

Chapter 5

EATING RIGHT WITH A CHRONIC ILLNESS

What should I eat if I have (or want to avoid) ...

Heart disease, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, diabetes, osteoporosis, cancer, gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), gum disease, eye problems.

What should I eat if I have ...

Arthritis, Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, trouble swallowing.





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Following Canada's Food Guide (Appendix B) is a solid basis for eating well, no matter what your age or health.

But sometimes a chronic illness requires special attention. Today, health experts agree that even small changes to what you eat can make a tremendous difference to your overall health.

This chapter provides general guidelines for eating right with the chronic illnesses that are most common among seniors in Canada. For more detailed information about healthy eating with these illnesses, or with an illness not covered here, please talk to your doctor and a dietitian. (Try Dial-A-Dietitian. See the back cover for contact information.) Because some prescription drugs can cause you to lose important nutrients, also ask your doctor, pharmacist or a dietitian about whether you need to add any extra foods to your diet.

What should I eat if I have (or want to avoid) heart disease?

Heart disease is currently Canada's number one killer.

Statistics Canada reports that a shocking 80 percent of Canadians between the ages of 20 and 59 have at least one major risk factor for heart disease. Eleven percent have three or more major risk factors. These risk factors include high blood pressure, high cholesterol, obesity, Type 2 diabetes and smoking. Research is also pointing to an association between periodontal (gum) disease and heart disease.

Drugs and surgery alone won't solve the problem. If you already have heart disease or you want to avoid it in the future, it is very important that you eat healthy foods and stay physically active, so that you maintain a healthy weight (see Appendix C to find out if your weight is healthy). You must also keep your gums and teeth healthy, and of course give up smoking.

You do not, however, have to give up all the foods you love. Instead, aim for variety and moderation – a little bit of pretty much everything – and, for a healthier heart:

Limit saturated and trans fats

Your body needs some fat, but there is a big difference between “healthy” fats and “unhealthy” fats.

Saturated and trans fats are unhealthy fats. They can be particularly risky for anyone with heart disease or at danger of heart disease because they may raise cholesterol levels.

Saturated fats are mostly found in food that comes from animals, such as fatty red meat and whole milk. Trans fats come mostly from vegetable oils that have been made solid through a process called hydrogenation, such as hard margarine. (Choose soft-tub margarines that say “non-hydrogenated” on the label.) Trans fats are also found in many commercial baked goods, crackers and snacks. (Choose products that are labeled “trans-fat free.”)

Healthy fats are monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats. They are found in a variety of foods, including oily or fatty fish, canola and soybean oil, ground flaxseed and nuts. Healthy fats can actually reduce your cholesterol levels and your risk for heart disease and stroke. Remember, however, that all fats – even the healthy ones – are high in calories.

(See Chapter 3 for more about healthy and unhealthy fats and tips on how you can reduce the amount of unhealthy fat you eat. Also see Chapter 8 for tips on how you can lower the fat in your recipes and Chapter 11 for easy and tasty low-fat recipes.)

For more information

The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada is a good source of information about diet and its connection to heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure and high cholesterol.

Call 1 888 473-4636 or visit www.heartandstroke.ca.

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Innocently ignorant



“I was innocently ignorant,” says James Ludvigson of Penticton, B.C. “I thought I was eating well when I chose the Cheezies over the fries.”

But it turns out that James was not eating as well as he thought. On Feb. 19, 2003, when he was just 59 years old, he suffered a heart attack that landed him in hospital for eight days.

“They told me my cholesterol was through the roof,” he says. “I was eating my vegetables and fruit, but then way too much junk on top. And I realized that I had to decide. Do I want to die now or in a year or two, or do I want to watch my grandchildren grow up and continue to contribute to my community? I guess I’m a little bit greedy and I decided I wanted to stay around for a lot longer.”

Today, with a truly healthy diet (no more Cheezies) and exercise, James has more energy than ever. He gets up at seven or eight in the morning and stays mentally and physically alert to 11 at night. “I used to get bogged down. Now I feel healthy, even robust.”

Increase your fibre

Eating high-fibre foods can help lower blood cholesterol levels and control blood sugar levels. It may also help with weight control by making you feel full for longer.

Good sources of fibre include:

- whole grain breads, and pastas and cereals

- brown rice, and
- vegetables and fruit.

(See Chapter 3 for more about fibre.)

Limit your sodium (salt)

Sodium (salt) can raise blood pressure. Limit your intake of sodium to no more than 2300 mgs (or about one teaspoon of salt) per day from all your food. Use even less if you also have high blood pressure, kidney disease, osteoporosis or diabetes. (See Chapter 3, What about salt?, for tips on reducing salt.)

