



Nutrition for Healthy Aging

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Hello — and welcome!

What we eat affects the quality and resilience of virtually every organ, cell, and system in the body. “Aging is not the passive process we once thought,” Henry S. Lodge, MD, coauthor of *Younger Next Year*, has said. “How gracefully you age is reflected by the food you eat.”

Many people worry about the types of food that cause weight gain. But the worst dietary demons — including many sugary and highly processed foods — do more than add unwanted pounds. They subtract years from your life.

The human body is a perpetual construction zone, replacing most of its cells every few months. The secret to aging well is to give your body the best tools for the job: whole, healthy foods.

This guide contains tips for how to feed your body on a cellular level in order to tamp down inflammation, balance your hormones, and boost your mitochondria. We hope it inspires you to rethink your nutritional approach to aging!





1. Try Intermittent Fasting for Brain Health

Intermittent fasting's ability to help regulate blood sugar and lower insulin offers protection against neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. "Abnormal glucose signaling is responsible for 60 percent of cognitive decline," says functional-medicine doctor Sara Gottfried, MD. "By helping to regulate and keep blood sugar under control as we age, intermittent fasting is a lifestyle change that can have long-term benefits on our brain health." Evidence suggests that intermittent fasting promotes a process called autophagy, in which the body breaks down and discards dysfunctional cell components. Autophagy, which becomes less efficient as we age, is linked to inflammatory conditions, including neurodegenerative diseases.

There are several different approaches to intermittent fasting:



Time-restricted eating:

Eat only within a specific window of time — say, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Some people do this every day, others several days a week. This is the most popular method of intermittent fasting, perhaps because it works well with most sleep schedules.



Alternate-day fasting:

Alternate days without food with days of normal eating.



The 5:2 diet:

Limit food intake on two nonconsecutive days each week and eat as you would on the other five.



Modified alternate-day fasting:

On fasting days, limit food intake to 20 to 25 percent of your usual consumption. Eat as you normally do on the alternate days. Modified alternate-day fasting is the template for the 5:2 diet.



Fast-mimicking diet:

This is a short-term, plant-based, ketogenic-style diet, in which calories are reduced by about 60 percent for five days. It was developed by cell biologist Valter Longo, PhD, to mimic the physiological effects of fasting.

“I prefer the time-restricted feeding model of intermittent fasting,” says Gottfried. “The word ‘fasting’ for many people implies restriction or suffering. In reality, you are sleeping during most of the fasting window, and during the eating window, you don’t have to ‘restrict’ your calories. You don’t want to binge on ice cream, of course, but you can eat healthy, balanced meals.”

Because of the relative ease of time-restricted eating, it can feel like cheating — or like it might not do the body enough good. But when practiced consistently, time-restricted eating even two or three days each week appears to produce powerful results. Studies have tied the approach to weight loss and maintenance; better cholesterol markers and overall cardiac health; and lower levels of inflammation, glucose, and insulin — as well as improvements in how the body handles insulin.

For more on intermittent fasting, check out [“Everything You Need to Know About Intermittent Fasting”](#) and [“The Case for Intermittent Fasting.”](#)



Pomegranate Lime-Tini

Makes 2 drinks

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup 100 percent pomegranate juice
- ¼ cup fresh lime juice (about 2 limes)
- 2 tbs. ginger syrup (see recipe [here](#))
- 2 ice cubes
- 2 lime twists
- 1 tsp. pomegranate seeds

DIRECTIONS

Shake the first four ingredients in a cocktail shaker. Strain into two glasses and garnish with the lime twists and pomegranate seeds.

2. Go Easy on the Alcohol — and Try a Mocktail!

When we're in our 20s, enthusiastic social drinking fits seamlessly alongside fitness routines, jobs, and other obligations. A couple of decades later, the same approach to alcohol can tank our functioning.

That's because as we age, we process alcohol less efficiently. "Some are surprised by it and find they feel intoxicated by the same amount of alcohol they used to drink without a problem," says functional-medicine practitioner Marcelle Pick, OB-GYN, NP. But as we get older, we have less muscle mass and body water, she explains, which affects alcohol processing.

The liver's capacity to break down alcohol also decreases with time. The longer we live, the greater our exposure to various toxins — and the greater their cumulative burden on the liver. "It's important for everyone to cultivate a detox-supportive diet and lifestyle, and keeping alcohol consumption moderate is important for that," cautions functional nutritionist Jesse Haas, CNS, LN. "The less effectively those detox pathways function, the more likely we are to experience disease as we age."

The good news is that there are plenty of delicious mocktails that can be just as satisfying as a cocktail. Try this booze-free take on a martini — it's packed with antioxidants from pomegranate juice!



