

## 5. High fat/sugar food and drink

These foods do not play any physiological role other than providing energy/calories. It is advised to have only small amounts, as eating too much can lead to weight gain.

### Fluid

Dehydration can cause fatigue and confusion, which can both be factors in falls.

- It is recommended to take 6-8 glasses of fluid per day
- Make sure that only half of your drinks contain caffeine as this can make you urinate more

### Alcohol

Alcohol taken in moderation can be part of a healthy balanced diet. It can, however, have some undesirable side effects. It also has a strong diuretic effect (i.e. it makes you urinate considerably more), so can make you dehydrated.

- Aim to have no more than 2-3 units a day for women, 3-4 units a day for men.
- One unit is equivalent to 100ml wine, ½ pint of ordinary strength beer, or 25ml (one standard measure) of spirits
- Try to have 2 alcohol free days each week

### Poor appetite

Food is important to help maintain your health. When you feel unwell you may not feel like eating – just when you need food the most!

- Eat little and often – try eating small frequent meals every 2-3 hours
- Don't skip meals – if you can't manage a full meal try a nourishing drink instead (full fat milk, milkshake, fruit juice, hot chocolate etc)
- Eat more when you feel hungry – if you feel most hungry in the morning, try having a larger breakfast
- Eat first, drink later – Drinking with meals can make you feel fuller sooner
- If you are too tired to cook, or have trouble standing for long periods, try ready-made oven/microwave meals, or tinned ready-to-eat foods
- Fresh air can stimulate your appetite. Try going for a walk, or just step outside for a while
- If possible, try and make meal times sociable

## Healthy eating



A guide to understanding how nutrition can impact on falls and fracture risk

Falls Prevention Service

### **If you are overweight:**

- It may be more difficult to keep balance, as muscles need to work harder, and this can increase risk of falling

### **If you are underweight:**

- The protective padding provided by fat may be absent, increasing risk of fractures if you do fall
- Being underweight is associated with less muscle mass and strength, which can lead to higher risk of falls

## **Your Diet**

There are five food groups that are used to understand how foods work in the body. In addition to these basic groups, some specific nutrients are relevant to reducing risk of falls and fractures.

### **1. Fruit and vegetables**

- Fruit and vegetables are an essential part of a balanced diet. Everyone should aim for 5 portions of fruit/vegetables daily, and choose a wide variety to get a range of different nutrients.
- They contain vitamins and minerals used in your body for everything from immunity, to getting the energy from your food
- Fruit and vegetables are high in fibre, which helps prevent constipation

### **2. Starchy foods/carbohydrates**

These foods provide energy in an easy-to-use form. The brain, and exercising muscles, prefer to use this type of energy. If you do not have enough, you may not be able to do as much physical activity.

- Carbohydrates include bread, cereals, rice, pasta and potatoes
- They are very important because they give you energy
- You should eat some carbohydrates at each mealtime
- Higher fibre varieties (e.g. wholemeal bread, pasta, and wholegrain rice) help prevent constipation

### **3. Meat, fish eggs and other protein sources**

Protein helps build muscles, and too little might lead to losing muscles strength, increasing risk of falls. Aim to have 2-3 portions per day – one portion may be a piece of chicken, fish or red meat about the size of a deck of playing cards. Vegetarian and vegan diets get most protein from nuts and pulses/legumes.

### **Iron**

In addition to providing protein, red meats and eggs are particularly good sources of iron. It is used to make haemoglobin in the blood that carries oxygen. Anaemia can

develop if you don't intake enough iron, leading to fatigue and lower endurance. Having red meat/eggs twice a week, or a high intake of dark green leafy vegetables will reduce this risk.

### **4. Dairy foods**

Milk and dairy foods provide protein and calcium, which is needed to maintain healthy bones. Osteopenia/Osteoporosis is the name for the condition with weakened bones with less calcium. This means that if you have a fall, you have a higher risk of breaking a bone.

- Milk, yoghurt and cheese are good sources of calcium
- Eat 2-3 portions daily (e.g. 200ml milk, 150g pot of yoghurt, 20g i.e. a small matchbox size amount of cheese)

### **Vitamin D**

Another nutrient related to calcium is vitamin D, which helps calcium absorption. Vitamin D is also called the sunshine vitamin as direct sunlight allows the skin to produce vitamin D. About 15-20 minutes direct sunlight exposure on hands/face will produce enough vitamin D. Sometimes people may need supplementary vitamin D.