

A healthy handful

As one gets older, it's important to choose healthy foods and enjoy eating as a social activity that you can look forward to.

An individualised approach to one's wellbeing is especially important during stressful times when there have been plenty of eventful, unprecedented changes around us. Our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing all need support, and a one size fits all approach is not always helpful.

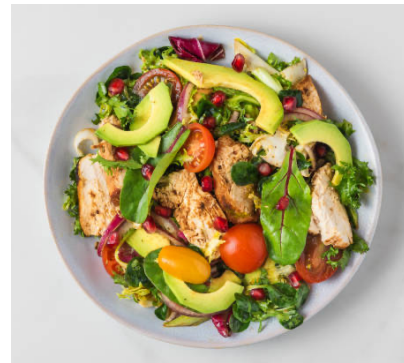
Entering the senior phase of one's life journey is such a privilege – but it brings with it a range of unique challenges. For some, they're fortunate enough to have their physical bodies and minds remain strong and vital. While for others physical strength becomes a challenge, and their mental clarity is not what it used to be.

Many of the elderly find it increasingly more difficult to cook for themselves – they find themselves on their own after decades of looking after a family – and it becomes just too much work to cook for one person.

Despite these individual differences, the common thread among most people in their senior years is that everything is slowing down.

In this article I would like to address three easy ways to ensure that eating a healthy plate of food is both affordable and manageable in most circumstances.

The first way to ensure that one is eating a balanced meal is to look at your hand – the palm to be precise. A handy little measuring guide is to imagine the piece of chicken, fish, beef, lamb or vegetable protein fitting nicely inside the palm. This general guide will ensure that a person is getting sufficient protein into their body every day.



Eating too little protein happens more often as one gets older. For many people it's due to expense, dental changes or health conditions that make swallowing difficult. However, the need for adequate protein is important for the build and repair work that happens every day on our bodies.

Some easy and affordable options to ensure that one is eating sufficient protein is to include scrambled eggs at breakfast rather than cereal. Protein at breakfast is always a good choice as it helps to regulate blood sugars and gives individuals a solid start to their day. Over time, combining protein and a good fat such as butter on a whole wheat slice of toast will provide an added bonus of improved energy.

If a nice warm bowl of oats porridge is preferred for breakfast, one can add some protein by mixing in a teaspoon of chia seeds, half a mashed banana and honey to sweeten. Do remember however, to add extra water/milk when you cook the porridge as the chia seeds absorb the liquid and swell.

Another idea is to drink a daily smoothie made with raw nuts, half a banana, a three quarter cup of milk of your choice (plant based/nut-based milks can be used), a quarter teaspoon of ground cinnamon and a teaspoon of honey. Blend with two to three ice blocks and you have a delicious, creamy breakfast/lunch or dinner. This recipe makes enough for one adult.

The second way to ensure that one is eating a balanced meal is to look at the plate when it has food placed on it. What is taking up most of the space? Is it a good mix of colourful vegetables such as spinach, silver beet, carrot, butternut, pumpkin? Or is it potato, rice, pasta and bread? Ideally the plate should be colourful, nutritious and appetising.

This can be a challenge as you get older – so what are some easy ways to do this?

If one is still living independently at home – consider making a large crockpot of soup filled with vegetables once a week. Add some barley (if you can tolerate grains) and you will have several meals that can be frozen and used at a later stage.

Other ways to make use of frozen vegetables is to slightly steam them. One can then either pop a fried egg over the top or have it with half a tin of tuna, salmon or mackerel.

The third and final way to ensure that one is eating a balanced meal is to consider healthy fats.

Looking again at one's hand – use the big thumb to gauge the quantity of fat that should be consumed daily.



Examples of 'good fats' that are easy to include are butter on toast with scrambled eggs, or drizzling olive oil or avocado oil onto salad or roasted veggies. And if one is able to chew and tolerate them – nuts and seeds provide wonderful, affordable sources of both protein and fat. And let's not forget cold fish such as fresh salmon or tinned mackerel. Avocado is also a wonderful source of good fat, and it is also packed with other vitamins and minerals.

Including these three easy daily reminders of adequate protein, plenty of vegetables and moderate amounts of good fats will provide the body with the right amount of nutrients needed to ensure that things don't slow down too quickly.

These simple tips are examples of the down-to-earth practical ways clinical nutritionists help all members of society.

The Clinical Nutrition Association (CAN) is a professional body for registered clinical nutritionists throughout New Zealand. Our aim is to help individuals of the public from all ages to receive nutritional and lifestyle recommendations based on their specific needs.

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