Foods that boost mind and memory

These everyday items help to improve and preserve your brain health.

Memory decline is a constant worry as you age, but there is some good news to ease your concern. Recent research has found that many simple, everyday foods can have a powerful effect on the memory faculties of older adults.

“Your diet often can be the greatest influence on your ability to improve your memory and preserve your brain’s function as long as possible,” says Lenore Arab, PhD, with the UCLA School of Public Health.

These foods are rich in nutrients that are linked to improving specific cognitive functions, such as working memory and recall, reducing the number of memory lapses, and soothing inflammation tied to poor thought processing.

Here is a look at the top four “memory” foods and how to add more of them to your daily diet.

**Blueberries/Strawberries**

Harvard researchers found that over time berries like strawberries and blueberries can delay memory decline in older women. Their study showed that consuming at least ½ cup of blueberries or 1 cup of strawberries per week had the strongest effect, and the women who ate the most berries had rates of memory decline that were similar to those who were up to 2½ years younger.

**What’s Inside:** Powerful antioxidants found in blueberries and strawberries increase learning and memory skills.

**Eat More:** Fresh berries can be added to every daily meal, from a breakfast side dish to a lunchtime snack to a healthy dinner dessert. “If fresh berries are out of season, frozen varieties have similar nutritional content,” says Harvard researcher Elizabeth DeVore, ScD.

**Walnuts**

A recent study from UCLA found that adults age 60 and older who ate walnuts scored higher on cognitive tests that measured story recall, response speed, sustained attention, and visual spatial memory. Subjects consumed an average of about 13 grams (g), or 2.7 teaspoons, of walnuts daily over a three- and six-year period.

**What’s Inside:** Walnuts are one of the richest foods in omega-3 fatty acids, which can have an anti-aging effect on the brain. Omega-3s are believed to increase the brain’s neurotransmitter activity so it can maintain its full function as you age, as well as protect your gray matter from inflammation. You do not need much either. One-quarter cup contains 113 percent of the daily value of omega-3s, which is twice that of a 4-ounce serving of salmon.

**Eat More:** Walnuts are high in calories (1 cup equals 523 calories), so you need to be careful about consuming too many. Eat a palm-sized serving for an afternoon snack, toss a few into your next salad, or stir one to two tablespoons of chopped walnuts into your morning oatmeal or yogurt.

**Green Tea**

Green tea has long been noted as a healthy elixir, but new research suggests it may also enhance cognitive function, especially working memory. Scientists recently had volunteers consume either a 1- or 2-cup drink containing 13.75 g or 27.5 g of green tea extract, continued on page 7
Mindfulness meditation practice can improve sleep quality

An estimated 50 percent of people age 55 and older have trouble falling and staying asleep. While sleep medication can help, they are often temporary solutions, come with side effects like daytime grogginess, and can be habit forming. However, UCLA researchers may have found a more effective and natural alternative: mindfulness meditation. They conducted a study that involved 49 subjects age 55 and older who were divided into two groups. The first group completed a six-week, two-hour-per-week sleep education program, which focused on areas like learning about sleep biology, stress reduction and relaxation methods, and how to set up a bedtime routine. The other group participated in a mindfulness meditation course, which included an “appreciation meditation” that focused on expressing gratitude, along with mindful movements, such as walking and eating, and traditional sitting meditations. The meditation subjects engaged in 10 to 30 minutes of practice in each class and followed up with an at-home routine that began with five minutes of daily meditation and progressed up to 20 minutes. Afterwards, the meditation group improved their overall sleep quality by 37 percent compared with the sleep-education subjects. They also reported less fatigue and sleep-related depression, says lead researcher Michael R. Irwin, MD. “These results were also comparable to other treatments, like cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia, which requires a highly trained therapist and is not readily available in the community,” he says. Learn more about these meditation practices at marc.ucla.edu.