3. Eat for Your Mitochondria

We spend billions of dollars every year buying pills, potions, and creams that promise to slow the aging process. But what if we could enlist our own bodies to help us live longer, healthier lives?

Meet mitochondria — the tiny factories in each of our cells that turn the food we eat and the oxygen we breathe into energy.

When the communication breaks down between our cells' nuclei and their mitochondria, aging accelerates. But the opposite is also true: When intracellular communication is improved, the aging process slows down, and overall health and vitality improve.

The great thing is, caring for our mitochondria and upgrading their communication network doesn't just help slow down the aging process. It can also enhance our energy, metabolism, and cognitive powers. And it can reduce our risk of age-related diseases like cancer, Alzheimer's, and heart disease.

Try these seven ways to boost mitochondria:

- 1. Avoid or eliminate ingredients** that are toxic to mitochondria, including processed flours, sugars and refined sweeteners, trans fats, gluten, and dairy products.

- 2. Eat 6 to 9 cups of fresh vegetables and fruits daily.** Terry Wahls, MD, recommends a variety of greens (broccoli, bok choy, etc.), brightly colored vegetables (beets, carrots, etc.), and the sulfur-rich veggies (cauliflower, cabbage, etc.) that help your body produce glutathione, a master antioxidant. She recommends blending several of your mitochondrial-enhancing veggies and fruits in a daily smoothie.

- 3. Dine on fiber-rich foods** to help detox the poisons that can build up when mitochondria slow down.

- 4. Up your omega-3 fat intake** to help build your mitochondrial membranes. Wahls recommends consuming 6 to 12 ounces of grassfed meat or low-mercury wild-caught fish each day. Avocados, nuts, and seeds are also rich in fatty acids. Consider taking a fish-oil supplement, which is a good idea for most people.

- 5. Brew up bone broth.** When mitochondria are compromised, there is increased risk for autoimmune diseases, such as arthritis, which are caused, in part, by a leaky gut. Wahls says bone broth is rich in glutamine and other amino acids that are especially good for healing a leaky gut and other ailments.

- 6. Take mitochondria-protective and energy-boosting micronutrients,** such as Acetyl-L-carnitine, alpha-lipoic acid, coenzyme Q10, N-acetylcysteine, NADH, D-ribose, resveratrol, and magnesium aspartate.

- 7. Do strength training and high-intensity interval training (HIIT).** This tip isn't a nutritional strategy, but it's worth noting that strength training and HIIT can increase mitochondria and improve their function.



4. Supplement Wisely

The best source for most nutrients is good food — fresh vegetables, fruits, nuts, seeds, and legumes grown without chemicals in healthy soil and water; wild-caught cold-water fish; and meat, eggs, and other products from animals raised on pasture.

Still, because even the best diet can leave some nutritional gaps, experts often recommend the following supplements to amplify your body's resilience to aging:

- A well-balanced multivitamin for micronutrients
- A high-potency probiotic to support the microbiome
- Vitamin D to support immune-system function
- Omega-3 and fish-oil capsules for essential fatty acids that help protect against inflammation and support brain health
- Turmeric to protect against inflammation
- NAC (N-acetylcysteine) to support detoxification
- Resveratrol for mitochondrial support
- CoQ10 (coenzyme Q10) to slow cardiovascular aging and treat heart disease. (This supplement is also widely recommended for anyone taking statin drugs, which hinder the body's natural production of the human form of CoQ10.)



5. Choose Healthy Fats

Americans have a case of nutritional whiplash when it comes to dietary fat. For decades we were told that reducing our fat intake can prevent weight gain and ward off disease, so we dutifully filled our grocery carts with low-fat, reduced-fat, and fat-free fare.

But in recent years, a growing number of medical experts have pointed out that we need fat for a wide range of health-promoting metabolic functions, including building cell membranes, producing hormones, absorbing vitamins, protecting our nerves, moderating our glycemic load, and supporting basic brain functions.

As it turns out, though, not all fats are created equal.

Here are seven tips to pick the healthiest fats and oils:



- 1. Eat anti-inflammatory fats.** Whole foods like wild salmon, walnuts, and chia seeds are excellent sources of inflammation-busting omega-3s, essential fatty acids that are required for cell health.

- 2. Avoid refined oils.** Vegetable oils such as corn, soybean, sunflower, and safflower — and yes, even canola — are all heavily processed industrial oils that are overly high in inflammatory omega-6 fatty acids and prone to oxidation in the body. “Omega-6 fats not only fuel your body’s inflammatory pathways, but also reduce availability of anti-inflammatory omega-3 fats in your tissues, resulting in more inflammation,” says functional-medicine doctor Mark Hyman, MD.

