

Nutrition

Healthy diet and weight

Maintaining a healthy weight is important for helping older people stay active and manage any health problems. The best way to do this is to eat a variety of fresh food and avoid extra helpings. Additionally, exercise is critically important in building muscle mass and maintaining functional strength.



Malnutrition and frailty can increase your risk of falling

Malnutrition has been shown to increase fall risk. Older people who are malnourished or considered to be at nutritional risk are more likely to be frail. Frailty has also been shown to increase your risk of falling. Furthermore, frail older people are more often overweight or underweight in comparison to non-frail older people. Nutritional interventions aimed at weight gain in underweight older people can reduce frailty and improve walking speed. Therefore, these changes might also reduce your risk of falling, but more research is needed.

Did you know?

Dehydration can lead to confusion, dizziness, weakness and constipation. It is important to drink water regularly throughout the day.

Tips for maintaining a healthy diet and weight:

1. Drink more water
2. Limit alcohol intake
3. Eat healthy, nutritious foods and a balanced diet
4. Eat healthy snacks
5. Swap big serves for smaller ones
6. Use less salt
7. Limit foods high in saturated and trans fats e.g. fried food, pastries
8. Do not skip breakfast and eat regularly throughout the day
9. Move more, sit less
10. Be active for 30 minutes most days of the week

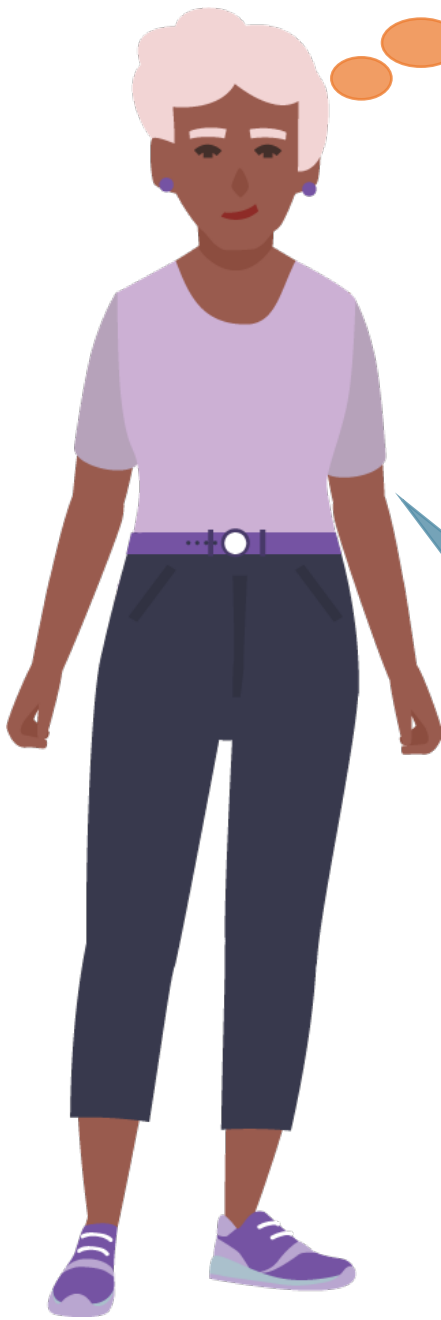
Vitamin D and calcium

It is important to eat a balanced diet with adequate calcium and if you don't spend much time outdoors, vitamin D (please note: it is difficult to get enough vitamin D from diet alone, most people rely on sun exposure and if deficient supplements). Vitamin D and calcium are important for bone health, deficiencies in either can increase your risk of developing osteoporosis. Osteoporosis is when you lose bone density which causes the bone to be weaker increasing your fracture risk.

Are you in the healthy weight range?

- Your Body Mass Index (BMI) can be calculated here:
Calculator: <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/health/Pages/bmi.aspx>
- Remember, the BMI is only a surrogate measure of body fat using body weight. Other factors can influence body weight too e.g. muscle and bone.
- If your BMI falls into the overweight, obese or underweight range, or if you are concerned about your body composition or weight, talk to your doctor or dietician

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Key points to remember:

- Malnutrition can increase your risk of falls
- Frailty is also a risk factor for falls and is influenced by nutrition
- Good nutrition is important to assist in managing your risk of frailty and falls
- Calcium and Vitamin D are important for your bone health: see our Bone Health fact sheet
- Make sure you get enough calcium in your diet
- Drink plenty of water to prevent dehydration (unless you have been told to restrict your fluid intake)
- Exercise is also important for your bone health, as well as maintaining muscle mass and strength

What can I do right now?

- Aim to eat a well-balanced diet with good nutritional value and drink plenty of water (unless you have been told by your doctor to restrict your fluid intake)
- Aim to maintain your BMI within the healthy range
- If your BMI is not within the healthy range or you are concerned about your weight, nutritional intake or body composition, talk to your doctor or dietician
- If you are underweight, try to gain weight by eating healthy and nutritious foods – focus on good sources of protein, grains, and healthy fats
- A dietitian may be able to help you build meals and snacks to help you gain or lose weight

Tips:

For more information about your nutrition talk to your doctor or health professional. You could also visit:

<http://www.nutritionaustralia.org/national/resource/nutrition-and-older-adults>

<https://www.eatforhealth.gov.au/eating-well/healthy-eating-throughout-all-life/healthy-eating-when-you%E2%80%99re-older>

<https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/healthy-eating-over-60>

Disclaimer: This fact sheet provides general information only. For specific advice about your healthcare needs and how to prevent falls, you should seek advice from your health professional. This information was current at the time of development and is generalisable for people >60 years. The associations between nutrition and frailty and falls may not be causal. We have presented the best evidence at this point in time.