

# Healthy eating to stay strong and independent

Eating well is important for good health, strong muscles and independence. Eating nutrient-rich foods gives you the energy to continue doing the activities you enjoy each day. Good nutrition may help prevent frailty. Frailty can look different for everyone. It may include unintentional weight loss, noticing muscle loss, having lower energy levels and loss of strength. These symptoms may happen if you are eating less food due to a poor appetite and being less active.

## Eat three healthy meals a day and nourishing snacks between meals

Choose protein-rich foods along with fruits, vegetables, breads, cereals, dairy or dairy alternatives. If you are eating less food due to a poor appetite, make your food count by choosing foods high in energy.

## Key messages on how to remain strong and independent

### Eat protein at each meal and snack

Protein foods help build your muscles and strength.

Eat at least 20-30g of protein by including protein-rich foods at each mealtime.

When having a snack, try to choose protein-based snack choices.

Refer to the list of protein-rich foods over the page.

### Stay well hydrated and include nourishing fluids

Have a drink with every meal and snack. Aim for 6-8 glasses a day.

Include nourishing fluids that are high in protein and energy such as milk drinks, smoothies and cream-based soups.

Use enriched milk to make these items. Recipe over page.

### Include daily physical activity and muscle strengthening exercise at least twice weekly

Regular exercise improves your ability to carry out your daily activities and helps you manage most health conditions.

Strengthening exercise at moderate-heavy resistance is vital for improving your muscle mass, strength, mobility, as well as your appetite. Adding balance training exercise can help you avoid falls.

In addition to strengthening exercise, accumulate 30 minutes of physical activity most days of the week, in intervals as short as 10 minutes.

Ask your healthcare professional for more information on resistance training exercises.

### Eat a protein snack after exercise

Eat a high protein meal or snack 20-30 minutes after your exercise.

Refer to the list of protein-rich foods over the page.

**TIP** Try exercising outside to help boost your vitamin D from sunshine

### Monitor yourself and speak to a healthcare professional

Changes to look out for include:

- poor appetite
- feeling full quickly
- nausea
- vomiting
- a change in your bowel habits
- difficulties chewing and/or swallowing
- dry skin or wounds
- losing weight without trying.

## Foods which are high in protein and energy

Protein-rich foods		High-energy foods	
Choose one of these at each main meal.	OR Choose a combination of 2-3 of these at each main meal.	Ideas to make food higher in energy	High-energy snack ideas
<p>These contain approx. 20-30g of protein in a serve</p> <p>Aim for 100g cooked serve or use the size of your palm as a size guide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beef</li> <li>• Chicken</li> <li>• Lamb</li> <li>• Pork</li> <li>• Prawns</li> <li>• Fish</li> <li>• Tempeh</li> <li>• Cottage cheese (1/2 cup)</li> <li>• Enriched milk drink* (1 cup)</li> </ul>	<p>These contain approx. 10g of protein in a serve</p> <p>In addition, choose 1 at each snack time.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eggs (x 2)</li> <li>• Tofu (100g)</li> <li>• Cheese slices (x 2)</li> <li>• Milk (cows or soy) (1 cup)</li> <li>• Baked beans (1 cup)</li> <li>• Chickpeas or lentils (1 cup)</li> <li>• Mixed nuts (50g)</li> <li>• Custard (1 cup or small tub)</li> <li>• Yoghurt (1 cup or small tub)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Add oil in cooking</li> <li>• Add butter or margarine to mashed potato, other vegetables and bread</li> <li>• Choose full-fat dairy foods</li> <li>• Add mayonnaise, cheese or avocado to sandwich fillings</li> <li>• Add creamy sauces to meals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biscuits and cakes</li> <li>• Dairy-based desserts</li> <li>• Sweets, such as chocolate and lollies</li> <li>• Chips, crackers and other savoury snacks</li> <li>• Cheese and crackers</li> <li>• Dips</li> <li>• Peanut butter</li> <li>• Savoury crackers with avocado</li> <li>• Ice cream</li> <li>• Dried fruit</li> </ul>



\* **Enriched milk recipe:** 2 tablespoons of skim milk powder in 1 cup of full cream milk or milk alternative. Use this enriched milk in tea, coffee, on breakfast cereal, in smoothies or milk shakes, added to creamy soups or wherever you would normally use milk.

**If you have tried these suggestions and you feel you need more advice, consider speaking to a dietitian. A dietitian may need to prescribe a nutrition supplement to help improve your nutrition.**

### ! Monitor your body weight

It is important to regularly check your body weight to identify weight loss early. Signs of weight loss may include loose-fitting clothing or jewellery, as well as a change in weight on the scales.

**If you experience any of the above changes, speak to a healthcare professional for advice.**

If you have already tried making changes to the food you are eating and you feel you need more advice, a dietitian may be able to help you. They may need to prescribe a nutrition supplement to help improve your nutrition.

### How to find a dietitian

Speak with your GP, contact your local health service or check the Dietitians Australia website ([www.dietitiansaustralia.org.au](http://www.dietitiansaustralia.org.au)) to find a dietitian.

Document information	
Evidence informed	The resource was developed based on rapid evidence checks supported by the ACI's Evidence Team and clinical consensus.
Collaboration	The resource has been developed in collaboration with the ACI Nutrition Network, ACI Nutrition and Frailty Reference Group, ACI Frailty Taskforce and consumers.
Currency	Due for review: Jan 2027. Based on a regular review cycle.