



Eating well in your 60s, 70s and beyond

From your mid 60s, eating for health and wellbeing needs a different approach.

While life can throw many challenges at us, health and independence is possible to the very end of our days. However, it requires an understanding of how our nutrition and health needs change in our later years.

Most people, including many health professionals, are unaware that following health and nutrition advice appropriate for someone aged 30 or 40 can instead be anything from unhelpful to harmful when you are in your mid 60s or older.

The distinction lies largely with body muscle. You see, muscles do much more than move you around; they also form an essential protein reserve, and protein is vital for so many aspects of ongoing good health, including:

- combatting illnesses, ranging from a sniffle to a life-threatening post-surgical infection
- keeping every body organ functioning
- supporting the repair of wounds, from minor cuts and scratches to the trauma of a major accident
- helping keep diabetes under control

So, your body's ability to keep all those systems going—so that you get to keep doing the things you want to do—depends on having plenty of healthy muscle.

Benefits of a healthy muscle reserve



Combats illnesses,
no matter how big
or small



Keeps every body
organ functioning



Supports the
repair of wounds



Helping keep
diabetes in
control

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Maintain those muscles

In your later years, muscle needs you to do 3 main things so it can keep your body and brain going and help you fight off illness and infection.

- 1. Keep using them** – ‘Use it or lose it’—you know that one! Remind your muscles regularly that they're needed by keeping yourself moving. As we get older, we can easily become less physically active. But no matter your age or capacity, you can always do something to strengthen and even build muscle, boosting that vital body protein reserve. Anything that makes your muscles work is great – using weights that suit you when you exercise, doing uphill as well as flatter walks, yoga, pilates, aquarobics, practising getting up without using the arms of your chair are examples.
- 2. Eat protein** – It's important to have a good serve at every meal, and I suggest basing your meals around a protein food. It doesn't matter where the protein comes from; foods like meat, seafood, chicken, cheese, nuts and seeds, pulses and soy foods are all top sources.
- 3. Avoid losing weight by dieting** – Weight loss through dieting, or any other method that doesn't involve very good resistance exercise (the sort of activity that involves lifting, pushing or pulling weight – including your own body weight), will cause loss of body muscle. That's not a problem if you're 30 or 40, but it is if you're 70—because you need muscle to keep your immune system boosted, remember? It might just mean you don't have the resources to fight off next season's flu or recover from an accident. And that can trigger ongoing health decline—which you absolutely want to avoid.

Three tips to maintaining your muscles



Keep physically active
to strengthen and
build your muscles!



Eat a good serving of
protein with each meal



Avoid losing
weight by dieting

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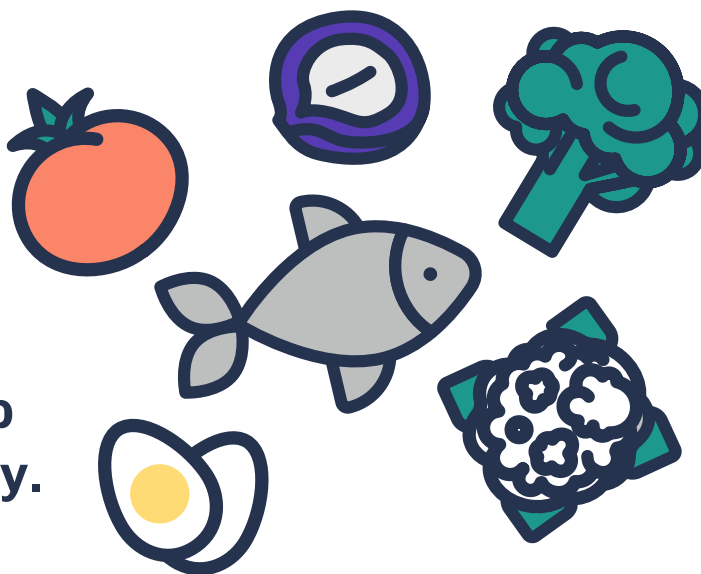
Add antioxidants

Of course, you're not going to eat just a plate of meat. At each meal, surround the protein on your plate with as many different colours as you can. The natural colours in foods are supplied by substances that are also cell-protective antioxidants.

So all those colours on your plate help keep your body and brain healthy, and that means you can continue to do the things you love.

**Surround the protein
in your meal with
as many colours
as you can.**

**These foods contain
antioxidants that help
protect your immunity.**



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Ngaire Hobbins is an Australian dietitian specialising in ageing and brain health. This article is based on her book, Brain Body Food, which presents in everyday language the science of eating well for healthy ageing. Brain Body Food is available through [Ngaire's website](#), or your favourite book retailer.