Combination of antidepressants may work faster for seniors

Older adults who take antidepressants to manage their depression may benefit from a combination therapy of Ritalin (methylphenidate) and Celexa (citalopram), says a UCLA study. Celexa, a standard antidepressant, can take from eight to 16 weeks to show improvements, while Ritalin is a stimulant known to have a rapid onset of action in depression within 72 hours. The researchers found this so-called “tag-team” approach worked faster to treat symptoms than taking either drug alone. However, there was no reduction in common side effects, such as GI distress, anxiety, insomnia, and heart problems. Geriatric depression is difficult to treat with medication because of its often delayed or poor response, says lead researcher Helen Lavretsky, MD. Still, medication is often the first step to treatment after a diagnosis. In the study, 143 older adults with depression were divided into three groups: Two of them used only one of the medications and the third used a combination. Daily dosage ranged from 20 milligrams (mg) to 60 mg for Celexa and 5 mg to 40 mg for Ritalin. (The difference was based on individual response and tolerance of the medications.) After 16 weeks, those on the combination therapy recorded lower depression severity, which included specifics like anxiety, apathy, quality of life, and cognition. The best results came from daily doses of 40 to 60 mg for Celexa and 10 to 15 mg for Ritalin. (New guidelines, however, recommend only 20 mg of Celexa daily for seniors age 65 and older.) The group also experienced positive results within four weeks of treatment and two to three months faster compared to the other groups. Dr. Lavretsky says the results could be helpful for those with more severe and chronic depression who do not respond to standard drug therapy or seek a faster response. “You should consult with your doctor to see if this combination therapy may be right for your condition,” she says.

Skin test may help with early detection of Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s diseases

In a recent study in Neurology, researchers took skin biopsies from 20 people with Alzheimer’s disease, 16 with Parkinson’s disease, and 17 with dementia caused by other conditions. In the study, 143 older adults with depression were divided into three groups: Two of them used only one of the medications and the third used a combination. Daily dosage ranged from 20 milligrams (mg) to 60 mg for Celexa and 5 mg to 40 mg for Ritalin. (The difference was based on individual response and tolerance of the medications.) After 16 weeks, those on the combination therapy recorded lower depression severity, which included specifics like anxiety, apathy, quality of life, and cognition. The best results came from daily doses of 40 to 60 mg for Celexa and 10 to 15 mg for Ritalin. (New guidelines, however, recommend only 20 mg of Celexa daily for seniors age 65 and older.) The group also experienced positive results within four weeks of treatment and two to three months faster compared to the other groups. Dr. Lavretsky says the results could be helpful for those with more severe and chronic depression who do not respond to standard drug therapy or seek a faster response. “You should consult with your doctor to see if this combination therapy may be right for your condition,” she says.
Counting your calories

You require a certain number each day to thrive and survive, but how much depends on several factors.

As you become older, your nutritional needs change, but what about the amount of food you eat? Do you need to be more mindful of your daily calories?

“Your calorie needs are highest at birth through your first few years of life, then decline gradually until adulthood and continue to go down as you age,” says Arlene Johns, MPH RD CNSC, a dietitian with UCLA Health.

Seniors need to be mindful of their calorie intake, she adds. Too many without adequate physical activity will cause weight gain. Too few calories and you starve your body of the fuel it needs to keep your systems running at an optimal level and maintain overall health.

Adding up your calories

Many factors determine how many calories you need, such as age, weight, gender, and physical activity.

✈ Age: As you age, your metabolism slows so your body does not burn calories as fast, so an 80-year-old requires fewer calories than a 60-year-old.

✈ Weight: The more you weigh, the higher your rate of resting energy (the number of calories your body needs to perform its basic functions), and the fewer calories you require.

✈ Gender: Women need fewer calories than men due to their lower muscle mass, height, and weight.

✈ Activity: Generally, the more active you are, the more fuel your body demands, and the more calories it needs.

Since calorie intake depends on so many individual variables it can be tough to focus on one number for everyone. However, on average, an adult age 50 or older should aim for between 1,400 to 2,000 for women and 1,800 to 2,400 for men, says Johns. That is a wide range, but the number narrows depending on your regular activity. For instance, a woman or man who has no physical activity beyond typical daily movement requires only the low-end amount of calories. However, if he or she follows a regular active lifestyle like walking three or more miles a day and working out three times a week for 30 minutes to an hour, the daily number is closer to the higher amount.

