

Senior Nutrition: How to Make Food More Appealing and Increase the Appetite of Your Elderly Loved One

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“Man, I’m *starving!*” “What’s for lunch?” “Isn’t it time to eat already?”

Most of us have no problem eating three—or more!—meals a day. Far from having issues with appetite, sometimes it can feel it has control over *us*. The silver lining to this is, of course, that we get the necessary calories and nutrients to keep us alive and thriving.

Older adults may not be so lucky with their appetite. It’s not uncommon for elderly adults to lose part of their appetite as they age.¹ Once their physician has ruled out a more serious reason for the decrease in appetite, it’s time to get creative about improving senior nutrition.

Tips for Stimulating an Older Adult’s Appetite

- **Spice things up.** Using stronger or more exotic seasoning can be a great way to get your loved one interested in food again. While you should check first with their physician, there are a number of things you can put in dishes to increase flavor. This is especially helpful if your loved one is craving a replacement to flavors found in fat, sugar, and other forbidden additives because of a health condition. Try seasoning dishes with garlic, onions, scallions, turmeric, cumin, curry, and red pepper. For a dessert-like taste, go for ginger, cinnamon, nutmeg, and cloves.
- **Don’t fill up on fluids.** It’s easy for those with poor appetites to get full simply by drinking too much liquid, either at meals or in between. Encourage your

loved one to take small sips throughout the day so that dehydration is not an issue. Otherwise, avoid big glasses at meal or snack time.

- **Rev up the nutrients – not the portions.** Large portions often look daunting to those with poor appetites. Fortunately, there are many things you can do to make meals and snacks more calorie and nutrient-dense without increasing their size. Heart-healthy extras like avocado, peanut butter, olive oil, granola bars, and protein shakes may be tasty options.²
- **Stick to the schedule.** Hunger and thirst signals are strongest when they're anticipated, and the easiest way to get people to anticipate things is to schedule them. Have mealtimes at regular intervals, and try not to deviate from them too much.
- **Make it social.** For older adults, eating by themselves is often a depressing affair. That alone may be enough to cause a reduction in appetite. If there's no one who can be with your senior at mealtimes, such as a family member or home health aide, check out your local senior center, and get a home care agency to provide transportation there.
- **Get moving.** The main reason we have an appetite at all is because we burn calories through our daily activities that need to be replaced. Older adults often don't perform the same activities they used to thanks to reduced mobility. This leads to fewer calories burned, and therefore less of a *desire* for calories. Encourage your loved one to move around during the day as safely as possible. Even a walk around the block once or twice with a home care worker can make a difference.

- **Try an appetite stimulant.** If none of the suggestions above lead to improvement, it may be time to discuss an appetite stimulant or supplement with your loved one's physician. Stimulants are available by prescription, but supplements such as shakes and meal bars can be bought in stores.

Consult an Expert in Senior Nutrition

The tips above are just a small sample of the things that can be done to increase senior nutrition. Your loved one may also benefit from an in-home consultation with an expert, such as a [geriatric nutritionist](#). If preparing foods is a problem for you or your loved one due to a physical condition or time constraints, a few hours a week with a home health aide can do wonders for an elderly person's nutrition and overall wellness. Whatever you decide, helping an older adult increase a low appetite is an important investment in their future well-being.

If you are unsure of how to best help an aging loved one, the trained and compassionate staff at the Institute on Aging is here to help you make that decision and get the best at-home care for the older adult in your life. [Contact us](#) to find out more.

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