

Foods after 50

A well-balanced diet is even more important after 50. David Hughes suggests foods to help reduce the major disease threats

ONCE WE progress past the age of 50, should we be choosing our food with more care? For a number of reasons, the answer is a definite 'yes.'

For one thing, as we age our metabolisms slow down. That means we burn up fewer calories, so eating the same amount of food as we always did means we start to put on weight. Becoming overweight is a risk factor for a number of illnesses, including diabetes, heart disease and dementia, and it will also put more pressure on the joints.

Some foods may also be useful in helping prevent and alleviate the kind of ailments that can creep up on us in later life. Hard evidence that a particular food will prevent a specific illness is still lacking, but existing research, anecdotal reports and traditional usage supports the idea that – for better or worse – we are at least partly what we eat.

The Arthritic Association, for example, states "research has shown that a good diet can help people manage their arthritis – and that a poor diet can make it worse."

Download the free booklet *Healthy Living for Strong Bones* from the National Osteoporosis Society website: (www.nos.org.uk), Helpline, tel: 0845 450 0230.

Quantity and quality

Portion control, along with a healthy, balanced diet, is the key to food health after 50, according to Sioned Quirke of the British Dietetic Association, but adjusting portions doesn't mean anything too drastic. "It's just being aware of portion size, especially starchy carbohydrates because they can be so high in calories," says Sioned. "So it may mean taking into account your activity level compared with your portion sizes; and there are things that can help – having a larger portion of fruit or vegetables and forgoing an extra potato."

Exercise

While food portion size usually remains the same as we get older, exercise often tails off, but regular exercise slashes the risk of heart disease, cancer, stroke, arthritis and Alzheimer's.

The strategy here, Sioned suggests, is to adjust the type of exercise. "It might not be the same form of exercise as previously, but you still need to do some to build muscle mass. It's not just how many calories you burn during the exercise, it's that you're maintaining muscle mass. And muscle actually requires calories to stay there, unlike fat, which doesn't use any calories at all. So by doing regular activity, you're naturally burning off more calories, even when you're asleep."

Ingredients that could help avoid the big-hitting diseases

Cancer

- **Green tea:** Rich in polyphenols, which reduce tumour growth, and a powerful antioxidant
- **Turmeric:** The most powerful natural anti-inflammatory.
- **Garlic, onions, leeks, shallots, chives:** Regulate blood sugar levels, which reduces the growth of cancer cells
- **Mushrooms:** Stimulate the immune system
- **Broccoli, cabbages, cauliflower and other cruciferous vegetables:** Contain anti-cancer molecules (but don't boil them)
- **Carrots, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, and all bright-coloured fruit and veg:** Contain Vitamin A and lycopene, which can inhibit growth of cancer cells
- **Rosemary, thyme, oregano, basil and mint:** All rich in essential oils which reduce the spread of cancer cells
- **Citrus fruits – oranges, tangerines, lemons, and others:** Contain anti-inflammatory flavonoids.

Go easy on: alcohol, salt, red meat.

SOURCE: ANTICANCER: A NEW WAY OF LIFE BY DR DAVID SERVAN-SHREIBER (MICHAEL JOSEPH £14.99, ISBN 978-0718156848)



Osteoporosis

- **Dairy products:** Good sources of calcium
- **Fatty fish such as salmon, mackerel, tuna, sardines:** Sources of Vitamin D
- **Kale, turnip greens, sweet potatoes:** Calcium
- **Spinach, beet greens, artichokes, sweet potatoes:** Magnesium
- **Papaya, oranges, bananas, prunes:** Potassium
- **Red peppers, green peppers, oranges, broccoli, strawberries, brussels sprouts:** Vitamin C.

■ **Avoid:** too much caffeine – drinking more than three cups of coffee per day may decrease calcium absorption and contribute to bone loss.

SOURCE: US NATIONAL OSTEOPOROSIS FOUNDATION

Arthritis

- **Green vegetables**
- **Omega-3 fatty acids:** in walnuts, flaxseeds, salmon, sardines, mackerel
- **Broccoli**
- **Vitamin D:** in oily fish, see above
- **Olive oil**
- **Ginger**
- **Vitamin C-rich foods**
- **Blackberries, raspberries, strawberries:** for anthocyanins, antioxidants that may reduce inflammation
- **Sweet peppers, squash, papayas, apricots:** for beta-cryptoxanthin, which may help prevent arthritis.

Go easy on: red meat, dairy, saturated fats and sugar.

■ See also the Arthritic Association's Conquest Diet, tel: 0800 652 3188, website: (www.arthriticassociation.org).

SOURCE: HEALTHLINE

Alzheimer's

- **Kale, spinach, broccoli, peppers, onion and other dark-skinned fruits and vegetables:** High in antioxidants, which may help protect brain cells
- **Likewise, prunes, raisins, blueberries, strawberries, oranges, red grapes and cherries**
- **Omega-3 sources,** including halibut, mackerel, salmon, trout and tuna
- **Nuts, including almonds and walnuts,** are a good source of Vitamin E. Vitamin E, Vitamin C and folate may be



important in lowering the risk of developing Alzheimer's

- **Olive oil**
- **Sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds:** contain zinc, choline, Vitamin E
- **Asparagus, tomatoes, carrots, beets:** contain Vitamin A, folate and iron that help with cognition
- **Legumes – beans, peas and lentils:** contain choline, good for brain function.

Avoid: saturated fats and trans fats, which double the risk of Alzheimer's; go easy on sugar and salt; and favour baking or grilling food instead of frying.

Jess Smith of the Alzheimer's Society said: "There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that a Mediterranean diet and regular exercise can significantly cut down our risk of developing dementia."

■ **Further information from the Alzheimer's Society, website:** (www.alzheimers.org.uk), Helpline, tel: : 0300 222 11 22.

■ **See also:** (www.alzdiscovery.org/cognitive-vitality/nutrition-natural-product).



Heart disease

- **Salmon or other fish rich in omega-3 fatty acids:** Which lowers risk of irregular heart beat and plaque build-up in arteries
- **Oatmeal:** High in soluble fibre, which can lower cholesterol
- **Strawberries, blueberries:** Three servings a week can lower heart attack risk by 32 per cent. Packed with antioxidants which may lower blood pressure
- **Dark chocolate:** At least 70 per cent cocoa. May help with blood pressure and inflammation
- **Citrus fruits:** High in vitamin C, a good immune-booster
- **Potatoes:** Rich in potassium, which can lower blood pressure, and a good source of fibre
- **Tomatoes:** High in lycopene, which may remove 'bad' cholesterol
- **Nuts:** High in fibre, and some (such as walnuts) are good for omega-3 fatty acids
- **Beans, lentils, peas and other legumes:** May help control blood sugar levels, and are good source of protein.

Go easy on: processed meats; refined and processed carbohydrates; soft drinks and other sugary beverages; salt.

■ **The British Heart Foundation has a free Time To Eat Well booklet, a portion size calculator, and other helpful advice,** tel: 0300 330 33221, website: (www.bhf.org.uk).

Find out more

- **Further information on food groups, portion sizes and balanced nutrition:** (www.nhs.uk/livewell/goodfood)
- **Try the healthy eating self-assessment on NHS Choices:** (www.nhs.uk)
- **British Dietetic Association for food factsheets written by dietitians** (www.bda.uk.com)
- **Sioned Quirke:** (www.quirkynutrition.co.uk).