

FITNESS

How do I... Eat optimally as I grow older?

Our nutritional needs change as we age but it's easy to adapt and stay strong

Anita Bean

Your body changes over time, and so do your nutritional needs. The major age-related changes that may affect nutritional requirements include a decline in aerobic capacity and muscle mass, both of which reduce your resting metabolic rate — the rate at which your body burns calories. Add to this a drop in training volume and it becomes more challenging to stay lean. To maintain your current weight in your 50s, you may need about 200 fewer calories a day than you did during your 20s and 30s.

However, you'll need more protein than you did during your younger years. Starting in our mid-30s, we begin to lose around eight per cent of our muscle mass per decade.

"Muscles become less responsive to the anabolic effects of protein and exercise," explains Oliver Witard, researcher and senior lecturer at the University of Stirling.

Researchers recommend, for active people, a daily protein intake of 1.2-1.5g per kilo of body weight per day to help preserve muscle mass and strength.

"Our research suggests this should be in the region of 0.4g per kilo of bodyweight per meal — that's 30g for a 75kg cyclist — which is considerably higher than the recommendation for younger athletes [0.25g/kg BW/ day]."

Increasing your intake of good fats is also a good idea, according to Witard: "There is convincing evidence that, in terms of preserving muscle mass, omega-3s become more important as we get older."

It's also important to take on enough fluids. Our perception of thirst decreases with age, as does our sweat rate and the ability of our kidneys to concentrate urine. As a rule of thumb, an intake of 400-800ml per hour prevents dehydration.

Low vitamin D is a particular problem as we get older, as the skin's capacity to produce vitamin

D from UV light diminishes. "Low levels may reduce muscle function and strength and impair performance," warns Witard. Getting adequate levels through sun exposure, diet or supplements is crucial for optimal performance. The best dietary sources include oily fish, egg yolk and liver.

Essential points

- You may require fewer calories as you get older
- You'll need more protein to offset age-related muscle loss and 'anabolic resistance'
- Consuming omega-3 fats and vitamin D becomes more important
- Thirst becomes a less reliable indicator of your fluid needs

Do: eat 30-40g protein at each meal. Get this from a medium-sized (125g) chicken or turkey breast, a (150g) fish fillet, one small tin (120g) tuna, four large eggs, or 400ml whey protein shake.

Do: fill up on low-calorie, high-volume foods like vegetables and fruits to maximise your diet's nutritional density and water and fibre content.

Do: estimate how much fluid you need to drink during exercise by calculating your sweat rate — the difference between your pre- and post-workout weight. Divide your hourly sweat rate by four to give you a guideline for how much to drink every 15 minutes.

Don't: eat less than 20 per cent of your calories in fat form, otherwise you risk deficient intakes of fat-soluble vitamins and essential fatty acids. Aim for mono and unsaturated fats from oily fish, avocados, nuts, seeds and olive oil.

Do: refuel with protein and carbohydrate within 30-60 minutes of completing any long or hard ride. As you grow older, recovery from hard workouts takes longer.

Do: boost vitamin D and omega-3 — aim for one portion of salmon, mackerel or sardines a week, or one tablespoon of flaxseeds, chia seeds or walnuts daily.

Don't: go to bed on empty. Studies at Maastricht University found that muscle protein synthesis was 22 per cent higher in athletes who consumed 40g of casein protein after a resistance workout and before sleep.

Don't: go overboard with supplements. High doses of vitamins C and E may actually reduce beneficial adaptations to training.

YOU SAY

I've stopped eating Nutella straight from the jar!

Craig White

I'm now very biased towards a veggie diet plan and I do several days vegan each month. I also carefully control carbs.

Simon Walker

Eat breakfast. When I was young, I could wake up after a night of drinking, have a cup of coffee and go. Not anymore.

Matthew Reschke

I've cut down on desserts and fried foods.

Gretta Long

I ask for a thinner slice of cake at the cafe.

Jennifer Boyle

Things to try this week

High5 IsoGel Xtreme

Already experienced in creating gels, electrolyte tablets and caffeinated energy drinks, High5 has launched its most potent such product to date. The 60ml IsoGel Xtreme contains 100mg of caffeine, is available in tropical flavour and has a thinner consistency than most rival gels, so you don't need to gulp water to wash it down. As well as the caffeine, it contains 23g carbohydrate, so provides a useful dose of energy too.

www.highfive.co.uk £31.25 box of 25 gels



Inchworm stretch

Tight hamstrings and glutes are common among cyclists, but a pre-ride dynamic warm-up can help loosen muscles. One of the best stretches for this is the inchworm stretch.

- Begin in the press-up position but with your feet shoulder width apart.
- Slowly walk your feet towards your hands with tiny shuffle steps, which will raise the mid-section of your body up into the air.
- Keep your legs straight until you start to feel a stretch in your hamstring and glute muscles — don't push to the point where you feel pain.
- Once you have reached your peak stretch, hold for a few seconds before slowly walking your hands out to return to the starting position.
- Repeat the exercise six times without standing up in between repetitions.



Ginger

As you increase your weekly mileage in preparation for the racing season, you inevitably put your body under greater stress, which can temporarily weaken your immune system. Ginger may help protect the body when the immune system is suppressed, since it has anti-oxidant and anti-inflammatory properties. If you don't like the flavour, you can always take ginger extract tablets.