- 3. Embrace full-bodied flavor.** “Any real oil should have flavor,” says Lisa Howard, author of *The Big Book of Healthy Cooking Oils*, noting that unrefined oils smell and taste like — and often have a color similar to — the original ingredient. An oil that’s been heavily refined has no flavor, little aroma, and a flat, golden color. We’re typically told to use canola oil because it’s “neutral,” says Howard. “That’s because it’s been rendered rancid during the processing, then heavily filtered, deodorized, and degummed into neutrality.”



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4. **Enjoy animal-derived fats.** High-quality grassfed butter and ghee (butter that has been clarified to remove the milk solids, which contain lactose and casein), as well as naturally produced lard, are good sources of animal-based fat. But steer clear of highly processed lard, says Howard.
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5. **Go for variety.** “It’s always good to eat a variety, no matter what category of food, because they all offer different nutrients,” says Howard. Extra-virgin olive oil, for example, will give you a healthy dose of oleocanthal, an antioxidant with demonstrated anti-inflammatory properties. Adding sliced avocado to your salad will enhance your body’s absorption of beta-carotene and other carotenoids in that salad — and give you an extra dose of fiber and protein. And grassfed butter will deliver a good supply of vitamin K2, as well as conjugated linoleic acid, a fatty acid with demonstrated anticancer properties.
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6. **Choose quality, not quantity.** Pesticides and other toxins often concentrate in fats and oils, which are themselves highly concentrated, so it’s important to opt for high-quality, organic products, says Deanna Minich, PhD, FACN, CNS, author of *Whole Detox*. She also suggests not buying oil in bulk. “It’s much better to have a smaller bottle of oil and go through it quickly than to buy a big vat and be stuck with that for months, because it will degrade,” she explains. This degradation produces chemicals known to cause oxidative stress in human cells and to contribute to degenerative disease.
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7. **Be cautious of high-heat cooking.** If you heat an oil past the point at which it starts to smoke (its smoke point), free radicals and other toxic compounds form.



6. Cut Way Down on Sugar

Many people think of sugar only in terms of cavities and dental health, but eating too much sugar leads to elevated glucose — which negatively affects our energy, body composition, and hormone balance. Elevated glucose levels also increase the rate of glycation — a chemical reaction in which sugars bond to proteins or lipids — which causes cellular aging in several ways.

First, increased glycation slows the body's repair mechanism. Although glycation's effects are mostly internal, aging skin is a primary external sign. "Sugar molecules gum up the collagen in your skin," says nutritional biochemist Shawn Talbott, PhD, CNS, making skin less elastic and causing it to wrinkle faster.

Glycation also ages the body by creating oxidative stress. Oxidation eventually leads to a buildup of toxins called advanced glycation end products, or AGEs. The accumulation of some AGEs is normal, but eating poorly is like hitting the fast-forward button on aging. That's because AGEs build up in the body and damage mitochondria, our cellular engines. The loss of cellular energy gives rise to such age-related complaints as loss of memory, hearing, vision, and stamina.

The upshot? If you can go cold turkey on processed sugar, great. If not, cut back as much as you can.

Sugar cravings? Try these tips from functional dentist Steven Lin, DDS:

1. Eat 1 tbs. coconut oil.

The medium-chain triglycerides in coconut oil will be absorbed quickly into your bloodstream, and this often stems sugar cravings.

2. Eat 1 tbs. of melted butter.

It helps you feel satisfied with a vitamin-rich dose of fat.

3. Eat 1 tbs. sauerkraut.

Even though it's not very sweet, sauerkraut can help quell the body's craving for sugar.

4. Grab a handful of Brazil nuts.

Brazil nuts are high in selenium, an element that reduces cravings for sweets.

5. Eat a handful of toasted coconut chips.

Coconut's natural sweetness and healthy fats help to curb sugar cravings.

6. Take a hot (or cold) shower.

Resetting your body temperature can often disrupt the cycle of craving.

7. Exercise!

Go for a walk or run, or do 10 pushups or jumping jacks.

8. Drink a cup of cinnamon or peppermint tea.

Naturally sweet herbal teas are a great way to deal with a sweet tooth.



7. Eat the Rainbow

One of the easiest ways to ensure healthy aging and ward off chronic disease is to consume lots of phytonutrients — powerful, plant-based chemicals found in veggies as well as in fruits, legumes, whole grains, nuts, herbs, and spices.

Phytochemicals are protective antioxidants that trigger positive gene expression — switching good genes “on” and bad ones “off” — and have an anti-inflammatory effect throughout the body.

To make sure you are getting a diverse array of phytonutrients, simply “eat the rainbow” by taking in lots of colorful plant-based foods.

