



DEPARTMENT OF
**PUBLIC HEALTH &
HUMAN SERVICES**

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Muscle Loss in Older Adults

General muscle loss refers broadly to the natural decline in muscle mass and strength that occurs with aging. Sarcopenia, otherwise known as age-related muscle loss, means the gradual loss of muscle mass, strength, and physical performance that can significantly impact function and independence in adults.

Sarcopenia increases the risk of falls and disability because older adults lose muscle strength and function. This condition gets worse over time and involves the loss of skeletal muscle mass as people age. It typically begins around age 30, with a gradual decline of up to 5% per decade, according to experts. Sarcopenia becomes more pronounced after age 60 and affects up to 50% of adults over age 80.

Sarcopenia differs from general muscle loss because it involves a more serious decline in muscle function and may require targeted intervention to prevent complications. Both sarcopenia and general muscle loss may improve with specific nutrition, physical activity, and overall self-care.

Stats

The older adult population, 65 years or older, has increased over time. According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), an estimated 524 million people were aged 65 or older globally in 2010, representing 8% of the world's population. By 2050, NIH estimates that number will nearly triple to about 1.5 billion, including 400 million people who will be 80 or older.

As the population ages, diseases and conditions that commonly affect older adults will also increase.

Aging research estimates the prevalence of sarcopenia about 11% among men and women living independently; about 23% among men and women who have been hospitalized; and more than 50% among men and more than 30% among women living in nursing homes.

Additional research shows that people with sarcopenia have a 58% higher risk of fracture than people without it. Furthermore, the risk of disability can be almost 4.6 times higher in older adults with sarcopenia.

Protein Importance

Protein is an essential macronutrient that supports the structure, function, and regulation of the body's tissues and systems. Proteins are the body's building blocks, providing structure to muscles, bones, skin, hair, nails, tendons, ligaments, and blood plasma.

Adequate protein intake is essential for older adults to maintain muscle mass, strength, and overall health, helping prevent frailty, falls, and slower recovery from illness. As people age, they naturally lose muscle. Protein plays a key role in preserving lean muscle mass. Without sufficient protein, older adults are more likely to experience weakness, slower healing, and decreased quality of life.

Older adults generally require more protein. Experts recommend at least 1 gram of protein per kilogram of weight (1 kg = 2.2 lbs). For example, an older adult weighing 175 pounds weighs about 80kg and would need about 80 grams of protein per day.

Older adults should aim for no more than about 30 grams of protein at a time. For example, 3 to 4 ounces of cooked steak has about 30 grams of protein.

Protein quality also matters. Older adults benefit most from quality protein from meats, eggs, nuts, seeds, beans, and nut butters. Consumers cannot always verify the safety of protein shakes, protein bars, and new protein food products. As a dietitian, I encourage older Americans to eat quality protein at each meal and snack.

Overall Nourishment Needs

Regardless of who you are, where you're from, or how old you are, nourishment is key to maintaining function as you age. Humans need food to live, and most can survive only three to six weeks without it.

Modern food choices can make healthy eating feel confusing, and often it seems that everyone is a nutrition expert, except nutrition experts. But eating hasn't changed as much as the food system has. Our bodies need nutrients from food, in particular carbohydrates, fats, proteins, vitamins, minerals, and water. Food quality determines how well the body can use these nutrients.

All foods, including processed or ultra-processed foods, provide fuel from carbs, protein, and fat. But processing and added ingredients can reduce the nutrients that help keep our bodies healthy.

According to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, older adults need daily quality foods from the five food groups: fruits, veggies, dairy, animal and plant-based proteins, and whole grains. The key is choosing wholesome foods that provide essential nutrients without synthetic ingredients that diminish quality.

Physical Activity

Staying active as you age helps maintain muscle mass, which is important for all daily activities. Regular physical activity, regardless of duration or intensity, helps manage and reduce risk of chronic disease, improves mood, and enhances mobility and strength. Better physical condition also makes therapeutic and enjoyable activities easier to do. Choosing a variety of activities based on ability can make physical activity more enjoyable and reduces the risk of injury. Find out more about what's possible at ncoa.org/article/exercise-programs-that-promote-senior-fitness

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Recipe of the Month

Creamy Greek Yogurt Egg Bites

INGREDIENTS

- 8 large eggs
- ½ cup plain Greek yogurt
- ½ cup shredded cheese
- ¼ tsp each of salt and pepper
- ¼ c diced bell pepper
- ¼ cup chopped spinach
- 2 tsp diced onion
- Olive oil or nonstick spray for greasing

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 325°F
2. Blend eggs, Greek yogurt, cheese, salt, and pepper until smooth
3. Grease a muffin tin with spray or oil
4. Pour egg mixture into each cavity, filling $\frac{3}{4}$ full.
5. Bake 18 to 22 minutes until set
6. Cool 5 minutes, loosen edges, and remove

Store in the fridge for four to five days.

Freeze up to three months.

Reheat in the microwave for 20 to 30 seconds.

