

## As You Age ... Health Basics

*As You Age: Issue 2: Kathleen M. Stadler and Pamela B. Teaster \**

**As you age**, your body undergoes changes, although many of us are unaware of them.

We are most familiar with normal aging, or continual physical and mental changes that occur as we grow older. Changes of normal aging usually, though not always, increase the risk of mortality.

Around the age of thirty, our major organs begin to decline in function. The secret to quality of life in old age is to maintain or increase our ability to function independently as long as possible. We can do this most effectively by eating correctly and exercising—simple words, but often difficult tasks.

### As You Age ... Health Status of Older Virginians

- In a survey done in 1978-79 of noninstitutionalized persons aged 60+, 47% reported that they were in excellent or good physical health.
- Eighty-three percent (83%) of noninstitutionalized males age 65+ and 76% of noninstitutionalized females age 65+ reported no limitations in mobility and self-care.
- Seventy-nine (79%) of all persons age 65+ reported no limitations; 67% of persons 75+ reported no limitations in mobility and self care.

Source: Virginia Department for the Aging. (May, 1996). Statistical Profile of Older Virginians. Richmond, VA: Author.

### Circle Examples of Normal Aging

**Gray Hair**



**Broken Hip**



**Loss of Skin Elasticity**



**Heart Attack**



**Decreased Night Vision**



Answers: Gray hair, loss of skin elasticity, decreased night vision.

Assistant Professor, Dept. of Human Nutrition, Foods and Exercise; Extension Specialist, Nutrition; Assistant Professor, Dept. of Human Development; Extension Specialist, Gerontology; Virginia Tech, respectively.

## Changes in Major Organs

### Heart

The heart is a muscle. Its strength decreases with age.

### Lungs

The aging rib cage becomes more rigid. Muscle fibers become smaller and fewer in number, and we take in less air through our lungs.

### Eyes

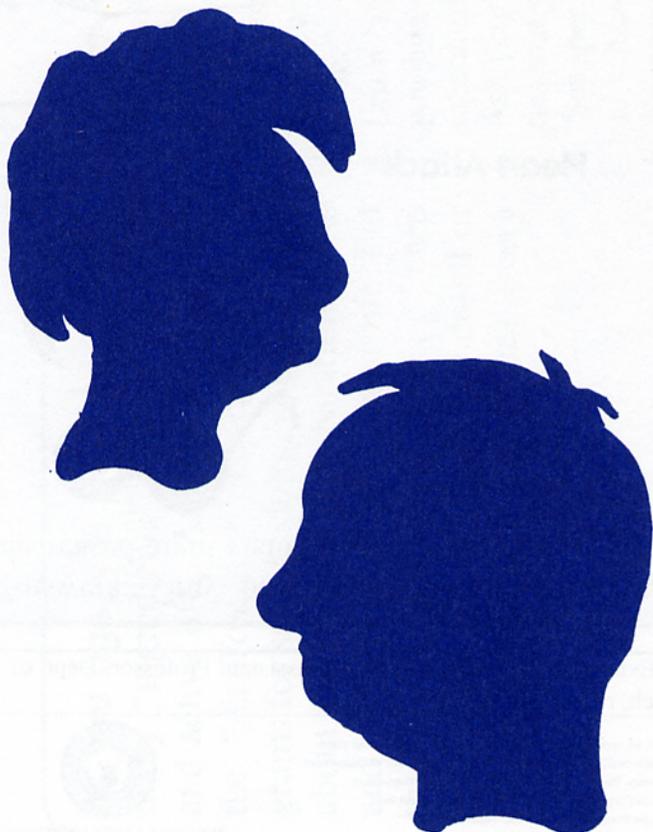
Typical age-related changes include slight shrinkage of the eye itself, reduced blood supply, and a build-up in connective tissue. The lens of the eye becomes less transparent and the iris tends to harden.

### Ears

Most changes due to age do not affect hearing. Approximately 1/3 of hearing loss cases in older adults are the result of a build-up of earwax. Gradual hearing losses that begin around age 40 have to do with structures in the inner ear.