Aim to eat foods from each of these color groups daily:

 **Red Foods**

Adzuki beans, cherries, goji berries, kidney beans, pomegranates, raspberries, strawberries, beets, red potatoes, radicchio, radishes, red peppers, tomatoes, rhubarb.

How to Use More: Add fresh tomatoes, goji berries, raspberries, pomegranate seeds, or pink grapefruit to salads. Try a Mediterranean salad with tomatoes, garlic, olives, herbs, and feta cheese or stuffed peppers.

 **Orange Foods**

Apricots, cantaloupes, mangoes, pumpkins, turmeric, sweet potatoes, and orange bell peppers.

How to Use More: Grate turmeric root into stir-fries. Replace white potatoes with sweet potatoes. Sprinkle pumpkinseeds on salads and soups. Mix dried apricot, mango, and papaya into a trail mix, or serve for dessert.

 **Yellow Foods**

Apples, corn, ginger, pineapple, summer squash, millet, potatoes, bell peppers, bananas, and Asian pears.

How to Use More: Add squash and peppers to stir-fries. Use Yukon gold potatoes instead of russets. Sip ginger-lemon tea. Slice banana on top of whole-grain cereal or even into a sandwich.

 **Green Foods**

Limes, okra, zucchini, olives, pears, avocados, sprouts, edamame, green tea, beet greens, dandelion greens, chard, kale, and spinach.

How to Use More: Add green veggies to omelets, soups, pizzas, and sandwiches. Squeeze lime juice into ice water. Sip a green smoothie. Add fresh herbs to main dishes. Swap green tea for coffee.

 **Blue/Purple Foods**

Berries, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, eggplant, figs, purple kale, olives, plums, potatoes, prunes, raisins, and black and purple rice.

How to Use More: Serve roasted eggplant or braised purple kale as a side. Add shredded purple cabbage or carrot to salads. Try a stir-fry of purple cauliflower served over purple rice. Add berries to yogurt, pancakes, or whole-grain cereal.

 **White/Tan/Brown Foods**

Legumes, black and white teas, whole grains, shallots, soybeans, tahini, seeds, garlic, jicama, cocoa, coffee, cauliflower, coconut, nuts, and brown spices.

How to Use More: Add unsweetened cocoa powder and spices to smoothies. Drizzle tahini over veggies. Swap dates or coconut for refined sweeteners.



8. Embrace Intuitive Eating

When it comes to healthy aging and nutrition, one of the best tools is mindful eating. So many of us eat when we are stressed or distracted, which can hinder healthy digestion. When we are stressed, the body releases adrenaline and cortisol — fight-or-flight chemicals — that divert blood toward your limbs and away from your stomach and intestines. As a result, food may ferment in the intestines, upsetting the balance of good and bad bacteria, and hindering the intestines' ability to break down and absorb key nutrients.

Stressed or distracted eating can also lead to unconscious eating. You may eat more than you intended or eat foods you wouldn't have chosen under better circumstances.

The fix? Try incorporating intuitive eating into your daily life. Nutritionists Evelyn Tribole, MS, RDN, and Elyse Resch, MS, RDN, coined the concept of "intuitive eating" in 1995 in order to help people ditch their diet mentalities and make peace with food.

Here are their eight principles of intuitive eating:

- 1. Learn to recognize** mild sensations of hunger that emerge even while you are busy doing something else — and feed them before you become ravenous or tempted to make unhealthy eating choices.

- 2. Give yourself permission** to eat whenever you feel hungry — and let go of internal feelings of guilt or rigid rules that say you can't eat more than a certain number of calories a day or enjoy a slice of cake.

- 3. Derive pleasure and satisfaction** from the eating experience moment by moment, without distraction, and savor your food. Notice when and how your hunger abates. While you are eating, do not watch television, work at the computer, or think about your plans for the rest of the day. Instead, look at your food, observing color, shape, taste, smell, texture, and quality. Observe your own sensations and reactions.

- 4. After a meal is done**, take some time to focus on your inner feelings — sluggish or energized, anxious or calm? Decide whether the meal and its contents are worth eating again.

- 5. Don't eat to alleviate anxiety, boredom, or depression.** If you find yourself overeating to treat a mood or emotion instead of to satisfy physiological hunger, search for the emotional root and then soothe or stimulate yourself through yoga, a long walk, or a talk with a friend.

- 6. Exercise and move for enjoyment** — not expressly for weight loss or calorie burning.

- 7. Notice how you feel** when you choose healthy, high-quality food. Take stock of your physical, mental, and emotional responses.

- 8. Keep caveats in mind.** Many integrative-health experts point out that the foods we most crave are sometimes those to which we are allergic or intolerant. If you have this sort of food "addiction," be aware that feeding it may make your cravings worse.

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