

# Dieting is a young person's game, right? Not really.

Here's how seniors can overcome the obstacles of aging to lose weight.

[Morey Stettner](#)



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## Retirement Weekly

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By

Ads for weight-loss programs usually feature the young. They rarely show smiling seniors telling us how they lost 50 pounds.

Yet staying reasonably slim is a challenge for many retirees. Certain affects of aging, such as changes in metabolism and loss of bone and muscle mass, increase the odds of weight gain.

Older people may not exercise regularly. And depression or boredom can lead them to overeat.

“Your metabolism starts to slow down as you age,” said Randi Weissberger, a Maryland-based registered dietitian. That means the rate at which we break down food steadily declines.

**Read:** [Walking can help you lose weight and get fit — if you do it right. Here's how to reap rewards from your rambles.](#)

Weight gain poses a particular threat to older women. Because women of any age have a slower metabolism than men, they're more at risk for losing muscle and gaining fat in retirement.

Some seniors are well aware of the risk. They track the latest diet trends and may try intermittent fasting or other weight-

loss regimens, especially if they have an adult child—or other family member—prodding them to slim down.

Research shows that fasting can reduce inflammation and improve longevity. But drastic caloric restriction can slow metabolism even more and spur muscle loss.

As an experiment, you may want to try fasting for 12 hours after dinner—going from, say, 7:30 p.m. to 7:30 a.m. without food. This helps with digestion and gives your body a chance to burn fat for energy as you sleep.

For those over age 65, the best diet is high in protein, low in calories. Focus on non-starchy vegetables like broccoli, cauliflower and green peppers and “keep carbs minimal,” said Weissberger.

If you’re intent on following an eating regimen, she says that the [DASH diet](#) and [Mediterranean diet](#) are healthy options for all ages. These are well-established, evidence-based weight management tools, as opposed to fad diets that come and go.

Recording your daily food and drink intake helps you make more mindful choices while holding yourself accountable for results. For retirees with time on their hands—and who are tempted to nosh throughout the day (and evening)—a food journal can serve a valuable purpose.

“You also want to drink more water, which can help fill you up,” Weissberger added. If you don’t like to drink water, hydrate with flavored water or seltzer or a zero-calorie sports drink.

When it comes to losing weight, retirees express a range of opinions. Some are fatalistic. They may figure that as long as they can dine at their favorite restaurants and go about their daily business, they can live with the extra poundage.

“Older people often say, ‘I enjoy what I enjoy so why start dieting now?’” Weissberger said.

She tends to counsel clients who are more motivated. Their cardiologist might refer them to her. Or they’re newly divorced and eager to get into shape.

**Read:** [How do you start backpacking at 65? Here’s how one woman did it, and now it’s her passion.](#)

Weight-loss experts often advise eaters of any age to listen to their body. They urge us to consume just enough food so that we’re no longer hungry—without feeling compelled to keep eating until we feel full (or past full).

That’s particularly good advice for seniors.

“As we get older, our food needs are less,” said Nancy Mazarin, a registered dietitian nutritionist in Great Neck, N.Y.

“If you listen to your fullness cues, you’ll recognize that you’re getting fuller on less food” after you reach your 60s.

Like Weissberger, Mazarin is a fan of keeping a food journal. She urges clients to ask themselves, “What’s the least amount of food I can eat so that I’m comfortable and I can go five or six hours until I get hungry?”

Protein is a priority for seniors, Mazarin says. Consuming a higher protein meal plan, especially complete proteins such as fish, tofu and poultry, can promote weight loss if coupled with other prudent eating and exercise habits.

For retirees who dine out often, beware of overeating. Ideally, gravitate to healthy choices such as grilled fish and edamame salad. If not, watch out.

Mazarin cites a client who came to her with a fondness for “eating gargantuan portions” of high-fat, high-salt restaurant meals. He assumed Mazarin would impose a rigid diet that would make him miserable.

“But I worked with all the foods he customarily ate,” she said. “I tweaked it.”

Rather than indulge in frequent servings of red meat, for instance, he limited one of his favorite meals—steak—to once a week with a leaner cut of beef. And he reduced his alcohol intake.

"He realized, 'Oh, I can do this,'" she said.