Limit your sugar

Sugars are carbohydrates that can affect your blood sugar levels, your weight and the fats (triglycerides) found in your blood. You should limit the amount of sugar you eat to about six to 10 teaspoons (or about 30 to 50 grams) per day, and even less if you have high triglycerides or diabetes. (See What to eat if I have (or want to avoid) diabetes? in this chapter for more about sugar.)

Limit your caffeine and alcohol

A moderate amount of caffeine appears to be fine, even for people with heart disease or high blood pressure. Moderate means about three 8-ounce cups of coffee (400 to 450 mgs) a day. Tea contains much less caffeine than coffee.

Alcohol can make some heart conditions worse because it increases your blood pressure. In addition, alcohol and most heart medications don't mix and can be very dangerous. If you do choose to drink, you should have a maximum of one drink a day, which means:

- one 12-ounce (354 mL) bottle of beer
- one five-ounce (147 mL) glass of wine, or
- one-and-a-half ounces (44 mL) of hard liquor.

Watch out!

If your triglyceride levels are high, talk to your doctor about how much alcohol is safe for you to drink. High triglyceride levels may be associated with a higher risk for heart disease and stroke.



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What should I eat if I have (or want to avoid) high cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a natural waxy substance found in many foods, especially meats, poultry, seafood and dairy products. Inside your bloodstream, you have carriers – called lipoproteins – that transport cholesterol around your body.

High-density lipoprotein (HDL) is “good” cholesterol. HDL carries cholesterol from your tissues to the liver. Low-density lipoprotein (LDL) carries cholesterol from the liver to other tissues. It is called “bad” cholesterol because high levels of LDL can increase the risk of heart disease and stroke.

If you have high LDL cholesterol, or want to avoid getting it, you need to stop smoking, maintain a healthy weight, stay physically active, and:

Decrease saturated fats

To reduce your cholesterol, reduce all fats, but especially avoid saturated and trans fats. Saturated fat increases your LDL (or “bad”) cholesterol level more than anything else.

Limit your intake of whole eggs to no more than four per week – 2 per week if you have high cholesterol, and reduce or cut out organ meats, such as liver and kidneys.

Increase fibre

The fibre found in legumes, whole grains, vegetables and fruit can “trap” the cholesterol in your blood and eliminate it from your body.

A Healthy Plate

For a heart-healthy, low cholesterol meal (perfect for anyone with diabetes, too), cook with little or no fat and fill your plate with:

- one half colourful vegetables
- one quarter whole grain products, such as whole wheat pasta or brown rice, or a starch (potatoes or corn), and
- one quarter meat, poultry, fish, tofu or legumes.

Complete your meal with a piece of fruit or low-fat yogurt.





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Increase Omega 3 fatty acids

Omega 3 fatty acids can help lower triglycerides. Good sources of omega 3 fatty acids include:

- oily or fatty fish, such as salmon, anchovies and herring
- walnuts and ground flaxseeds
- canola and soybean oil, and
- foods fortified with omega 3, such as eggs, yogurt and soy beverages.

Eat more nuts

Nuts are a great source of healthy fats as well as vitamins and minerals. Try to eat about one quarter of a cup (60 mL) of unroasted, unsalted pecans, peanuts, walnuts or almonds five or more days a week.

Increase phytosterols

Phytosterols are natural plant substances that can help reduce LDL cholesterol. Phytosterols can be found in:

- vegetable oils*
- tofu and soy products (including tempeh, soy beverages, veggie burgers and veggie dogs)
- legumes (such as dried peas, beans and lentils)
- sunflower and sesame seeds*, and
- most vegetables and fruit.

* While vegetable oils and seeds can lower your LDL, they are also high in fat, so eat in small amounts.

Avoid alcohol

If your triglyceride levels are high, talk to your doctor about how much alcohol is safe for you to drink.

What should I eat if I have (or want to avoid) high blood pressure?

Blood pressure is the force that pushes your blood to all parts of your body, including your brain, hands, feet, kidneys and liver.

Two numbers show blood pressure. If your blood pressure is 125 over 80, for example, the higher number (125) is the pressure when your heart beats. It is called the systolic pressure. The lower number (80) is the pressure when your heart relaxes between beats. It is called the diastolic pressure.

- You have normal blood pressure if the higher number is below 130 and the lower number is below 85.
- Your blood pressure is high normal if it is between 130 over 85 and 139 over 89. You should see your doctor every year to have it re-checked.
- You have high blood pressure (also called hypertension) if it is 140 over 90 or higher.

Many people with high blood pressure can bring their blood pressure down by changing their eating and drinking habits and by adding more physical activity, while others require medication.

