

## Meeting a Senior's Dietary Needs

As our loved ones age, their nutritional needs change, as do their abilities to tolerate various food textures and flavors. Dexterity challenges might make it more difficult to eat foods that crumble. Swallowing issues due to stroke or Parkinson's might make larger bites more challenging. Denture or jaw pain might make it tough to take smaller bites. Generally, our taste buds will age as well, making foods that used to be appealing seem bland or, conversely, overly spicy. Seniors left to their own devices may start to avoid the challenges of meal preparation altogether, shorting themselves on valuable nutrition.

While our loved ones may need fewer calories as they age, they specifically need more B vitamins, calcium, protein, and hydration. As we age, our ability to absorb nutrients decreases. Additionally, your senior may have varied nutritional requirements to help with medications or supplements they may be taking. It may be valuable to connect with a nutritionist to help guide food and nutrition choices.



### Foods to Choose

As you think through a revised meal plan for your loved one, ensure they have variety to address all their nutritional needs. It is important to make sure that the meals we make are easy for them to consume, simple to prepare, and appealing in both taste and smell. Some considerations include:



**Foods that are soft in texture** and easy to chew like scrambled eggs, oatmeal, beans, or mashed potatoes.



**Foods that are already bite sized** (no larger than 1 inch) – Consider the use of a food processor – not to turn the meals into mush but to reduce the size of all ingredients to bite sized chunks.



**Steamed vegetables** in a variety of colors. There is some truth to the “eat the rainbow” adage. Soups are also a good way to include more veggies.



**Meats that are skinless and boneless**, perhaps shredded or flaked, like cod, salmon, pulled pork or hamburger.



**Fruits that are soft and pre-cut** or blended into delicious smoothies – Add yogurt, milk, or supplements to smoothies to get some added nutrition without affecting taste.



**Natural seasonings** such as ginger, green onions, and garlic for added nutrition.

Source: [Chefs for Seniors](#), [A Place for Mom](#) and [Elderly Health Service](#) – Department of Health, Hong Kong

## Foods to Avoid

Foods that may be more difficult for your loved one to eat might include:



**Foods that are coarse or dry,** hard or stringy in texture.



**Foods that crumble easily** and are hard to pick up.



**Vegetables that are stringy or hard** to bite like celery, carrots, or kale, unless they're cut into smaller pieces.



**Overly salty seasonings** – the elderly are more easily dehydrated and salty foods will contribute to this.



**Fruits that are dried, hard or fibrous,** like dried apricots, apples or pears, unless they're cut into smaller pieces.



**Meats that are tough,** on the bone, or chewy, like ribs or squid.

Source: [Chefs for Seniors, A Place for Mom](#) and [Elderly Health Service – Department of Health, Hong Kong](#)



### Breakfast Ideas

- Scrambled eggs or egg whites. You can add diced onions, mushrooms, or chives.
- Fruit, such as sliced apple or pineapple, orange or grapefruit sections, grapes, or melon balls. A dollop of yogurt adds freshness and zest.
- Whole grain toast. Try apple butter, naturally sweetened jam, or a drizzle of honey instead of butter!



### Lunch Ideas

- Homemade tuna salad. Try using vegan or canola mayo and adding pine nuts or chopped cashews for added texture. Add curry seasoning for extra flavor.
- Green leafy salad with your favorite vegetables: tomatoes, cucumbers, scallions, olives, and avocado.
- Homemade soup. Start with vegetarian or chicken stock, then add your favorite vegetables and seasonings. Potatoes add texture, and squash or fresh corn add sweetness. A large batch can be frozen into individual portions for anytime use.



### Dinner Ideas

- Baked or broiled skinless chicken breast or fish fillet (tilapia, salmon, and tuna are delicious choices). Season with a squeeze of lemon and herbs such as rosemary or thyme.
- Potato, yam, or squash — baked or broiled. Baking them together with the meat in tin foil preserves the flavors and speeds the cooking time.
- Steamed or broiled vegetables such as broccoli, carrots, cauliflower, asparagus, beets, spinach, or kale. Choose different combinations in a variety of colors for rounded nutrition.

Source: [The Goodman Group](#)