Also, be aware that while you do need some extra energy when you exercise or are active, there is no need to go overboard. “Unless one is doing prolonged activity, running, walking, or hiking for many miles, for example, eating a lot of extra calories beforehand is not necessary,” says Johns. “You do not burn as many calories as you may think. For instance, walking at a moderate pace for an hour may only burn about 100 to 150 calories.”

Calculating daily calories

There are many online calorie calculations that can help you determine the calories in individual foods and track overall intake from meals. (See sidebar above.)

Another option is to keep a food diary in which you list each daily meal and protein.”

food and complete meals and the approximate number of calories for each one. This teaches you to be more aware of food quantity and calories by glancing at individual items and entire meals, and helps to ensure you meet your daily requirements without going too far over.

Also, pay close attention to serving sizes, says Johns. “You should use a measuring cup when serving your food in order to keep your caloric intake in check,” says Johns. “For instance, a serving of pasta may be one cup and 200 calories on the label, but so often we fill up a large bowl or plate to the rim, which doubles or triples the number of servings.”

The right number of meals

Recent studies have shown that it does not matter if your total calories are spread over three daily regular-scheduled meals or six smaller ones eaten throughout the day (a practice called “grazing” in terms of weight loss. “Eating fewer, moderate-calorie meals actually may help some seniors, as they will have less food to keep track of at one time,” says Johns. However, you may want to experiment to see what meal schedule works best for you, as eating large meals may unsettle your stomach.

Your calorie source is equally important. Johns says older adults should avoid high-calorie items, which come in the form of many processed foods, refined carbohydrates like juices, candy, cookies, or higher-fat items like ice cream and fried foods.

“These have high calories in smaller portions, so it’s easier to overindulge. Plus, they lack vital nutrients you need, like fiber, calcium, vitamins, and protein.”
Get rolling with foam rollers

Versatile and easy-to-use, this exercise equipment can be a valuable recovery tool for the gym and at home.

One of the best fitness tools for seniors is a small, lightweight cylinder made of compressed foam. “Foam rollers can be an effective means to help prevent aches and pain, prevent injuries from workouts, and remain more mobile and active,” says Susan Stich, MSPT, with the UCLA Outpatient Rehabilitation Department.

How do foam rollers work?
When you lie on a foam roller and roll up and down, it pushes against your body and provides resistance. The effect is similar to the benefits of a traditional massage, says Stich.

Any type of massage helps to improve circulation by pushing blood through the various arteries, veins, and capillaries in your body. Foam rollers also massage sore muscles to remove built up lactic acid and therefore reduce pain.

Foam rollers are also the ideal recovery equipment. A 2014 study found that a 20-minute foam rolling routine after a workout helped to reduce sore muscles as well as improve joint range of motion.

They can also be used as a support for traditional exercises to help reduce strain. For instance, rollers can be placed under the shoulders when doing sit-ups.

Using a foam roller
There are many ways to introduce a foam roller into your daily routine, from post-workout to an as-needed massage. Keep in mind, though, that foam rollers may not benefit everyone. “Each person is different, and a roller may be difficult to use if you have range-of-motion or strength issues, especially in the shoulder or low back,” says Stich.

Also, if you have had a hip replacement or lack of mobility, you should consult with a personal trainer of physical therapist to ensure safety and proper execution.

Finally, foam rollers can be painful on muscles and tissue at first, so...

1. Lower back: A tight or sore back can restrict movement and lower overall mobility.
   ➢ Lie on the floor and place the foam roller (preferably a 36-inch roller) under your lower back between your mid back and the top of your pelvis. Bend your legs and keep your feet flat.
   ➢ Gently move the roller up and down your back several times for 30 seconds.
   ➢ Make sure you properly support your neck and stop if you have any pain.
   ➢ Another option is to place the roller against a wall and perform the same up and down movement as you do wall squats.