However, medication alone is not enough. Even if you are placed on blood pressure pills, you must still eat a healthy diet.

Watch out!

Seniors with high blood pressure are more likely to have a heart attack or a stroke. They are also more likely to develop chronic kidney disease, where the kidneys gradually become less able to filter out wastes and excess fluids.

But many people with high blood pressure don't even know they have it. There are no symptoms.

Make sure you check your blood pressure regularly. See your doctor or visit your local pharmacy – most have self-check machines.



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If you know you have high blood pressure or you want to prevent it, follow the advice provided earlier in this chapter for people with heart disease, especially the advice about following Canada's Food Guide, and:

- stay physically active
- maintain a healthy weight
- do not smoke, and
- limit alcohol.

In addition, you should:

Cut back on salt

For people with high blood pressure, medical experts recommend 1500 to 2300 mgs of sodium per day – or about one teaspoon of salt – from all your foods. (See Chapter 3, What about salt?, for a chart of the sodium content in common foods and tips for reducing salt.)

Avoid grapefruit, grapefruit juice, pomelos and Seville oranges

If you are taking medication for high blood pressure, these fruits can affect how your body absorbs the drug and how effective it is. You should avoid them completely.

What should I eat if I have (or want to avoid) diabetes?

Nearly two million Canadians are living with diabetes right now, and an additional 2.5 million could be at risk of developing it.

Diabetes occurs when the body is not able to make or use insulin properly. Insulin is a hormone made by the pancreas that your body needs to control the amount of sugar (also called glucose) in your blood. With Type 2 diabetes, the most common form of diabetes for seniors, the pancreas produces

insulin but the body is unable to use it. In Type 1 diabetes, the pancreas makes little or no insulin.

If your blood sugar is too high over a long period – which means you have diabetes – you are two to four times more likely to develop heart disease. You are also more likely to go blind, develop kidney disease, lose an arm or leg or suffer from erectile dysfunction (impotence). Diabetes also increases your risk of developing periodontal (gum) disease, which can make controlling your blood sugar levels even more difficult.

Are you at risk of Type 2 diabetes?

The risk of developing diabetes increases over age 40. Talk to your doctor about diabetes if you:

- are overweight, particularly if you carry most of the weight around your middle (you're an apple shape)
- are not physically active
- are of Aboriginal, Hispanic, Asian or African descent
- have a parent, brother or sister with diabetes
- had gestational diabetes or gave birth to a baby that weighed more than nine pounds, or
- have high cholesterol, high blood pressure or heart disease.

Remember that, even with these risk factors, studies show that you can reduce your risk for developing diabetes by one half simply by being active two-and-a-half hours a week and losing five to 10 percent of your total body weight. That's just 10 to 20 pounds if you currently weigh 200 pounds.

Remember, too, that many people with diabetes have no symptoms. It's very important that you have your blood sugar levels checked by a doctor once every year.



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To help prevent diabetes follow Canada's Food Guide and be physically active.

While there is no cure for diabetes once you have it, the harmful effects can be prevented or delayed by:

- seeing a registered dietitian and following her/his eating advice which is specifically designed for you
- following the advice provided earlier in this chapter for people with heart disease and high cholesterol
- avoiding saturated and trans fats
- eating more fibre to help control blood sugar levels
- staying physically active
- keeping your gums healthy, and
- taking all medication as prescribed by your doctor.

To help your body control blood sugar levels even more:

Eat regularly

Eat three meals a day at regular times and space each meal between four and six hours apart.

Have a healthy snack of raw vegetables or a piece of fruit between meals if you need one. (Talk to your dietitian about the best snack choices for you.)

How are you feeling?

Early diagnosis of diabetes is critical. See your doctor immediately if you:

- are suddenly very thirsty
- are urinating more frequently
- feel extremely tired
- lose weight for no reason
- feel a tingling or numbness in your hands or feet
- notice your vision is blurred
- find that cuts or bruises are slow to heal

Choose healthy carbohydrates

Foods that contain carbohydrates turn to sugar in your blood. These include rice, pasta, breads, flat breads like roti and pita, cereals, starchy vegetables (potatoes and corn), fruits and milk, as well as white or brown sugar, honey, molasses and syrups.

You need some of these foods as a source of energy, but they can also be high in calories.

Try to choose the carbohydrates that give you the most nutrition, such as whole grain breads and cereals, vegetables and fruit, and low-fat dairy products.

Limit or avoid refined starches and concentrated sweets, such as pop, candy and icing. And choose packaged foods with the smallest amount of added sugar (you must read the labels!). Sugar can be found under many words on labels. Words that end in “ose” are sugars, including sucrose, glucose and fructose.