### Brain

The brain loses neurons, which affects short-term memory.



## Color Your Life Through Knowledge

Acute diseases, such as a heart attack or stroke, are physical disorders with a limited duration.

Chronic diseases, such as arthritis, cancer, or osteoporosis, are long-standing health

problems that cannot be cured and often become worse over time.



### Heart Attack

A heart attack is caused by the sudden blockage of a coronary artery. Heart attack is the leading cause of death of older persons, affecting 1 out of 25 Americans over 75.

### Stroke

A stroke happens when a blood vessel to the brain is obstructed or ruptures, and the flow of blood to the brain is reduced. Strokes account for 9% of deaths for persons 65 and older.

### Arthritis

The symptoms of arthritis include red, swollen, and painful joints and limbs, which cause physical disability. Arthritis afflicts nearly half of adults over 65 years of age.

### Cancer

This disease occurs in many forms, such as breast cancer, prostate cancer, skin cancer, or lung cancer. Half of all cancers occur in people over 65 and account for 21% of deaths among old persons.

### Osteoporosis

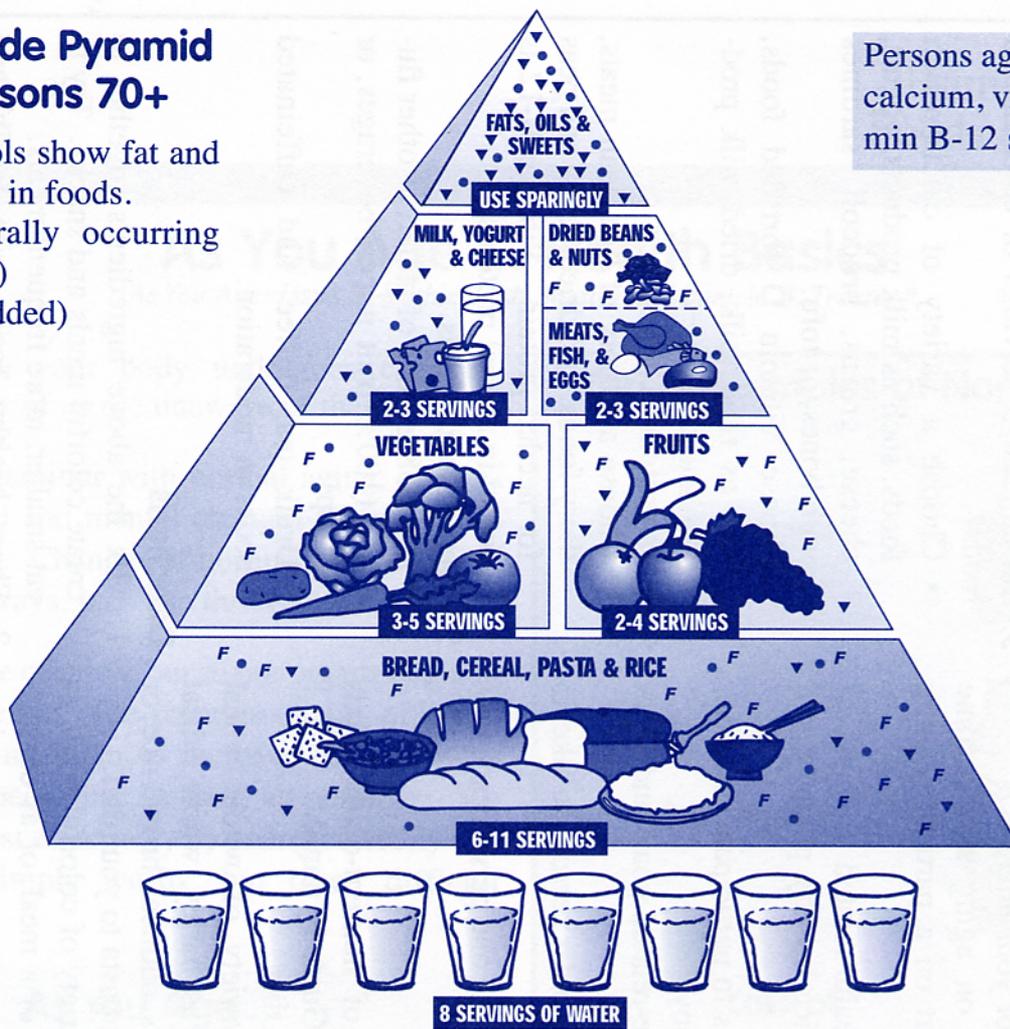
The aging skeletal system gradually loses calcium from the bones, and bones become brittle. Osteoporosis is a major health problem, especially for older women and accounts for 1.5 million fractures yearly in individuals over age 45.