2. IT (iliotibial) band: This fibrous tissue runs from the hip to the knee along the outside of your leg and is a common tight spot when doing aerobic activity like jogging, or from regular movements like walking and squatting. A tight IT band can also be the source of knee pain.
   ➢ Lie on one side with the foam roller placed horizontally and just below your hip bone. Support yourself by placing your other leg in front of the outstretched one and with both hands on the ground.
   ➢ Slowly roll the foam roller down and stop above the knee (don’t roll over your hip or knee). Roll back and forth for one minute.
   ➢ If the position is difficult to hold, have a personal trainer or physical therapist assist you.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW
Other tips when choosing a foam roller:
➢ Half-round foam rollers are a good choice if you have little strength or muscle tone.
➢ While you cannot roller over them, lying on a half-round roller in the area of tight muscles can release tension.
➢ Least expensive ones are less than $15 and increase in price with firmness and quality.
➢ Find foam rollers at amazon.com, or any running or sporting goods store.
EXERCISE

only use as long and with enough force in order to feel adequate pressure, but without causing discomfort.

Choosing a foam roller
Foam rollers come in various shapes and sizes. Which kind you choose depends on your needs and physical tolerance. The main areas you need to address are firmness and size.

Firmness: Most foam rollers are color coded according to firmness. White rollers are the softest, followed by blue or green (medium density), and black (firmest). “White rollers are best for seniors and beginners, as they are the least dense and will allow some movement between the muscles, bones and the roller, and thus produce less pressure and pain,” says Stich.

Size: Most foam rollers have a 6-inch diameter, yet the lengths range from 12 to 36 inches. A longer 36-inch roller is ideal for back exercises, as it will allow you to roll with it perpendicular to your back without worrying about slipping off the ends.

Beginning a foam roller routine.
Foam rollers are easy to use, but it is best to begin slowly until you become more familiar with them.

Here are four foam roller routines from Stich that address some key areas for seniors: lower back, IT (iliotibial) band, calves, and posture. Try them on their own or as part of your post-exercise stretching or cooldown period.

3. Calf: Most people experience tight calves from activities such as prolonged standing, running, and even walking.
   ◆ Sit upright on the floor with the foam roller placed horizontally under one calf. Keep your other leg bent.
   ◆ Use your hands to push your hips off the ground, and then begin at the bottom of your calf and slowly roll up and down for one minute. Use your hands to control the amount of pressure.
   ◆ Switch leg positions and repeat.

4. Posture: This stretches the pectoral muscles, opens the chest, and helps prevent a rounded posture.
   ◆ Lie down lengthwise on a 36-inch foam roller. Support your head with a pillow or the roller and bend your knees to maintain a neutral curve of the back.
   ◆ Spread your arms out to make a “T” or “A” shape and feel the stretch across your chest. Relax and let your shoulders pull back.
   ◆ Stay in the position for up to two to five minutes.

Treadmills may predict how long you live

Researchers from Johns Hopkins Medicine have developed a formula that estimates one’s risk of dying over a 10-year period based on the ability to exercise on a treadmill at an increasing speed and incline. Their FIT Treadmill Score factors in age, gender, peak heart rate reached during intense exercise, and the ability to tolerate physical exertion as measured by metabolic equivalents (METs), which gauges how much energy the body expends during exercise. For instance, slow walking is 2 METs and running is 8 METs.

The experts analyzed data from 58,000 heart stress tests from people with a median age of 53 over 18 years and found that by using this formula, individual fitness levels were the greatest indicators of death risk even when other variables were accounted for, such as family medical history and illnesses like diabetes.

Scores ranged from negative 200 to positive 200. Those above zero had a lower mortality risk, and people who scored 100 or higher had a 2 percent risk of dying over the following decade. Those with a score between zero and 100 had a 3 percent risk.

People with scores between negative 100 and zero had an 11 percent risk, while those with scores lower than negative 100 had a 38 percent risk.