Choose healthy sugar replacements

Manufacturers use sugar alcohols to sweeten foods labeled “sugar free” or “no sugar added.” Sugar alcohols may be found in cough and cold syrups and other medications, such as antacids.

Some artificial sweeteners increase blood glucose levels. Sweeteners that do not increase blood glucose levels – if taken in moderation – include aspartame, saccharin, sucralose and cyclamate.

Talk to your dietitian about how to fit sugars and sweeteners into your daily diet.

For more information

The Canadian Diabetes Association has lots of good information on nutrition and diabetes.

Call: 1 800 226-8464 or visit: www.diabetes.ca.

Your local diabetes education centre will also be able to answer all your questions. Ask your doctor to refer you to the closest centre.



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Drink water instead of fruit juice

Even unsweetened fruit juices will raise your blood glucose. Limit fruit juice to a half cup (125 mL) at a time. Stick with water the rest of the time. (If you don't like plain water, try it with a lemon wedge.)

Talk to your doctor or dietitian about alcohol

Alcohol can affect blood glucose levels. It can also raise triglycerides (essentially, the fat in your blood) and add calories.

Ask your doctor or dietitian about whether you should drink alcohol and how much is safe for you.

If you do drink, limit the sugar content by choosing light beer, dry wine and mixed drinks served with diet pop or soda water.

What should I eat if I have (or want to avoid) cancer?

Healthy eating, regular physical activity and maintaining a healthy body weight can reduce the risk of some cancers by as much as 30 to 40 percent.

Obesity alone has been proven to increase the risk of five different types of cancer: cancer of the breast, uterus, colon, kidney and esophagus.

The latest research into the connection between nutrition and cancer reveals that fruit and vegetables are the foods most likely to help reduce the risk of cancer.

For more information

The Canadian Cancer Society publishes an easy-to-read booklet called *Good Nutrition: A guide for people with cancer*. They also offer *Eat Well, Be Active*, a guide to preventing cancer through healthy eating and regular physical activity. Call 1 888 993-3333 or visit www.cancer.ca.

To reduce your risk of cancer:

- Eat at least seven servings of fruit and vegetables a day, as recommended by Canada's Food Guide. In addition to being good, healthy food, vegetables and fruit will give you lots of antioxidants and phytochemicals.

Antioxidants – such as vitamins C and E – may help to prevent some cancers by blocking some of the damage caused by free radicals, which are created when your body transforms food into energy. (See Chapter 4 for more on these vitamins.)

Phytochemicals are chemicals produced by plants that contain compounds researchers now think may protect against disease, especially cancer. (See Chapter 3, *Why are vegetables and fruit so important?*, for more on the foods that produce phytochemicals.)

Dry mouth and taste changes

Chemotherapy and radiation can cause dry mouth and changes in the way food usually tastes.

If your mouth is dry, take extra care to clean your teeth to prevent decay. Brush your teeth and gums with a fluoride toothpaste and rinse your mouth with fluoride rinses.

If your food does not taste good, try rinsing your mouth before eating to remove any bad tastes. If food tastes metallic, try using plastic cutlery and kitchen utensils. Also try your food at room temperature (instead of hot or cold), and experiment with new foods and new seasonings, such as herbs, spices, garlic, onions, mustard, ketchup and barbeque sauce. If your mouth isn't sore, acidic seasonings like lemon juice and vinegar can make food taste more interesting. You can also add a little extra sugar to lessen bitter tastes.

After eating, rinse your mouth with water or try sucking on sugarless mints, candy or chewing gum to remove any leftover tastes.



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- Eat lots of fibre, such as whole grain products made with wheat bran, oat bran, whole wheat, oats, rye or flax.
- Limit all fats, but particularly saturated and trans fats. Choose low-fat milk, eat lean meats and prepare your food with healthy fats, such as vegetable oil or non-hydrogenated soft-tub margarine. (See What should I eat if I have (or want to avoid) heart disease? in this chapter for more on fats and fibre.)
- Drink no more than one alcoholic drink a day. This means one 12-ounce (354 mL) bottle of beer, one five-ounce (147 mL) glass of wine, or one-and-a-half ounces (44 mL) of hard liquor.
- Limit your salt to no more than 2300 mgs (one teaspoon) a day from all your food. (See Chapter 3, What about salt?, for tips on easy ways to cut salt.)
- Avoid or cut down on smoked meat and meat preserved in nitrate, which is a known cancer-causing chemical. Preserved meats are also high in fat and salt.
- Avoid charring or deep browning your food. Cooking this way can produce a cancer-causing chemical called polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons or acrylamide. When you are barbecuing, cook your food slowly and keep food as far as possible from the hot coals.
- Be food safe. Vegetables and fruit may contain small traces of pesticides. While experts do not consider these traces to be a health risk, it is still wise to wash all produce, throw away the outer leaves of leafy greens, peel vegetables and fruit that have skins, and scrub vegetables with edible skins, such as potatoes and carrots. (See Chapter 9 for more on food safety.)

