she explained. Seniors are also at higher risk for dehydration because their thirst sensation is less acute.

Despite lower appetite and calorie-needs, proper nutrition in the senior years is essential to keep the body healthy and the mind alert to provide sufficient energy to go about the day. Ms Tay said this means **seniors should opt for nutrient-dense foods to ensure they get an adequate amount of essential nutrients even with smaller meals.**



## The essential shopping list for a healthy diet for seniors:



**Fish** Ensuring an adequate intake of good quality low-fat protein is important especially in seniors to address muscle loss and aid healing. Fish is an easy to digest protein and an excellent source of nutrition. Have two servings of fish a week and where possible, choose oily fish such as salmon, cod, tuna or sardines. Tinned sardines and salmon are good options as these have edible bones that provide a calcium boost.



**Meat** Avoid red and fatty meats as these are high in heart-clogging saturated fats. Instead, choose skinless chicken, lean red meats and lean cuts of pork. Eat meat sparingly and be mindful that a palm-sized cut of meat offers a single serving.



### Dairy and calcium-rich foods

As we age, it is important to ensure that we take in enough calcium to prevent osteoporosis or brittle bone disease. Low-fat dairy products such as milk, cheese and yoghurt are all good sources of calcium and vitamin D. Tofu and soya bean milk are also excellent choices for the lactose intolerant.



**Wholemeal carbohydrates** Always opt for wholemeal varieties of rice, noodles, bread or crackers as they provide a good source of energy-giving B vitamins and dietary fibre. A diet high in fibre doesn't just promote healthy bowel function, but also offers protection against cardiovascular disease.



**Fresh fruit and vegetables** Vitamins from whole foods is best and most easily absorbed – and nothing beats the vitamin- and antioxidant-packed goodness of fresh fruit and vegetables. Pick a colourful and varied 'bouquet' of fruit and vegetables each day as bright colours signal high antioxidant content and add a beautiful vibrancy to your meals.

## Eating tips

1. Instead of three big meals, opt for five or six smaller meals throughout the day
2. If chewing is a problem, have soups, stews and porridge with finely-chopped meat and vegetables
3. Enhance flavours with spices and herbs instead of salt and sugar
4. Boost nutrition by adding ikan bilis to oat porridge, mashed sardines to sandwiches, and tofu to soups and stir-fries. Add additional milk or soy milk powder to hot beverages
5. Opt for snacks of steamed wholemeal bao, soft fruit (a banana or slice of papaya) and low-fat milk

### Recommended daily servings

For those over 51 years of age, the Health Promotion Board recommends:

**4–6** servings  
wholemeal starches (brown rice,  
wholemeal bread or noodles/pasta)

**2 + 2** servings  
fruit & vegetables

**2** servings  
lean protein  
(fish, meat, eggs,  
seafood)

**1** serving  
calcium-  
rich  
foods