

Nutrition and Immunity for Older Adults

The immune system is the body's defence against disease and infection. A healthy, balanced diet with a variety of foods from the main food groups can help to keep it working properly. As well as nutrients such as protein and omega-3 fats, a number of vitamins and minerals have key roles in supporting our immune systems.

As we get older, our immune system starts to work less effectively so it isn't as good at fighting off diseases and infections like colds, flu and pneumonia. We may also experience loss of interest in food and a poorer appetite as we age, which can make it harder to get the nutrition we need for good health. Being undernourished can lead to a weaker immune system but eating well and getting the nutrients your body needs throughout later life can help to support the immune system and help fend off infections wherever possible.

Vitamin A

Found in:

Eggs, cheese, liver. The body can also make vitamin A from beta-carotene, found in dark green leafy vegetables (e.g. spinach), orange-coloured fruits and vegetables (e.g. carrots, sweet potato, butternut squash, canteloupe melon).

DID YOU KNOW?

Soups made from veg like butternut squash, sweet potato or carrots are delicious **vitamin A** providers – if you find these veg difficult to peel and chop, you can buy them ready cut in most supermarkets, or choose a ready-made soup.



Vitamin B6

Found in:

Poultry, fish (e.g. tuna), some fruit and vegetables (e.g. bananas, avocados, Brussel sprouts, plantains), nuts and seeds (e.g. walnuts, cashews, sesame seeds).



DID YOU KNOW?

A potato topped fish pie, made with veg provides a balanced meal, with fish for protein and omega-3s (if oily), potatoes for carbohydrate and vegetables adding more vitamins and minerals.

Vitamin B12

Found in:

Meat, fish, milk, cheese, eggs, fortified yeast extract, fortified breakfast cereals, fortified milk alternatives (e.g. soya, oat, almond drinks – check labels).



DID YOU KNOW?

Milk is a good source of **vitamin B12**. Whole milk can be a better choice if you have a poor appetite. You can fortify your milk by blending 2-4 heaped tablespoons of dried skimmed milk powder into a pint and using in porridge, soups and milky drinks.

Vitamin C

Found in:

Citrus fruits (e.g. easy peelers), grapefruit, berries, kiwi fruit, green vegetables (e.g. cabbage, kale), cauliflower, peppers, tomatoes.



DID YOU KNOW?

Serving a meal with a portion of green cabbage and a portion of cauliflower will provide you with all the **vitamin C** you need for the day!

Vitamin D

Found in:

Oily fish, eggs, some fortified breakfast cereals, some fortified dairy and dairy alternative products (check labels).



DID YOU KNOW?

Lean beef mince is a good source of **zinc**; so favourites like chilli, meatballs, koftes and cottage pie will all boost zinc intake. For vegetarians, nuts and seeds and mycoprotein are good sources of zinc.

Copper

Found in:

Wholegrain breakfast cereals, wholewheat pasta, quinoa, prawns, pulses (e.g. beans, chickpeas, lentils), dried fruit, nuts.

DID YOU KNOW?

Pulses are good sources of **copper** in our diet. Why not use them in soups, stews, and curries?



Folate

Found in:

Green vegetables (e.g. broccoli, cabbage, spinach), chickpeas, oranges, berries, cheese, wholemeal bread.



DID YOU KNOW?

Green veg are often packed with **folate**; choose ones you like whether it's cabbage or peas (frozen are good and can save waste!).

Iron

Found in:

Red meat, pulses (e.g. kidney beans, lentils), nuts and nut butters, seeds and seed pastes (e.g. tahini), wholemeal bread, dried fruit (e.g. apricots).

DID YOU KNOW?

If softer foods are easier for you to eat, minced beef and lamb can be a good choice. A portion of stewed beef mince can provide around a third of the **iron** an older person needs a day.



Selenium

Found in:

Nuts and seeds, (particularly Brazil nuts, cashews, sunflower seeds), eggs, poultry, fish, shellfish.



DID YOU KNOW?

Eggs are a good **selenium** provider – why not have eggs for breakfast on some days – you may find you have a better appetite in the mornings.

Zinc

Found in:

Red meat, poultry, cheese, some shellfish (like crab, mussels), nuts and seeds (like pumpkin seeds, pine nuts), wholegrain breakfast cereals, wholegrain and seeded breads.



DID YOU KNOW?

Wholegrain bread with cheese or cheese on toast like cheddar, red Leicester or double Gloucester may be a good choice to include especially if you prefer to have small frequent meals and snacks in the day.