If you already have cancer

If you have cancer, following Canada's Food Guide will help you get the nutrition you need to fight back. Because everyone is different, you should also talk to your doctor and a dietitian about your particular nutritional needs. (Try Dial-A-Dietitian.

See the back cover for contact information.)

If you are going through chemotherapy or radiation, you may experience nausea and vomiting. You may also lose your appetite and/or experience a drop in your usual energy levels. But you must keep eating.

Even though it contradicts all the advice you've ever heard about healthy eating, follow your cravings and eat what you like. Make every mouthful count by choosing foods that are high in both protein and calories.

Eat lots of meat, fish, chicken, turkey, dairy products, nuts, nut butters and legumes, such as beans and lentils. And don't be afraid to:

- add high-fat milk products (such as whole milk, table cream or yogurt) to soups, milkshakes, cheese sauces, pancakes or scrambled eggs
- eat ice cream as a snack
- add butter or margarine on top of your potato
- add pasteurized cheese to eggs, sandwiches, potatoes, cream soups, sauces and casseroles, and
- put jam or honey on your whole wheat bread or cracker.

Also try eating small snacks and meals through the day, every one to two hours. Eat whenever you are not feeling nauseous, and exercise lightly before you eat to increase your appetite.

Avoid strong smelling foods if the smell turns you off. And keep quick, easy foods and snacks in the house that require little effort to prepare.

If you just can't eat enough to keep up your energy, try a liquid nutritional supplement. These are milkshake-like drinks that come in a variety of flavours and are available at grocery and drug stores. Talk to your dietitian about which supplement is best for you.

Watch out!

If your cancer treatments cause you to vomit, rinse your mouth with water after each session to avoid damage to your teeth.



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You must also keep up your fluids. If you are a woman, try to drink about nine 8-ounce glasses (2.2 litres) of fluids each day. If you are a man, try to drink about 12 8-ounce glasses (three litres) of fluids each day.

And remember that alcohol can interfere with some medications and treatments. Please talk to your doctor about drinking alcohol while you are receiving treatments.

And, of course, be food safe. Cancer can weaken your immune system and your body may be less able to fight off an infection caused by bacteria in your food. (See Chapter 9 for more on food safety.)

What should I eat if I have (or want to avoid) osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis, a thinning of the bones that makes them more likely to break, affects about 1.4 million Canadians. More women than men develop osteoporosis because they lose essential hormones that protect bones after menopause, but men's bones also thin with age. In Canada, one in four women and one in eight men over age 50 has osteoporosis. The disease causes more than 88,000 hip fractures every year in this country alone.

Osteoporosis can change your life, making it hard to do the simplest activities, such as climbing a flight of stairs or going for a walk, without worrying that you will break a hip, wrist or even your spine. And once you have broken a bone, especially a hip, it can be very hard to recover and can often lead to permanent disability.

Ask your doctor to send you for a bone density test if you are over 65 or if you are between 50 and 65 and:

For more information

To find out more about nutrition and osteoporosis, call the Osteoporosis Society of Canada at 1 800 463-6842 or visit www.osteoporosis.ca.

- your family has a history of osteoporosis
- you broke a bone recently
- you tend to fall often
- you are a woman and went through menopause early (before age 45)
- you have problems absorbing nutrients (you have celiac disease, for example, or colitis)
- you smoke
- you do not drink milk or eat milk products
- you weigh less than 125 pounds (57 kilograms), or
- you drink a lot of alcohol, coffee, tea or soft drinks.

If you have osteoporosis or you want to prevent it, take any medications ordered by your doctor, quit smoking, follow Canada's Food Guide and stay physically active. Weight-bearing activities, such as walking, running or dancing, are great for strengthening the bones.

In addition:

Add extra calcium and vitamin D

Studies of seniors show that calcium – along with vitamin D, which helps the body absorb calcium – can slow bone loss and lower the risk of fracture.

Seniors should consume 1200 mgs of calcium and 600 international units (IU) of vitamin D a day from food sources and/or supplements. (Canada's Food Guide recommends seniors take a vitamin D supplement of 400 IUs a day.) If you already have osteoporosis or you are post-menopausal, your doctor may recommend even higher amounts of calcium and vitamin D for you.