“The takeaway is that fitness is a powerful predictor of survival,” says researcher Haitham Ahmed, MD, MPH. “The FIT Score is a great tool for motivating behavioral change, increasing exercise frequency, and improving fitness at any age.”
Getting ready for post-surgery

You work to avoid surgery, but when that day comes it’s best to be prepared.

You exercise, eat right, and adopt healthy lifestyle habits. But few people go through life without having to visit the hospital for some kind of procedure. Whether it is a knee resurfacing, heart bypass, or anything in between, you need to be ready for what comes afterwards.

“Surgeries do not take that much time to perform, and before they know it, seniors are suddenly faced with the road to recovery with no plan in place,” says Peyman Benharash, MD, a cardiac surgeon with the Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center. “Without a proper support strategy in place, they can find themselves readmitted to the hospital and make recovery longer and more difficult.”

You do not need to devote much time or effort to post-surgery planning. Here is a look at two of the most common surgical procedures for seniors—heart bypass and hip and knee replacement—and what to expect afterwards and how to plan accordingly.

HEART BYPASS

The first step: Before your surgery, prepare yourself physically. Yes, you will have a heart procedure, but that does not mean you cannot stay somewhat active. “Instead of sitting around waiting for the surgery, do a daily walking routine,” says Dr. Benharash. “This regimen does not have to be strenuous, just enough to get the muscles moving and the lungs expanded.” Your surgeon or cardiologist can advise a safe level of activity.

If you are overweight or underweight consult a nutritionist to help you lose/gain weight and ensure you take enough vitamins and antioxidants to help with post-surgery wound healing. Also, check for any anemia.

“Ensuring you have an adequate healthy red blood supply can reduce surgery complications,” says Dr. Benharash. If needed, drugs can increase your red blood cell mass.

After the surgery, you need to address these areas:

House Help. Older adults will need at least five to seven weeks for the breastbone or incision to heal enough for movements like driving. However, you will not be allowed to lift more than 10 pounds for six weeks, which means you will need assistance with grocery shopping, cooking, and other routine household tasks. “Many patients arrange the support of family and friends to help in this role, but if you do not have this option, it is best to stay in a rehabilitation center for at least a few weeks,” says Dr. Benharash. (See “What You Should Know,” on page 7.)

Medication. After surgery, you may take up to eight kinds of daily medications in various dosages and at a variety of times. These include blood thinners and drugs to slow down the heart rate and lower blood pressure to reduce your heart’s workload.

Dr. Benharash recommends setting up a checklist and reminder system, such as a daily notebook to list all the drugs, how much to take and when, and a box to check off when completed. If you need a more visual reminder, set up a white board that lists all the information. You can also schedule timers on your smart phone.

Appointments. Depending on your individual needs, you may have a regular in-home nurse visit to take blood, check your healing progress, and review medications to ensure they are being taken as scheduled. These meetings may be every day or every other day at first and then a few days a week. “Also, plan for scheduled follow-up doctor visits in advance in order to coordinate any travel needs,” says Dr. Benharash.

Get Moving. You may need a walker or shower chair to help with balance for the first few days post-surgery. (You can rent them from medical supply companies.) But you need to focus on being active instead of lying in bed. Resume your pre-surgery routine of daily walks whether outside or inside.

JOINT REPLACEMENT

Knee or hip replacements are similar in terms of pre-surgery prep and post-surgery recovery.

Two months before, focus on improving your health, says Benjamin Bengs, MD, associate professor and orthopaedic surgeon at the Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center. “Losing even a small amount of weight can help relieve some stress of recovery,” he says. “Stay active with an exercise bike or walking, which many people can do without putting excess stress on their joint. This can help strengthen the surrounding muscles and help speed up recovery.”

The recovery period begins almost immediately after surgery, but full healing can last from six months to a year. You typically stay in the hospital for three days, but are encouraged to be mobile as soon as possible. When you leave the hospital, you should be able to resume normal bathroom hygiene and move around with the assistance of a walker or cane.

