

Special Diet Considerations for Seniors

If you suffer from any medical condition, please check with your physician before starting a new diet plan. Pending approval from your physician, below are a few relevant points to consider.

Cardiovascular Disease

If high cholesterol or a history of heart disease is an issue, avoid diets that encourage you to frequently consume animal products. Only animal products contain cholesterol, and they are the primary sources of saturated fats -- two dietary components that you need to keep to a minimum. Make sure the diet includes high quantities of fruits and vegetables, as they contain an arsenal of phyto-chemicals that may help keep your heart healthy. Also, you need folate and vitamins B6 and B12 from food or supplements. This trio of "B's" has been shown to control homocysteine levels in the blood which increase the risk of clogged arteries and heart disease.

Breast Cancer

Though it's far from proven, some experts believe that women at risk for breast cancer should not consume soy products. Soy is a rich source of isoflavonoids, which are naturally occurring compounds that produce an estrogen-like action in the body. Some tumors are estrogen-dependent and require the hormone to survive. Too much estrogen could increase the risk. Though the "proof" so far comes only from animal and lab studies, some experts say, "why risk it"?

Constipation

If constipation is an issue for you, avoid diets that discourage the consumption of carbohydrates, such as high-fiber whole grains, or that limit your intake of fruits and vegetables. Try to consume 21 to 30 grams of fiber a day from the diet plan you choose.

Diabetes

Don't tempt fate by trying an unbalanced diet plan that emphasizes one food or food group over another. Choose a diet plan that includes enough -- but not too much -- protein, carbohydrates, and fat. Because diabetes increases your risk for heart disease, select a diet that emphasizes heart-healthy monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats, and includes a healthy dose of soluble fiber from beans, peas, lentils, oats, fruits, and vegetables. These foods will help keep blood sugar and blood cholesterol under control.

Gallstones

Make sure you plan on sticking with your diet and maintaining your weight loss. Research shows that "weight cyclers," also known as yo-yo dieters, are putting themselves at risk for developing gallstones. If you already suffer from gallstones, you could make matters worse.

High Blood Pressure

If your blood pressure tends to be high, your risk for a heart attack or stroke increases. The diet that offers the best protection against high blood pressure includes low fat dairy foods and large amounts of fruits and vegetables. The key nutrients to focus on are calcium, potassium, and magnesium. And go easy on the salt.

Kidney Disease

There are many different kinds of kidney disease, so it's best to check with your doctor before you try any new diet plan. But in general, if you have kidney troubles, don't consume too much protein. That means you should steer clear of diet plans that emphasize eating meat, fish, and poultry. People with kidney disease should drink plenty of fluids to decrease the risk of developing kidney stones and bladder cancer.

Osteoporosis

Calcium and vitamin D are vital to the prevention of this debilitating, bone-robbing disease. Choose a diet that includes significant amounts of those two bone-building nutrients. The diet should not be heavy on protein or sodium, since both can leech the calcium from your bones, leaving them weak, brittle, and prone to fractures.