Include lots of milk and alternatives throughout the day, like a glass of milk with each meal and a soy drink or orange juice fortified with calcium for a snack. Also try canned salmon or sardines for lunch (and eat the bones). You may also need to take a calcium supplement with vitamin D added.

We suggest you talk with your doctor or a dietitian. (Try Dial-A-Dietitian. See the back cover for contact information.) They can help you determine if you are eating enough calcium and vitamin D, and whether you need a supplement. (See Chapter 4 for more about calcium and vitamin D.)



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Eat foods high in potassium

Potassium can help calcium to do its work in protecting your bones.

Try to eat foods high in potassium every day, such as bananas, oranges and orange juice, melons, kiwis, potatoes, tomatoes, milk, nuts and whole grain cereals (especially those that contain oats).

Eat protein everyday

Protein is good for bones and can reduce the risk of osteoporosis or help you recover from a fracture. Eat protein-rich foods throughout the day, such as:

- legumes (kidney beans, chickpeas, lentils)
- peanut butter
- eggs
- cheese
- milk, and
- meat, fish, shellfish, chicken and turkey.

Limit your salt, caffeine, alcohol and soft drinks

Experts have known for a long time that eating too much salt can raise your blood pressure, but recent research now indicates that high blood pressure can, in turn, speed up the body's loss of calcium, which could lead to osteoporosis. (See Chapter 3, *What about salt?*, for tips on easy ways to cut salt.)

Caffeine also can be hard on your bones, since it seems to cause more calcium to be lost through urine. Stick to a maximum of three 8-ounce cups of coffee a day. Tea contains much less caffeine than coffee, so you may want to try it for a change. Green and black teas also contain polyphenols (phytochemicals produced by plants), which researchers now believe may help preserve bone health if you drink them regularly.

Both alcohol and soft drinks can be hard on bones if you drink a lot of them (for soft drinks, that's more than 21 cans a week).

Limit your intake of alcohol and soft drinks to one a day or less. And remember that avoiding sugary soft drinks completely will not only reduce your risk for osteoporosis, but also lower your risk for obesity and help keep your blood sugar levels under control.

What should I eat if I have (or want to avoid) gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD)?

The esophagus is the tube that connects the mouth to the stomach. Gastroesophageal reflux happens when the muscle at the bottom of the esophagus (called the lower esophageal sphincter) does not work properly and allows the stomach contents to flow back into the esophagus.

Everyone gets acid reflux now and then. But when it happens regularly, it's called gastroesophageal reflux disease or GERD. About a third of all Canadian seniors have GERD, with its most common side effect, heartburn.

If you think you have GERD, call your doctor. If you know you have GERD, you will need to modify your lifestyle and eating habits.

Most doctors recommend that you stop smoking, maintain a healthy weight, and take extra vitamin B12, either from a supplement or from fortified foods, and take any other medications or vitamins as directed. They also recommend that you follow Canada's Food Guide and:

- Avoid foods that might make you feel uncomfortable, such as chocolate, coffee, alcohol, peppermint, citrus fruits and juices (orange, lemon, grapefruit), tomatoes, onions, garlic and pepper.
- Avoid any other foods that you know give you heartburn.
- Eat smaller portions at mealtime or eat smaller meals more frequently. Try four to six small meals a day.
- Limit alcohol to one drink a day or less and caffeinated coffee and tea to a maximum of three regular cups a day.
- Avoid walking or bending or stooping immediately after eating.
- Avoid lying down right after eating.



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- Try to eat at least two to three hours before bedtime. You might also consider putting blocks about six inches (20 cm) high under the head of your bed to keep your head higher than your stomach.
- Talk to your doctor if your GERD gets worse. Over the long term, GERD may lead to more serious health problems.

What should I eat if I have (or want to avoid) gum disease?

Periodontal disease is an infection of the gums and bone that support your teeth. It is caused by plaque, a sticky film of bacteria that forms constantly on the teeth.

When periodontal disease affects only the gums, it is called gingivitis. With poor oral care, gingivitis can lead to a serious gum disease called periodontitis – and you may lose some of the bone that supports your teeth or even lose your teeth.

To avoid periodontal disease and tooth decay or stop them from spreading:

- brush your teeth and gums twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste
- floss your teeth once a day
- see your dentist regularly (at least once a year)
- quit smoking
- drink water more often than anything else, and limit sweet drinks, like pop or sweetened fruit drinks, and
- follow Canada's Food Guide.

The better your nutrition, the better your teeth and gums will be. And the better your teeth and gums are, the healthier you will be.