Keep It Simple. Dr. Bengs says the best at-home recovery strategy is to keep it simple. “Arrange for friends or fam-
ily members to help with errands, as you won't initially be independent, including the ability to drive, for a couple of weeks,” he says. “If this isn’t an option then stay in a rehabilitation facility until you are able to take care of yourself.”

**Stay Active.** Regular physical activity is also crucial. A physical therapist will provide in-home sessions several times a week to help with range of motion and strengthening, but it is up to you to initiate some kind of ongoing movement. Again, simplicity is the key. Rent a stationary bike for daily cycling sessions. Walk for 30 minutes daily at least three times a week. “Don’t worry about speed or distance, and stop and rest as needed so you don’t overextend yourself,” says Dr. Bengs.

**Mental Outlook.** One of the greatest challenges with joint replacement is not physical, but mental. You will experience some pain and discomfort, and may feel like your independence is gone, which can lead to mild depression. A social support group can keep up your spirits. Many times this can be your regular circle of friends and family that helps with errands, but these interactions may be limited. “Ask others just to pay a friendly visit, or make an effort to call or e-mail someone once a day,” says Dr. Bengs. “It’s a small gesture, but can keep you positive until you recover.”

**Food and Memory—cont. from page 1**

respectively. Then the subjects solved several working memory tasks. The researchers found the green tea groups scored much higher than the control group, and MRIs of their brain activity showed an increased connectivity between the parietal and frontal lobes—areas involved in language processing and short-term memory.

**What’s Inside:** While the exact reason for green tea’s effect is not known, Arab says green tea contains substances like thiamine, which crosses the blood-brain barrier and can influence areas of the brain.

**Drink More:** While the study used green tea amounts equal to six to 14 cups, Arab says one to two cups per day can be just as beneficial. Switch your morning coffee for freshly-brewed green tea or drink as a mid-day ritual. Avoid bottled tea beverages, as they contain smaller amounts of tea.

**Turmeric**
The bright-yellow spice has been shown to improve working memory in older adults as well as mental skills, such as planning, problem solving, and reasoning. A 2014 study tested turmeric on seniors age 60 and older who had been recently diagnosed with untreated pre-diabetes. The subjects either had 1 g of turmeric or 2 g of cinnamon spread over white bread for breakfast. After six hours, their working memory was tested. The researchers found the turmeric group increased their scores from 2.6 to 2.9 out of 3.0 while the cinnamon group was unchanged.

**What’s Inside:** Turmeric is rich in curcumin, an anti-inflammatory molecule that gives the spice its unique color. Researchers believe curcumin can target inflammation in the brain that disrupts memory and information processing.

**Eat More:** Turmeric is an ideal substitute any time you use spices or seasonings. Add to scrambled eggs, mix into a pot of rice and beans, sprinkle onto vegetables before roasting, toss into soups, salads, and even smoothies.

**PROTECT YOUR MEMORY FROM TRANS FATS**

A new study found that one way to protect your working memory is to maybe avoid all trans fat foods. Among 1,000 people, those who consumed the most trans fats performed the worst on a word memory test—a more than 10 percent reduction compared with those who ate the least trans fat. “Trans fats appear to prevent access of energy to brain cells,” says lead researcher Beatrice A. Golomb, MD, PhD. While those age 45 and younger were affected the most, Dr. Golomb says high trans fat consumption can reduce the working memory of older adults, too. Trans fats are artificially produced to turn liquid oils into solids at room temperature and extend food shelf life. They are found in fast foods, baked goods, snack foods, frozen pizza, and coffee creamers. The best way to avoid trans fat is to be diligent about reading labels. Avoid any product that contains the words “hydrogenated,” “shortening,” or “margarines.” Note that products listed as “zero grams of trans fats” can still contain up to 0.5 grams per serving.

**WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW**

Tips when choosing a rehabilitation center:

➢ Ask your doctor for a recommendation. He or she gets feedback from patients.

➢ Conduct an on-site tour to be familiar with the layout and daily activities.

➢ Inquire about room occupancy: private or shared? What does your insurance cover?

