

# Understanding Nutrition



Proper nutrition is more than what and how much you eat; it includes your metabolism, counting calories and dietary supplements. These all help play an important role in your nutritional status.

## What is metabolism?

Metabolism is a chemical reaction our cells use to break down food and convert it to energy. The rate at which this process happens determines how fast we gain and lose weight, coining the terms “fast or high metabolism” and “slow or low metabolism.” People with fast metabolisms burn calories more rapidly and lose

weight quickly. That might seem ideal, but for those with a very high metabolism, keeping a healthy weight can be difficult. Several healthy behaviors that can help speed your metabolism include regular physical activity, strength training, eating smaller portions more often and eating low-calorie, high-protein snacks.

## Why should I count calories?

The ideal number of calories you should consume in a day depends on an array of factors, including your age, height, weight and how much you exercise. Counting calories can help you stay in a calorie range that supports maintaining, losing or gaining weight. At first, calorie counting may seem a little overwhelming, but there are resources that can help make the task easier.

The USDA’s MyPlate website ([www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov)) provides a food-tracking tool that allows you to assess the calorie and nutrient content of your daily food intake. Another helpful tool is recording and tracking what you eat each day. This will give you a better idea of how much you eat, how many calories you consume and when you are eating the most.

## Key Supplements for Older Adults

Vitamin/Mineral	RDA/AI per Day	Function
Vitamin C	90 mg	Antioxidant, immune function, wound healing and aids iron absorption.
Vitamin D	600 IU	Aids in calcium absorption.
Vitamin E	15 mg	Antioxidant, immune functions and may prevent heart disease.
Vitamin B6	1.7 mg	Nerve function, required for protein absorption and may prevent heart disease.
Vitamin B12	2.4 mcg	Cell growth and division, red blood cell formation, nerve function and may prevent heart disease.
Calcium	1,300 mg	Maintaining strength of bones and teeth, muscle contraction, nerve function, normal blood clotting and may lower blood pressure.

## Should I take dietary supplements?

Some people do not get enough nutrients from the food they eat. For them, dietary supplements such as multivitamins can be helpful. Table 1 shows some of the more important vitamins and minerals that are helpful as we age. Not everyone needs to take

supplements, and some types can interact with prescription drugs. Always talk with your doctor before taking supplements.



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