Watch for the signs of gum disease

Periodontal (gum) disease is usually painless and it can be hard to know if you have it. You may have periodontal disease if:

- your gums bleed easily or are red, swollen and tender
- your gums have pulled away from your teeth or you can see the root of the tooth
- you have persistent bad breath or a bad taste in your mouth
- your teeth are loose or separating
- your teeth no longer fit together the same way when you bite, or
- your partial dentures no longer fit as well as they once did.

What should I eat if I have (or want to avoid) eye problems?

Your chance of developing one of three eye diseases – cataracts, glaucoma and macular degeneration – goes up dramatically as you age.

- A cataract is a clouding of the eye's natural lens, which lies behind the iris and the pupil. The lens works much like a camera lens, focusing light onto the retina at the back of the eye and helping you see clearly.
- Glaucoma is a group of eye diseases that damage the optic nerve, which is responsible for carrying images from the eye to the brain. It can gradually steal your sight without warning. People with high blood pressure or diabetes have a greater risk of developing glaucoma.



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- Macular degeneration is the leading cause of blindness for those age 55 and older. It is caused when the central portion of the retina deteriorates. The retina's central portion, known as the macula, is responsible for focusing central vision in the eye. It controls your ability to read, drive a car, recognize faces or colors and see objects in fine detail.

You can reduce your risk of developing eye diseases by following Canada's Food Guide and taking a multivitamin/mineral for people over age 50.

There is also some evidence that taking extra antioxidants – such as vitamins C and E and zinc – may help slow down early-stage macular degeneration. However, researchers don't know yet exactly what level of these antioxidants is best for eye health. In the meantime, eat a minimum of seven servings of vegetables and fruit each day, especially those that are green, red, orange, yellow, purple and blue. If you already have macular degeneration, you may want to talk to your doctor about supplements with high levels of antioxidants and some minerals.

If you have high blood pressure or diabetes, make sure you keep them under control to reduce your risk of developing glaucoma. (See What should I eat if I have (or want to avoid) high blood pressure? and What should I eat if I have (or want to avoid) diabetes? in this chapter.)

If you have already developed cataracts, they can be treated with surgery. There is no cure for either glaucoma or macular degeneration, but medication or surgery can slow or prevent further vision loss. See your optometrist or ophthalmologist for more detailed information.

What should I eat if I have arthritis?

There are many different kinds of arthritis. The three that most commonly affect seniors are osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis and gout.

- Osteoarthritis is inflammation of the joints, which causes swelling, pain or stiffness.
- Rheumatoid arthritis is inflammation of the membrane (the synovium) lining the joints.
- Gout is a build-up of uric acid in the joints, causing pain.

Eating well when you have any kind of arthritis can be difficult. Painful joints may make it hard to stand or cut up vegetables and prepare meals, and you may simply feel too tired. Some arthritis medications, too, can decrease your appetite and cause your stomach to feel upset. If you are taking arthritis medications, talk to your doctor about whether you need a special vitamin or mineral supplement.

Unfortunately, there is no special diet or herbal supplement that can help you avoid arthritis or cure it. Even the very popular glucosamine has not been proven to reduce the pain and stiffness of arthritis (although it will not harm you if you do take it).

Food and arthritis

Some people think their arthritis pain is linked to the food they eat.

If you think a specific food is affecting you, it may be worth keeping track of what you eat and what seems to make your arthritis worse.

If you identify a food that you think makes your arthritis flare up, don't eat it for two weeks to see what happens – but do not eliminate a whole food group! For example, rather than cutting out all grain products because you think oatmeal is affecting you, just cut out oatmeal.

Also talk to your doctor and a dietitian. (Try Dial-A-Dietitian. See the back cover for contact information.)



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However, you may feel better if you:

- follow Canada's Food Guide
- lose any extra weight (joints affected by arthritis are already under strain, so extra weight can make your symptoms worse)
- stay physically active, even if your joints are stiff or painful (moderate activity can actually decrease the pain by strengthening the muscles around the joint – see Chapter 3, What about exercise?, for more information on physical activity)
- take a daily multivitamin/mineral for people over age 50, and
- make sure you get 1200 to 1500 mgs of calcium and 600 international units (IU) of vitamin D a day from food sources and/or supplements (Canada's Food Guide recommends seniors take a vitamin D supplement of 400 IUs a day).

In addition, research has shown that some foods, especially those containing fibre and omega 3 fatty acids, can help reduce inflammation, while other foods, especially those high in saturated fats, can increase it.

With any kind of arthritis, try to eat lots of foods high in:

- fibre, such as whole grains, vegetables and fruit, and
- omega 3 fatty acids, found in fatty or oily fish (salmon or herring, for example), ground flaxseed and flaxseed oil, walnuts and foods fortified with omega 3, such as eggs, yogurt and soy beverages.

