



Caregiver's Answers, Topics, and Helpful Information

In an effort to continually assist caregivers in their search for pertinent information regarding eldercare, our Family Caregiver Support Coordinator addresses topics of most frequently asked questions via Caregiver's Answers, Topics and Helpful Information (CATHI). Additionally, caregivers are also invited to e-mail individual questions to the Family Caregiver Support Coordinator at caregiver2@senior-resources-guilford.org.

Dietary Changes as We Age

Dietary needs evolve as people age, and older adults need to know how to manage these changes to maintain their physical health and wellness. Dietary changes may be related to the normal aging process, medical conditions, or lifestyle. Nutrition is an important determinant of health in older adults. Older adults need to take an active role in shaping their diets and nutrition habits to ensure more energy, better disease prevention and quality of life. Nutritional status in older adults has been recognized in a variety of conditions such as cancer, heart disease, and dementia. Healthcare professionals can also help senior and their families create and implement healthy eating plans.

These plans often include:

Increase protein and fiber intake.

Protein and fiber are important nutrients for older adults. Food high in fiber can help maintain healthy digestive systems as we age and increasing protein intake can help seniors increase or maintain energy and strength.

Whole grains have multiple benefits.

Whole grains are also fiber-rich foods that not only aid the digestive process but promote healthy hearts for seniors. Cereal, rice and bread made with whole grains can easily be found at any grocery store and are able to provide several service choices to meet recommended daily requirements.

Calcium is a key component in maintaining bone strength.

Calcium can help prevent osteoporosis, especially when calcium intake is consistent. Preventing osteoporosis is critical for older adults, especially those that are at risk for falls.

Hydration is critical at any age.

Physical changes that occur with age make hydration more important for older adults. For those that are less inclined to drink water, a few alternatives are milk or juice. Additionally, hydrating foods include watermelon, cucumbers, and grapes.

If engaging in good eating habits is a struggle, there are steps seniors can take to ensure that they are getting proper nutrition. In addition to consulting a physician about diet or health concerns they might have; you can try the following tactics with your loved one to help get them back on the right track:

Making meals a social occasion.

Sharing a meal can be one of the most enjoyable ways to ensure someone is eating well. This can include making something healthy and delicious for others, or reaching out to people that love to cook healthy food and offering them some company at mealtimes.

Making healthy eating fit your budget.

Good food does not have to break the bank. A doctor or nutritionist can point you to budget friendly, nutritious food options. Maintaining a healthy lifestyle can save money on medical care in the future.

Shop for healthy foods.

Having a kitchen stocked with healthy snacks and meal options is one of the most important steps to maintaining a balanced diet.

Encourage people to ask for help.

If someone has concerns about their ability to plan healthy meals, shop for groceries or if they are just not getting the nutrition they need, please ask for help. In-home caregivers, delivery services such as Meals on Wheels, family, friends, and medical professionals can all help your loved one reach their nutrition goals.

6 Tips to get Seniors with no Appetite to Eat

1. Have a regular meal and snack schedule

Having a regular daily routine and serving food at roughly the same times every day helps their body be ready to eat at those times. Do not rely on your loved one's ability to feel their hunger (it declines with age) before giving them food.

2. Serve smaller portions of high nutrient foods

Some seniors feel overwhelmed if they see a large amount of food in front of them. Instead of a big plate, serve their food in smaller portions. You could even try switching their daily routine to 5 smaller meals instead of 3 larger ones.

Boost the healthy calories in those small servings by adding:

- Avocado
- Finely chopped meat, cheese, or eggs
- Olive oil
- Peanut or other nut butter
- Soft cheeses like ricotta or mascarpone

To save time, you can still cook food in normal or larger batches. Just store it in smaller individual containers so it is easy to reheat.

3. Stop using utensils

The frustration of not being able to use a spoon, fork, or knife could make your loved one not want to eat at all. To make it easier, serve foods that can be eaten without any utensils.

Some suggestions:

- Chicken strips or nuggets
- Fish sticks
- Steamed or raw veggies such as carrots, broccoli, bell pepper strips, or cucumbers
- Meatballs

4. Have plenty of easy-to-eat snacks on hand

Some seniors prefer to graze throughout the day rather than eat full meals. That is okay too. Keep plenty of healthy, delicious, easy-to-eat snacks available.

Unless your older adult has specific health issues, do not worry too much about fat or cholesterol. After all, the challenge is to get enough calories into them.

Some suggestions:

- Cheese sticks or string cheese
- Full-fat yogurt
- Diced fruit, fresh or packaged
- Cheese and crackers
- Peanut butter and crackers
- Whole chocolate milk

5. Make milkshakes or smoothies

If chewing is difficult or tiring, even with smaller pieces of food, consider serving liquids.

Some suggestions:

- Nutritious soups, enhanced with cream, olive oil, or pureed meats and veggies
- Healthy smoothies, add bananas, fruits, full-fat yogurt, or veggies like carrots and spinach
- Hot chocolate
- Full-fat milk
- Milkshakes, good quality ice cream is better than eating nothing

Warning: this is NOT a solution for those with swallowing issues.

6. Keep track of what works

Take notes so you can keep track of what foods your loved one enjoys, what they do not like, and what might be upsetting their stomach. You can also track what times of the day they are more willing to eat or when they have a better appetite.

Keeping track lets you experiment more with things that are working and avoid the things that are not working.

Getting Seniors who have no appetite to eat is huge a challenge. Be patient, be creative, keep experimenting, and do not get discouraged. Most of all, do not take their refusal to eat personally. Keep in mind, they are not rejecting you as a person.

The information in this article was adapted from: *Daily Caring, 6 ways to get seniors with no appetite to eat, 2019.*

The information in this article was adapted from: *Comfort Keepers, Dietary Changes as we age, September 23, 2019.*

If you would like to join our mailing list to learn more about programs and services available contact our Family Caregiver Support Coordinator at:
caregiver2@senior-resources-quilford.org

For referrals to community organizations in Guilford County that assist older adults and caregivers, contact Senior Resources of Guilford's SeniorLine at (336) 884-6981 in High Point, all other areas (336) 333-6981 or the Caregiver Support Coordinator, at (336) 373-4816 in Greensboro or (336) 883-3586 in High Point.

