

DIETARY GUIDELINES FOR OLDER AUSTRALIANS

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Public health and clinical medicine have done much to improve the health of older Australians, those over the age of 65 years during this century. In Australia a person of age 65 can now expect to live, on average, a further 19.6 years for women and 15.8 years for men. During this extended lifespan appropriate nutrition is important to minimise morbidity and to maintain an independent lifestyle for as long as possible. The cost of health care increase steeply with age and appropriate nutrition has the potential for reducing the numbers of admissions, shortening hospital stays and of improving outcome from community managed care. Examples would include a reduction in the incidence of falls and fractures in those with good muscle mass and fewer fractures due to osteoporosis.

The proportion of older Australians (above 65 years) is increasing as shown below:

1976	9% (1.2 million)	16% of elderly over 80 years
1996	12% (2.2 million)	20% of elderly over 80 years
2016	16% (3.5million)	25% of elderly over 80 years

The draft guidelines are framed in a positive way and are ranked in approximate order of importance. An issue under much discussion in Australia and overseas is the use of nutrition supplements, in the older age groups. Is it difficult for older persons, who usually have a reduced energy expenditure (and hence reduced food intake), to achieve a sufficient intake of all nutrients, without the use of supplements. However if energy expenditure is maintained at a higher level it is possible. Thus in the provision of good nutrition for older Australians, energy expenditure and the maintenance of muscle mass becomes very important and is emphasised in the guidelines.

The Draft Dietary Guidelines for Older Australians

1. Enjoy a variety of nutritious foods.
2. Keep active to maintain muscle strength and a healthy body weight.
3. Eat plenty of vegetables (including legumes) and fruit.
4. Eat plenty of cereals, breads and pastas.
5. Eat a diet low in saturated fat.
6. Drink adequate amounts of water and/or other fluids.
7. If you drink alcohol, limit your intake.
8. Choose foods low in salt and use salt sparingly.
9. Include foods high in calcium.
10. Use added sugars in moderation.
11. Eat at least three meals every day.
12. Care for your food; prepare and store it correctly