

Eat yourself younger at any age

Good news... the right diet can slow down the impact of each passing birthday! Read on to discover the key foods that will help you age brilliantly

Through each decade, our body changes, and so do our nutritional needs. 'The ageing process starts to affect our bodies from our 30s onwards,' explains leading performance nutritionist James Collins, author of *The Energy Plan*. 'As we get older, cellular wear and tear results in tissues and organs beginning to function less effectively. Our muscle strength and mass, bone mass and ability to make vitamin D from sunlight decline.'

The other fact to take on board is that most people also start to put on weight as they get older. According to Collins, this is because our metabolic rate – our ability to burn calories – drops, due to the natural loss of muscle mass that comes with age. Falling hormone levels (oestrogen and testosterone) and a decline in physical activity are contributing factors. After 40, we lose around 1% of our muscle mass each year. The less you have, the fewer calories your body is able to burn.

Our metabolic rate decreases by an average of 2% every decade from our mid-30s, so as each decade passes, you'll need less fuel to sustain your body every day, and it becomes more challenging to avoid weight gain. 'As a nation, we've become accustomed to thinking – incorrectly – that being overweight is an accepted part of ageing. Without addressing this, or maintaining activity levels, you'll inevitably see an increase in fat

(particularly the more dangerous visceral fat around the organs) and, if you're not careful, a cocktail of chronic diseases,' warns Collins.

Much of the fat gained during this time will, you've guessed it, accumulate around the waist. Dr Pamela Peeke, author of *Fight Fat After Forty*, calls it 'stress fat' since it is the main source of fat that gives you energy to fight or take flight during stressful situations. Too much is dangerous as it puts women at higher risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, stroke, type 2 diabetes and certain cancers. To prevent the pounds creeping on, you may need 200 or 300 fewer calories a day in your 50s than you did during your 20s. However, we don't advocate going on a diet at any age – most diets fail in the long term and result in further muscle loss.

So, if dieting isn't the answer, what should you do? Collins advocates regular exercise (such as walking, running or swimming) and adding in two sessions of resistance exercise per week to combat muscle loss. This doesn't necessarily mean lifting weights – simple body weight exercises, such as squats, lunges and press-ups that you can do at home, resistance bands and body pump classes all count (turn to our feature on page 92).

With this regular activity, combined with good nutrition targeted to your stage in life, the good news is that you can make a difference to how well you age. Here's how to alter what you eat decade by decade...

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Good eating habits
are key to staying
healthier for longer

THE RIGHT BALANCE

Working on strength, flexibility and balance as you get older will keep you feeling fitter for longer



Eat your greens: vegetables can boost your health

WHAT TO EAT IN YOUR 20s & 30s

Prioritise folate-rich foods found in green leafy vegetables and pulses, as your intake years before pregnancy may affect your fertility. During early pregnancy, adequate intake of this vitamin reduces the risk of neural tube defects, such as spina bifida. The NHS recommends a daily supplement of 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid while you're trying to get pregnant and during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy.

Research at Harvard University found a strong link between omega 3s, folic acid and vitamin B12 and a lower frequency of infertility. Eating oily fish (such as salmon), walnuts, soya beans, poultry, wholegrains, fruit and vegetables was shown to increase fertility in both women and men.

An Australian study found that women who ate fruit less than three times a month took longer to become pregnant than those who ate fruit three or more times a day in the month before they became pregnant. Fast foods were found to reduce fertility.

Stress can have an impact on the immune system and having a healthy gut microbiome (the community of microbes that live in your gut) is vital for combatting the effects. Most of our immune system is found in the gut and studies have shown a strong link between anxiety, depression and having low levels of certain gut microbes. These microbes produce and regulate serotonin, which is responsible for relaxing the nervous system and lifting mood. To increase these beneficial microbes, eat a varied diet rich in fibre, including prebiotic foods (such as onions, leeks and lentils) and probiotic foods (such as yogurt, kefir and sauerkraut).

Magnesium is also essential for the production of serotonin. Up the magnesium content in your diet by consuming more green leafy vegetables, wholegrains, beans, seeds and nuts.

WHAT'S BEST FOR BONES?

◆ Until about the age of 30, our bodies are still building bone – more than 50% of our bone mass is formed during puberty – so it's important to eat lots of calcium and vitamin D in our teens and 20s.

◆ Under 18s need 800mg, while those over 18 need 700mg. You can get 200mg calcium from 200ml of milk, 30g Cheddar cheese or a 125g pot of yogurt.

POWER THROUGH your 40s

The ability to convert protein from food into muscle diminishes after 40 and means you'll need about 50% more protein than you did during your younger years. Researchers recommend a daily protein intake of 1.2g per kg of body weight a day to help preserve muscle mass and strength, which equates to 72g for a 60kg woman. Dividing it between your meals, rather than consuming most of your protein at dinner, means more muscle and less hunger. Aim for about 25g per meal. You can get this from 125g chicken, meat or fish; (200g) cooked pulses, such as lentils, chickpeas or black beans with 3tbsp cooked rice; or 4tbsp (200g) strained Greek yogurt with 1tbsp (15g) nuts.

