

# Food Sources of Critical Nutrients for Older Adults

**PROTEIN** is essential for maintaining bone and muscle mass during aging. Protein quality, in addition to protein quantity, is an important dietary consideration, as older adults may have higher protein needs than younger adults, despite having lower energy needs.<sup>9</sup>



**CALCIUM** makes up much of the structure of bones and teeth; if intake is inadequate, the body will use calcium stored in bone for other body functions. In addition, a natural decline in bone mass density occurs around age 30, making calcium critical for health during aging.<sup>10</sup>



**VITAMIN D** plays a role in immune function and increases calcium absorption, supporting bone health.<sup>9</sup> Few foods contain vitamin D, most people obtain vitamin D from sun exposure or fortified foods.



**POTASSIUM** is an electrolyte that maintains fluid balance, supports nerve function, regulates muscle functions and maintains healthy blood pressure.<sup>10</sup>



**VITAMIN B12** can be linked to cognition and memory. Adequate intake may require extra attention in older adults due to absorption issues. A diet low in animal products can increase the risk of deficiency.<sup>10</sup>



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FIBER promotes a healthy gut microbiome by feeding and supporting digestive health.<sup>11</sup>



PROBIOTICS are microbes that can support health. However, not all live microbes in foods are considered probiotics. To be called a probiotic, microbes must be known to provide health benefits when consumed in adequate amounts. Fermented dairy foods such as yogurt and kefir provide probiotics. Other foods with live cultures such as sauerkraut, kimchi, tempeh, kombucha and miso support healthy dietary patterns, but most store-bought varieties do not contain strains of microbes that have been studied enough to establish their impact on health outcomes.<sup>12</sup>



PREBIOTICS are often foods that contain soluble fiber that the body can't digest but serve as food for the good bacteria (probiotics) in the gut.<sup>13</sup> These prebiotics help healthy microbes grow and stay active. Even lactose, a natural sugar found in dairy products, can act as a prebiotic for certain beneficial gut bacteria.<sup>14</sup> Prebiotics and probiotics work together to improve gut health and consequently enhance immunity, reduce inflammation and help with memory preservation.<sup>15,16</sup>



## GUT MICROBIOME + LACTOSE INTOLERANCE

Adding small amounts of dairy to eating patterns over time can support the development of gut bacteria such as *Bifidobacterium* that can help break down lactose and prevent symptoms of lactose intolerance.<sup>17</sup>