

Maintaining a Healthy Weight

Maintaining a healthy weight as we age can help us lower our risk of Type 2 diabetes and heart disease, help us stay as pain free in our joints as possible, keep our immune system strong, and help fight various skin diseases and respiratory issues. So just what can you do to maintain a healthy weight while aging? Check out some of the suggestions below about stretching and stress reduction, physical activity, and healthy eating as we age!

Aim for 15 minutes of flexibility, balance, and stress relief activity. Yoga and tai chi help build strength in our fine muscles around our joints that help ensure we stay balanced while carrying out daily activities. They also help keep our core muscles strong, which in return keeps our spine straight and pain at bay. Yoga and tai chi also help improve flexibility of muscles throughout the whole body, and include focused breathing activities that help us manage our stress!



Aim for 30 minutes of weight-bearing and muscle-strengthening activity daily, and try to keep your heart rate up, keep it revving while being active! Burn calories, improve bone density, improve balance! Even low-impact activities such as walking, using the elliptical machine, or walking slowly upstairs in your house or at the mall can produce positive health benefits! If you can, mix in some higher-impact activity such as hiking, dancing, tennis, and/or stair climbing.

Avoid sitting for long periods of time! Get up and move. If you need to, set a timer each hour as a reminder to get up and do some laps around your living room, house, or block, or to do some stretching exercises!

Get stronger and healthier as you carry out daily activities:

- Walk to the mail box, don't drive!
- Park at the **back** of the parking lot, rather than close to the door, and add more steps to your goal of 10,000 per day!
- Don't lean on the basket in the grocery or big box store! Push the basket and *use your core muscles* to stay upright.
- When getting up from a chair or the couch, gently place your hands on your knees and push up with your legs to stand up – try not to use your arms to help you up, this will build strength in your legs!

Fill half your plate with colorful vegetables at each meal! Dark, leafy greens are nutrition powerhouses, so try to add more kale, broccoli, and spinach to your meals every day. Bright orange, red, and yellow vegetables, such as carrots, squash, bell peppers, and sweet potatoes should be part of your daily meals we well. For great ideas on how to “sneak” more veggies into your everyday foods, check out another Healthy Aging Tip Sheet at www.nrpa.org/Healthy-Aging-in-Parks.



Reduce snacking. As we age, we do not need to eat as much as we used to and calories are much harder to burn off! Snacking is something to consider dropping from our daily routines as we age! However, if you have to snack, seek out low-calorie, high-nutrition vegetables as snacks! Raw veggies such as baby carrots, cherry tomatoes, and celery sticks are super snacks that do not need much preparation. Think about veggie leftovers from the previous night’s supper as a super healthy snack! Try to avoid muffins, crackers, cookies, chips, and other high-calorie processed snack/junk foods.

Mix in a few servings of fruits each day - and mix up the variety that you consume. However, if you are overweight, you may consider focusing on vegetables not fruits, since fruits are high in sugar (even natural sugar is sugar and thus higher in calories!). Similarly, if you are diabetic, you may not want to consume fruits since they can negatively affect your blood sugar levels.



Go for lean proteins! Lower-calorie, lower-fat meat proteins, such as white poultry and seafood (fish, shrimp, etc.) have lots of protein to keep you going! Limit dark meat poultry, pork, and red meats to 1-2 times per week. Also consider plant-based proteins such as dried beans and peas, soy protein, nuts, and seeds – these are great ways to get protein every day!

Minimize grains and grain products, such as cereals, pastas, bakery goods, and breads. Even in their whole grain form, these are usually “extra” calories that we do not need – especially when our bodies are burning *fewer* calories each day as we get older – don’t put more into your body that won’t get burned off! If you are diabetic, grain-based foods will play havoc with your sugar levels, so consider avoiding them if you can.

Seek out “clean foods” as much as you can.

Clean foods have been grown, or produced and processed, in ways that are as natural as possible, without tons of chemical-based fertilizers and/or pesticides, added colors, preservatives, or other additives. Some of these additives put into foods are those we may not think about as being “bad,” but still need to be minimized in our diets, such as: added sodium (heart disease trigger), sugar



(obesity/diabetes trigger), fat (obesity trigger), and/or high fructose corn syrup (obesity/diabetes trigger). Check out the “Clean Foods Tip Sheet” for more information at www.nrpa.org/Healthy-Aging-in-Parks.

Reach for water. Try some infused water, unsweetened tea or unsweetened coffee and try to avoid beverages high in sugar such as 100% juice (yes, even if it is 100% juice it still is primarily sugar!), sports drinks, sweet tea, soda, wine, and beer – all of these beverages are high in calories, which are much harder to burn off as we get older. Stay hydrated by drinking water throughout the day – consuming water continually throughout the day helps our organs and skin work more efficiently.