➢ Wi-Fi? What are sample meals? Can they meet dietary restrictions?

**WHAT TO KNOW**

➢ Conduct an on-site tour to be familiar with the layout and daily activities.

➢ Inquire about room occupancy: private or shared? What does your insurance cover?

➢ Wi-Fi? What are sample meals? Can they meet dietary restrictions?
Q I’ve heard that irritability and depression can be early warning signs of Alzheimer’s disease. Is that true? Are there other Alzheimer’s symptoms that can appear to be something else?

A It is true that sudden mood changes can be a symptom of Alzheimer’s disease. Other warning signs are memory loss, disorientation in familiar settings, changes in daily routine behavior, poor judgment when handling money or in business affairs, and withdrawal from normal activities. If Alzheimer’s is the source, it is likely at least one or more of these additional signs is also present. However, some of the early signs of Alzheimer’s are also symptoms of depression. In fact, there are many illnesses, and reactions to certain medications, that create symptoms similar to those of Alzheimer’s. Diabetes, urinary tract infections, and thyroid dysfunction represent only a few of the examples, many of which are highly treatable. What is key here is to seek out a doctor’s opinion should anything unusual with regard to mood, behavior, or mental faculties appear. Whatever the underlying condition may be, it should be identified and treated as soon as possible.

Q Is it really better to just eat an orange than to drink orange juice? Why is orange juice a problem?

A Orange juice, as with many fruit juices for that matter, contains a great deal of sugar. One cup (8 ounces) of orange juice contains approximately 23 grams (g) of sugar. According to the American Heart Association, a healthy diet shouldn’t exceed 25 g (six teaspoons) of sugar a day for women, or 37 g (nine teaspoons) for men. This means that a single cup of orange juice at breakfast puts you at, or near, your daily sugar limit before your day has barely begun. In the U.S., it is easy to consume too much sugar and often without realizing it. For example, a Starbucks Grande Latte has 17 g of sugar. A single can of regular Coke has a whopping 39 g. Many processed foods, common in the American diet, contain added sugar even if they don’t taste sweet. All the extra calories from sugar make it difficult to maintain a healthy weight, and there is a clear link between excess body weight and type 2 diabetes. A recent study published online by JAMA Internal Medicine revealed a direct correlation between excess dietary sugar and death from heart disease. And it is common knowledge that the acidity of orange juice is damaging to tooth enamel. Although orange juice is high in vitamin C and other nutrients, an orange provides the same good nutrition, with the bonus of healthy fiber, at less than one-half the sugar of juice. If you must drink orange or other fruit juice, reduce your portion to one-half or three-quarters your usual amount and fill up the rest with water to limit the amount of sugar per serving.

Q I have a few younger friends (in their mid 50s) who play tennis and want me to learn. I don’t have any real health problems, but I am 65 years old. Am I too old to learn a sport like that?

A With no health problems to stand in your way, you must not allow perceptions of “too old” to deter you from pursuing new interests, tennis included. You stand to gain a great many health benefits from playing tennis, such as improved mood and cardiovascular health, lower body fat, and better balance and increased bone density. Just don’t try to do too much too fast. Take lessons from a certified instructor so you can learn proper form to reduce chances of injury, and, at first, confine your efforts to doubles play, which doesn’t require as much movement around the court as singles matches. In fact, your age should not be a hindrance for exploring any new physical activity, as long as you receive proper instruction and don’t push yourself beyond what would be considered a safe level for beginners.

**DISCLAIMER**

Healthy Years is intended to provide readers with accurate and timely medical news and information. It is not intended to give personal medical advice, which should be obtained directly from a physician. Acting on any information provided without first consulting a physician is solely at the reader’s risk. We regret that we cannot respond to individual inquiries about personal health matters. From time to time, we make our list of subscribers available to carefully screened institutions and organizations offering products or services we believe you may be interested in. If you would prefer that we not release your name to these organizations, just let us know. Please include the mailing label from your issue with your request, and send it to the customer service address at the left.