

# Several Trends of Older Adults’ Diet: Rapid Need for Change

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## Commentary

**Received:** 03-Apr-2024, Manuscript No. JFPDT-24-131286; **Editor assigned:** 05-Apr-2024, PreQC No. JFPDT-24-131286 (PQ); **Reviewed:** 19-Apr-2024, QC No. JFPDT-24-131286; **Revised:** 04-Mar-2025, Manuscript No. JFPDT-24-131286 (R); **Published:** 11-Mar-2025, DOI: 10.4172/2321-6204.13.1.001

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**Citation:** Izdonaite-Medziuniene I, et al. Several Trends of Older Adults’ Diet: Rapid Need for Change. RRJ Food Diary Technol. 2025;13:001.

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## ABSTRACT

The commentary focuses on the topical issue in the area of older adults' dietary trends and the need for rapid changes to enhance their quality of life and prolong healthy life expectancy. Having plenty of evidence of improper older adults' diets leading to various diseases, we focus on the necessary decisions for dietary behavior change. We underline that food marketing, busy lifestyles convenience priority over nutritional quality, longstanding habits and emotional ties to food are factors that define older adults' diets and strongly complicate dietary behavior changes. The commentary marks out that older adults lack education for proper diets and a better quality of life. It is evident that older adults' dietary behavior change is long-term in perspective and mostly affected by physiological, psychological and emotional factors.

**Keywords:** Older adults’ diet; Dietary behavior change; Older adults’ quality of life

## INTRODUCTION

Eating habits of older adults have been an important trend in the last several years and will be quite topical in the times of aging societies in the future. Therefore, the care of food is essential for older adults and in all stages of life for others, because balanced diets and proper nutrition determine the state of personal health resulting in the absence or reduction the diseases and enhancing the quality of life. In addition, other diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, cancer, dementia and the most common age-related conditions, are increasing due to improper nutrition <sup>[1]</sup>. Improvements in nutrition are known to bring tangible benefits to older people and many age-related diseases and conditions can be prevented <sup>[2]</sup>.

## DESCRIPTION

The research has proved that eating habits and nutrition changes as people age. Older adults tend to have newly formed eating habits that usually do not correspond to a healthy lifestyle but lead to a reduction in their quality of life. Usually, the general dietary pattern is described as high consumption of meat and low consumption of raw vegetables and fiber, wholegrain, raw nuts/seeds, etc., and this trend remains relatively stable as we start analyzing previous literature or conduct various research on older adult dietary basis. Turner <sup>[3]</sup> in her doctoral thesis states that in 2020, more than 90% of Australian adults aged 65 years and older were not meeting the current dietary guidelines for fruit and vegetable intake. The author proves that this is a persistent trend, with comparable figures recorded in the research conducted in 2018 and 2011. Older adults are at increased risk of malnutrition which can have serious consequences on health and quality of life and consequently shortens healthy life expectancy. Some research highlights several reasons that cause older adults' malnutrition and even dietary nutrition change; they are physiological and psychological causes <sup>[2]</sup> and various external factors. According to Turner <sup>[3]</sup>, psychological factors are crucial in determining people's diet (what and how they eat) and it is also vital to acknowledge the necessity for individuals' specialized support and to address their potential barriers to healthy diets. Much previous research and our completed research on "Disposition of improving quality of life in older adults: The case of Lithuania" <sup>[4]</sup> focused on the external factors determining malnutrition and dietary behavior change restrictions for older adults. First, older adults experience a lack of accurate nutrition knowledge and education in that field. Second, according to Turner <sup>[3]</sup>, older adults lack the availability and accessibility of nutritious food options, their eating habits are usually influenced by pervasive food marketing, busy lifestyles that prioritize convenience over nutritional quality, longstanding habits and emotional ties to food that they are used to. Therefore, intensive and detailed actions should be taken to stop older adults' malnutrition and prevent various risk factors caused by improper diets. Turner <sup>[3]</sup> in her doctoral thesis presents simple strategies to increase food intake such as:

- Increasing variety and enhancing the palatability or flavor of foods.
- Maintaining protein for muscle mass—can be effectively delivered to older adults *via* protein-enriched drinks.
- Giving opportunities for older adults to eat with others or to prepare meals enhances food intake.
- Other aspects that need to be considered are safe food preparation <sup>[3]</sup>.

The other research confirms that encouraging older adults to prepare meals can increase appetite and food intake and so provide opportunities for older adults to eat a wide variety of foods, in company, which is a simple strategy to increase food intake <sup>[2]</sup>.

Concerning dietary patterns, the Mediterranean diet is most often presented as a part of a healthy lifestyle and is quite suitable for older adults. Mediterranean diet is characterized by containing vegetables, fruits, nuts, cereals, fish and lower portions of animal products, dairy products and alcohol. The research has shown that this diet strengthens health prevents cardiovascular and various metabolic diseases and represents mainly one of the most balanced diets, focusing on

considerable benefits to human longevity and well-being <sup>[4]</sup>. In general, as the diet quality of older adults becomes a very effective lifestyle strategy in reducing disease and mortality risk, it is more than important for public health and lifestyle medicine specialists to identify older adults as the most vulnerable group which is at higher risk of decreasing quality of life <sup>[5]</sup> and healthy life expectancy. But the most important goal for all is changing the diet behavior of older adults or at least reaching their positive disposition to change eating habits for a better quality of life. Thus, Turner <sup>[3]</sup> suggests the use of evidence-based behavior change techniques in diet behavior change interventions such as problem-solving, goal setting, feedback and social support. It is proved by the author that it can have a greater impact on driving meaningful behavior change in older adults.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we admit that older adult education strategy, the possibility of preparing meals with family members, friends, or community members will lead to meaningful dietary behavior changes in older adults. Even though we clearly understand that longstanding habits and emotional ties to various foods are very strong factors interfering with a positive disposition for change, still the potential benefits for older adult's better quality of life are valuable. The improved knowledge of older adults through dietary education leads to a complex process of older adults' dietary behavior change which in a long-term perspective focuses on physiological, psychological and emotional factors affecting food choices and healthy diets.

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