Source: Spence, A.P. (1995). *Biology and human aging*. (2nd ed.) Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

# Food Guide Pyramid for Persons 70+

These symbols show fat and added sugars in foods.

- Fat (naturally occurring and added)
- ▼ Sugars (added)
- F Fiber



Persons aged 70+ may need calcium, vitamin D, or vitamin B-12 supplements.

## Recipe for Health

### Ingredients:

A desire to take control of your own aging and health.

### Add:

- Eat correctly. This series will show you how.
- Drink 8 glasses of water.
- Drink alcohol in moderation.

### Stir:

Exercise in a variety of ways: walk the dog, take steps rather than elevators, park away from buildings rather than in the closest spot, and/or clean the house.

### Bake:

- Maintain the correct weight.
- Stop smoking.

### Serve:

Maintain your network of friends and family.

# As You Age ... Recipe for Healthy Aging

**As you age**, you prepare and select many “ingredients” to live a healthy and active life. As you participate in the “*As You Age*” educational programs for senior adults, you will learn about new and old preparation skills and ingredients to use in your life. Put this “Recipe for Healthy Aging” card where you can see it. Try to do all of these healthy aging practices every day!

## Preparation

1. Select a new topic or area of interest to learn about your own aging. Pursue a creative outlet for your interests.
2. Find resources on aging and become your own expert on a particular aging issue.
3. Learn about health-related changes as you age. Practice healthy physical and mental habits.
4. Ask your friends to participate in activities that you enjoy.
5. Set specific age-related goals and work to achieve them.
6. Encourage other older persons to take up active aging.
7. Communicate with one person each day.

carrots, collard greens, kale, & spinach (vegetables contain vitamins, minerals, and phytochemicals).

3. Eat at least 3 servings of calcium-rich foods.

- Choose a variety of calcium-rich foods, such as milk products, yogurt, cheese, greens, broccoli, sardines with bones, or tofu.
  - Choose Vitamin D fortified foods, such as fluid milk, dried milk products, and cereals.
4. Eat a protein-rich diet.
    - Choose a variety of fish, lean meats, dairy foods, and dried beans and peas for needed protein. Vitamin B-12 is found in animal proteins.
  5. Drink enough fluids.
    - Drink 8 glasses of water, or other fluids (100% fruit juices, beverages, or soup).
    - Drink tea, coffee, and caffeinated sodas in moderation.

## Ingredients

1. Eat a variety of nutrient-dense foods from the Food Guide Pyramid.
2. Eat a fiber-rich diet.
  - Choose a variety of whole wheat foods, such as barley, whole wheat bread, cereals, oatmeal, brown rice, or whole wheat pasta to your diet.
  - Choose a variety of colorful fruits as snacks, part of a meal, or as dessert—apples, bananas, pears, peaches, strawberries, & melons (fruits contain vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants).
  - Choose a variety of colorful vegetables, such as broccoli, bell peppers,

## Directions

1. Mix the above ingredients together to create colorful meals and snacks. Try to eat smaller, more frequent meals.
2. Share healthy foods with family and friends.
3. Discover new ways to prepare foods to meet age-related changes.

**Food Guide Pyramid for Persons 70+**

