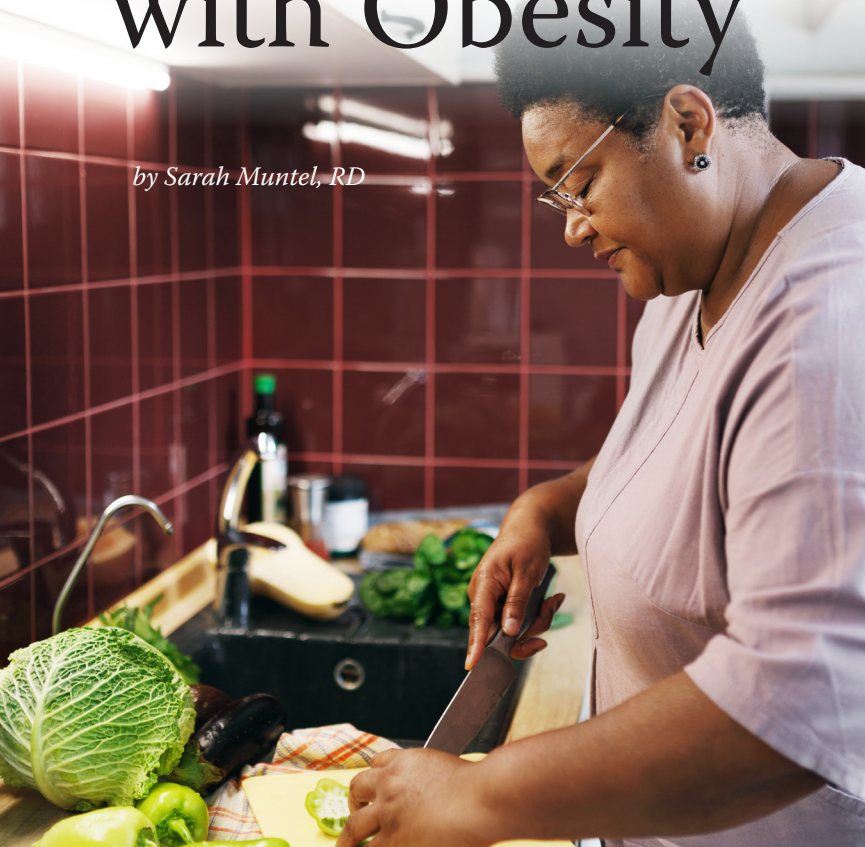


Nutrition for Older Adults Living with Obesity

by Sarah Muntel, RD



Nutritional needs change throughout life, from childhood to adolescence and into adulthood. As the body changes during each stage of life, nutritional needs and health goals often shift. Nutrition for older adults is no different. It comes with its own set of priorities and areas of focus.

With aging, supporting overall health remains important, and for some people that may include managing weight. Additional goals often emerge, such as maintaining strength, supporting overall health and preserving independence. With the right nutritional focus, aging with strength and vitality can be possible.

What Changes Should You Expect With Aging?

Muscle Loss

Starting around age 40, muscle mass and strength naturally begin to decrease. This loss continues over time and often accelerates after age 60. Maintaining muscle mass is important for physical function and overall health. Without adequate muscular strength, people may experience balance problems, increased risk of falls and greater fatigue.

Decreasing Caloric Needs

As people age, the body typically requires fewer calories to maintain weight. One contributor is the gradual loss of muscle mass, which lowers the body's overall energy needs.

According to the National Institute on Aging, the average daily caloric need for a sedentary woman over age 60 is about 1,600 calories. For sedentary men over 60, the average is about 2,000 calories per day. These needs increase with higher levels of physical activity.

These changes can affect how the body uses energy and may influence body weight over time. Choosing foods rich in key nutrients can help support overall health. Small calorie adjustments combined with physical activity can add up over time.

Appetite and Thirst Changes

Appetite may decrease with age. This can be the body's natural response to lower calorie needs. At the same time, thirst sensation often decreases, which can increase the risk of dehydration.

A Change in Focus

Weight alone does not define overall health. Earlier in life, weight loss may feel like the primary health goal. While weight management can improve many aspects of health, priorities may shift as people age. Functional movement, strength and overall health often become the most important goals.

Weight Alone Does Not Define Health

Often, there is a perception that reaching a certain weight automatically means someone is healthy. This is not always true and can be especially misleading for older adults. Proper nutrition, strength and daily function are often more important indicators of health.

Nutrition Priorities Shift With Aging

As the body changes with age, nutrition and lifestyle habits may also need to adjust. Maximizing nutrition can support healthy aging.

Meal Composition and Meal Timing

Protein

Because muscle mass may decrease with age, choosing protein-rich foods becomes especially important. Protein supports muscle maintenance, immune function and overall health. Research shows that many older adults do not consume enough protein.

Sarcopenia is an age-related loss of skeletal muscle mass, strength and function. It often begins gradually around age 30 and accelerates after age 60. Symptoms can include weakness, fatigue and reduced mobility. Meeting protein needs can help lower the risk.

Protein sources include lean meats, poultry, eggs, seafood, beans, lentils and nuts.