If you have gout, you should also:

- limit or avoid organ meats, such as liver, kidneys and brains
- limit or avoid shellfish, sardines, herring, salmon, trout, mackerel, haddock, carp, herring roe, horsemeat, goose, liverwurst and porcini mushrooms
- limit alcohol to one drink a day or less, and
- drink plenty of fluids.

For more information

In addition to your doctor, the Alzheimer Society of B.C. is a good source of information about Alzheimer's disease. Call 1 800 667-3742 or visit www.alzheimerbc.org.

What should I eat if I have Alzheimer's disease?

Alzheimer's disease is a brain disorder that, over time, causes a person's memory, language skills and perception of time and space to decline. Eventually, people with Alzheimer's will be unable to care for themselves. Although Alzheimer's disease is not a normal part of aging – not everyone will get it, unlike wrinkles – the risk of developing the disease increases as you grow older.

There is no conclusive evidence that any food causes Alzheimer's disease, so there is no special diet to eat to avoid it. However, if you or a person you know already has Alzheimer's, proper nutrition is vital.

Weight loss is one of the primary symptoms of Alzheimer's, because a person with it can literally forget to be hungry or forget to eat, and may even get confused if there are too many food choices or too many distractions around the table. It also may be hard for someone with Alzheimer's to use a regular knife, fork or spoon. So:

- set regular meal times and stick to them
- serve familiar foods
- try offering one food at a time
- avoid distractions during meals: turn off the television or radio and avoid talking too much
- try cutting the food into small pieces or serve food that can be eaten with the fingers, and
- limit coffee and tea to one cup a day and alcohol to one drink a day.



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Also ask your doctor or a dietitian about liquid nutritional supplements for added nutrition. These are milkshake-like drinks that come in a variety of flavours and are available at all grocery and drug stores. (Try Dial-A-Dietitian. See the back cover for contact information.) Also see Chapter 6, *What should I eat if I am underweight?*, for more on dealing with weight loss.

What should I eat if I have Parkinson's disease?

Parkinson's disease is a disorder of the nervous system that affects muscle control, so that arms and legs tremble and may become rigid. Over time, someone with Parkinson's may find it difficult to walk and talk and possibly even think. He or she may also experience problems with swallowing (see *What should I eat if I have (or want to avoid) problems swallowing?* in this chapter) and with constipation, depression and weight loss (see Chapter 6 for information on these).

If you or a person you know already has Parkinson's disease, proper nutrition and regular physical activity is vital to maintaining strength and preventing muscle loss.

Follow Canada's Food Guide and add a daily multivitamin/mineral for people over age 50. Also talk to your doctor and a dietitian. (Try Dial-A-Dietitian. See the back cover for contact information.) They can give you advice about how to adjust meals to avoid problems with drug interactions as well as problems with swallowing.

What should I eat if I have trouble swallowing?

Having trouble swallowing or feeling like food is caught in your throat or somewhere between your throat and your stomach is common at any age, but even more so for seniors.

Trouble swallowing can be caused by such things as simply eating too fast, taking bites that are too big, having dentures that do not fit well, or having a loose tooth that prevents proper chewing. It can be made worse by not drinking enough while eating or by eating while lying down. People with Alzheimer's disease may not chew their food enough or may actually forget to chew.

If you have trouble swallowing, do not restrict yourself to eating only soft or liquid food (that can cause other problems!). Instead, first try to take smaller bites and eat more slowly, and see your dentist if you have dentures or a loose or missing tooth.

See your doctor if the trouble goes on for more than a few days, or if you have had a more serious health problem, such as a stroke or Parkinson's disease. Your doctor may refer you to a speech language pathologist for a full assessment.

Healthy Eating

QUIZ # 4

multiple choice

1. To reduce your chances of getting heart disease, you need to:

- A. Avoid saturated and trans fats.
- B. Increase fibre.
- C. Limit salt, sugar, alcohol and caffeine.
- D. All of the above.

Answer: D. All of the above.

2. Increasing the fibre you eat by adding more fruits, vegetables and grain products can:

- A. Help lower blood cholesterol levels.
- B. Control blood sugar levels.
- C. Help with weight control.
- D. All of the above.

Answer: D. All of the above.

3. According to Canada's Food Guide, one serving of steak is:

- A. A 10-ounce steak.
- B. An eight-ounce steak.
- C. A six-ounce steak.
- D. A 2.5-ounce steak.

Answer: D. One serving of cooked meat, fish, shellfish and poultry is two-and-a-half ounces (75 g) or half a cup (125 mL).