

# Understanding Nutrition

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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.

MyFitnessPal ([www.myfitnesspal.com](http://www.myfitnesspal.com)) provides a food-tracking tool that allows you to assess calorie and nutrient content of your daily food intake. MyFitnessPal also provides an app version that can be downloaded and used on smartphones. Tracking what you eat each day 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

**Table 1: Supplements**

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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