Recommendation: According to the National Resource Center for Nutrition and Aging, the general recommendation for adults is 0.8 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight each day. For adults age 65 and older, the recommendation often increases to about 1 to 1.2 grams per kilogram per day.

Hydration

The sensation of thirst often decreases with age, which makes consistent fluid intake important, even when you do not feel thirsty. Older adults are at higher risk for dehydration.

A common guideline is to aim for about 64 ounces of fluid each day.

Recommendation: Choose non-caloric beverages throughout the day to stay hydrated. Water, coffee, tea and other low-calorie beverages are good options. Limiting caffeine may help reduce the risk of dehydration. Some people find that using new cups, water bottles or straws can help encourage regular drinking.

Make Each Meal Count

Hunger may decrease with age, but nutritional needs remain important. Even when appetite is low, the body still requires nutrients to function well.

Nutrient-dense foods provide vitamins, minerals and other nutrients the body needs without excess calories. Examples include fruits, vegetables, whole grains and dairy products.

Recommendation: Plan meals and snacks ahead of time so healthy options are readily available. Stock the refrigerator with easy choices such as chopped fruits and vegetables, yogurt, cheese sticks and whole grain crackers. Choose foods that help meet your nutritional needs.



Loaded Chicken Quinoa Salad

EatingWell.com

Ingredients

- ¾ cup shredded cooked chicken breast
- ½ cup cooked quinoa
- 1 cup roasted root vegetables
- 1–2 tablespoons vinaigrette
- ¼ avocado, sliced
- 1 tablespoon crumbled feta cheese
- 1 tablespoon sunflower seeds

Directions

Combine chicken, quinoa and roasted vegetables in a bowl. Drizzle with vinaigrette. Top with avocado, feta cheese and sunflower seeds

Meals like this provide protein, fiber and a variety of nutrients.

Vitamins and Minerals Matter

Certain nutrients become especially important with aging.

Calcium and Vitamin D

These nutrients work together to support bone health and reduce fracture risk. Food sources include dairy products, fortified cereals and juices, leafy greens and fatty fish.

Aim for: 1,000 mg to 1,200 mg of calcium daily and 600 to 800 IU of vitamin D.

Vitamin B12

Foods that contain vitamin B12 include meat, fish, dairy products and fortified foods such as cereals. Absorption of B12 often decreases with age, which may require greater intake of fortified foods or supplements.

Aim for: 2.4 mcg per day for adults. Some people may need supplementation due to absorption issues. Speak with your health care provider for guidance.



Try this smoothie for a quick breakfast or snack. It provides calcium, vitamin C, vitamin D and fiber.

Strawberry Oatmeal Breakfast Smoothie

Allrecipes.com

Ingredients

- 1 cup milk
- ½ cup rolled oats
- 14 frozen strawberries
- 1 banana, broken into chunks
- 1½ teaspoons sugar (optional)
- ½ teaspoon vanilla extract (optional)

Directions

Blend milk, oats, strawberries and banana until smooth. Add sugar and vanilla if desired and blend again until smooth. Pour into glasses and serve.

" Small steps such as nourishing your body with nutritious foods and making time for self-care can support long-term health. "

Managing Health Conditions and Medications

With aging, many people manage additional health conditions or medications. Developing a plan with your health care team can help support long-term health.

Medications

Spend time with your physician or health care professional discussing your health goals, conditions and possible medication side effects. Work together to develop a schedule that identifies the best time to take medications and supplements.

Managing Side Effects

Many medications may cause side effects. For example, obesity medications can be an effective treatment option for some people, but they may also cause symptoms such as nausea or constipation. Increasing fiber intake and drinking more fluids may help manage constipation. Eating smaller, more frequent meals may help reduce nausea.

See Your Health Care Professional

If you experience new symptoms or changes in your health, contact your health care professional. Some changes are a normal part of aging, but many concerns can be managed with proper medical care. Symptoms such as low appetite, chronic fatigue or frequent falls should always be discussed with a health professional.

Final Thoughts

At every stage of life, the goal is to focus on balance rather than perfection. Healthy habits take time to develop and change rarely happens overnight.

Small steps such as nourishing your body with nutritious foods and making time for self-care can support long-term health. Living well is about caring for your body and supporting your well-being each day.

About the Author:

Sarah Muntel, RD is a Registered Dietitian from Indiana. She has worked in the field of Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery and Weight Management for 25 years. She loves seeing patients meet their health and wellness goals. In her free time, she enjoys spending time with family, watching her kids play sports and taking walks with friends.



ABOUT THE OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.



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LEARN, CONNECT, ENGAGE

The OAC knows that the journey with weight can be challenging but we also know that great things happen when we learn, connect and engage. That is why the OAC Community exists. Our Community is designed to provide quality education, ongoing support programs, an opportunity to connect, and a place to take action on important issues.

Through the OAC Community, you can get access to:

- Weight & Health Education • Community Blogs
 - Community Discussion Forum
 - Ongoing Support • Meaningful Connections
- AND MUCH MORE**



JOIN TODAY: GO TO OBESITYACTION.ORG/JOIN

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