



**DEPARTMENT OF
PUBLIC HEALTH &
HUMAN SERVICES**

March 2026 Nutrition Article National Nutrition Month – Nutrition for Older Adults

March is National Nutrition Month, which began in 1973 by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (AND), the leading organization of food and nutrition professionals. This month-long campaign is designed to spread the message that making informed food choices and developing sound eating habits is the key to a healthy life.

The AND's mission centers on well-being and optimal nutrition for everyone. Its members, registered dietitian nutritionists (RDNs), are recognized for their expertise and celebrate their profession on Registered Dietitian Nutritionist Day, observed on March 14.

What separates RDNs from other nutrition and wellness professionals is their level of education, required medical and community internships, AND recognition and certification, and access to first-hand, science-based information. They are responsible for spreading the message that getting credible, accurate information is important because nutrition myths create confusion and lead to poor choices.

The ever-growing health-consciousness in America has led to a cacophony of misinformation that has changed how we live well. With that said, it is important to seek out a trusted RDN professional who can simplify the basics of nutrition into edible bites for consumers to chew on.

Nutrition shouldn't be confusing or so rigid that people struggle to adopt healthier eating patterns. Just as some doctors, mechanics, or electricians deliver higher-quality work than others, the same is true for nutrition professionals. Instead of making informed choices, many of us bounce from one new diet to the next, trying detoxes and cutting out nutrient-dense foods in the name of health. When it comes to weight loss and other lifestyle-related chronic diseases, different professional camps often promote competing approaches. Below are a few philosophical points to consider when deciding whom to trust for nutrition advice.

The New Dietary Guidelines

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGAs) are updated every five years to guide Americans at every stage of life – from birth through older adulthood – on what and how much to eat for lifelong health. The DGAs highlight quality food groups such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, varied protein sources, and dairy for their nutritional value. At the same time, it's important to recognize that nearly 70% of what's available in the food supply isn't truly food, so choosing wisely matters most.

The DGAs offer evidence-based recommendations that support overall health and reduce the risk of chronic disease. Rather than focusing on single nutrients or labeling foods as "good" or "bad," they emphasize building a balanced eating pattern over time.

For older adults, the newly released 2025–2030 DGAs add a few important shifts. While the core message still centers on healthy eating patterns, the updated guidance highlights the importance of prioritizing quality protein at each meal, choosing full-fat dairy, eating fruits and vegetables throughout the day, incorporating healthy fats, consuming whole grains in their most wholesome forms, limiting alcohol, and reducing intake of highly processed foods and those high in added sweeteners – including alternatives.

Real Food Only

What is in a food matters most when determining whether it's healthy. Real food contains everything nature designed it to have. But, with 70% of Americans eating a diet dominated by ultra-processed food products, it's not surprising that more than 70% also live with at least one chronic disease. In short, you are what you eat – and no one wants to be cheap, easy, or fake.

To determine if a food is "real" (aka: healthy), look to the ingredients first and foremost. Yes, before you look at calories or fat or carbs. If you recognize all the foods on the list (basically, if you wanted to, you could make it yourself), then it's real food. If not, you are purchasing and consuming an ultra-processed food product that contains synthetic ingredients available only to food manufacturers.

These are ingredients the body does not recognize (as they're not naturally located in foods) and will wreak havoc over time. There are over 10,000 synthetic ingredients, 9 coloring agents, and over 17 alternative sweeteners allowed in food products lining supermarket shelves. Solution: Eat more real food, fewer ultra-processed food products, and start preparing your own meals and snacks. Be in control of your food, and you'll be in control of your health.

Eat Despite Lacking Hunger Signals

A balanced diet is crucial for older adults as it supports energy, vitality, and overall wellness. It helps maintain muscle mass, supports immune system function, and enhances cognitive abilities. In short, older Americans benefit greatly from a balanced diet because food is medicine that increases our physical and psychological well-being by supplying the body and brain with necessary nutrients to promote and maintain health.

That said, it is quite common for older Americans (as confirmed by their caregivers) to not eat enough because they do not experience the same hunger signals as younger people.

This can become a problem over time when you don't take in enough nourishment to maintain quality health. Celebrating quality foods you enjoy can promote healthy aging, but many reasons can make it hard to feel hunger, including health issues, financial constraints, mobility and transportation challenges, and social isolation. Establishing a routine with specific mealtimes can help stimulate and automate hunger.

Choosing quality, wholesome foods can also supply the body with appropriate nourishment without overeating. Focusing on quality sources of protein – meat you cook yourself, eggs, nuts, seeds, beans, and nut butters – helps minimize the natural loss of muscle mass that comes with aging. A palm-sized piece of meat (about the size of a deck of cards), such as steak, fish, chicken, or pork, is enough for a meal.

Finally, getting into the routine of experimenting with seasonal foods, like fruits and vegetables, can help restore the enjoyment of food that may have been lost over the years due to the ultra-processed products that dominate our food system.

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Recipe of the Month

Super Easy Shepard's Pie

Overseeing your own delicious meals ensures you have fiber, protein, and no synthetic ingredients.

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 small onion, chopped
- 1 Tbsp olive oil
- 1 pound ground beef
- 2 Tbsp dried parsley
- 1 tsp rosemary, thyme, and salt
- $\frac{3}{4}$ tsp black pepper
- 1 Tbsp Worcestershire sauce
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 Tbsp flour
- 3 Tbsp tomato paste
- 1 cup broth (your choice)
- 1 cup peas, frozen
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup corn, frozen
- 2 large potatoes, cubed
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup half-and-half cream
- 4 Tbsp butter
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp garlic powder
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup parmesan cheese, shredded.



INSTRUCTIONS:

1. In a pan, sauté onion in olive oil.
2. Add ground beef, parsley, rosemary, thyme, salt, and pepper, and cook until the meat is done. Drain.
3. Add Worcestershire sauce and garlic, and cook another minute.
4. Add flour and tomato paste and stir until mixed well.
5. Add broth, peas, and corn.
6. Bring to a boil, then simmer and stir for 5 minutes.
7. Pour mixture into a 9x9-inch baking dish.
8. In a pot, boil potatoes until soft, drain, and place back into the pot.
9. Add half-and-half cream, butter, and garlic powder to potatoes and mix/mash.
10. Mix in parmesan cheese.
11. Place potato mixture on top of beef mixture in baking dish.
12. Bake at 400°F for 30 minutes uncovered.
13. Let cool for 10 minutes before serving.