Age can take a toll on skin health, so up your intake of vitamin C, beta-carotene and vitamin E. Vitamin C helps build collagen, and its antioxidant properties also neutralise the free radicals that damage cells and prematurely age our faces. In a UK study of 4,025 women, those with higher vitamin C intakes were less likely to develop wrinkles than those with low levels. Find it in kiwi fruit, citrus fruits, Brussels sprouts, peppers and strawberries. There's plenty of vitamin E in almonds, hazelnuts and peanut butter, and beta-carotene in carrots, butternut squash and sweet potatoes. Some research suggests that polyphenols – found in colourful fruit and veg – may help prevent certain age-related diseases, including heart disease, Alzheimer's and cancer.



Combat age-related diseases with a healthy diet





It's never too late
to improve your
health habits



Make eggs
a key part
of your diet

FOOD FOR THOUGHT IN YOUR 60s & beyond

The skin's capacity to produce vitamin D from UV light decreases after we turn 60, so getting enough of it in our diet becomes even more important. Low levels may reduce muscle function and strength, and impair your immunity. While you can get limited amounts of vitamin D from oily fish, egg yolks and liver, taking a supplement will ensure you don't become deficient. Public Health England recommends taking a daily 10mcg supplement in the autumn and winter or all year round if you don't get much sun exposure, or are over the age of 65.

There's evidence that omega-3 fatty acids may help reduce the chronic inflammation that is thought to accelerate ageing and diseases, such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, arthritis and dementia. The richest source is oily fish, such as mackerel and salmon, but if you don't eat fish, get omega 3 from nuts (walnuts, pecans and hazelnuts), seeds (pumpkin, flax, hemp and chia), flaxseed oil, or take a vegetarian omega-3 supplement made from algae oil.

Eating plenty of berries, such as blueberries, and green leafy vegetables, such as spinach, may reduce the risk of developing dementia. A US study found that older people who followed this MIND diet, which comprises of these brain-healthy foods, were 52% less likely to be diagnosed with Alzheimer's.

It could also slow down the mental decline normally seen with age. Those who stuck closely to the MIND diet had brains about eight years younger than those in the study who didn't.

Age-related macular degeneration is the biggest cause of blindness from 60 onwards. You need a good intake of eye nutrients such as lutein and zeaxanthin, found in egg yolks, peppers, kale and spinach. A 2018 study showed that people who ate an orange a day had a 60% lower risk of developing macular degeneration. Eating oily fish just once a week can also cut the risk by 42%, according to research from Harvard University.

HEALTH BOOSTERS in your 50s

Getting enough calcium is especially important during and after the menopause to help offset the

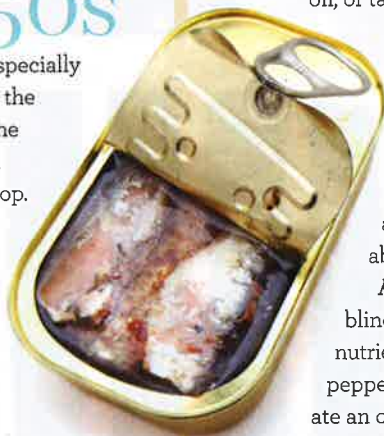
rapid loss of bone that occurs when bone-protective oestrogen levels drop.

The recommended daily intake is 700mg (achievable by consuming three servings of dairy a day).

If you don't consume dairy, get your calcium from a non-dairy milk or yogurt with added calcium (most brands contain similar levels to milk), tofu (made with calcium sulphate), beans, chickpeas, tahini, tinned sardines, sesame seeds, dried figs and almonds.

Eating foods rich in phytoestrogens, such as soya-based products, flaxseeds, beans and lentils, may reduce menopausal symptoms by mimicking oestrogen. About eight in 10 suffer menopause symptoms in the West, but in cultures where large amounts of soya-based foods are consumed, women suffer significantly fewer symptoms.

Fibre helps lower cholesterol levels and improves heart health, which is why getting enough of it becomes increasingly important as you age. A woman's risk of coronary heart disease increases after menopause. We need 30g of fibre a day but the average person gets only 19g. A Mediterranean diet rich in fruit, vegetables, beans, lentils, nuts and wholegrains will help you meet this target.



WHY IRON IS IMPORTANT FOR TEENS

Young women need to consume **MORE IRON** to make up for what's lost during menstruation. The National Food and Nutrition Survey in 2018 found that more than half of 11- to 18-year-olds did not meet the minimum recommended intake. Low levels can lead to anaemia - early signs include fatigue, paleness, and above-normal breathlessness during exercise.

THE DAILY REQUIREMENT IS 14.8MG

A DAY, and good sources are **RED MEAT, WHOLEGRAINS, OATS, QUINOA, NUTS, SEEDS, BEANS, LENTILS, GREEN LEAFY VEGETABLES AND EGG YOLKS.**

If you think your teenage daughter might be anaemic, your doctor can carry out a simple blood test and will advise if she needs supplements.

