



## FACTSHEET

**GOAL:** As a part of the [President's HealthierUS Initiative](#), *Steps to Healthy Aging Eating Better & Moving More* is a two-part project sponsored by the Administration on Aging (AoA) and the National Policy and Resource Center on Nutrition and Aging (Center) at Florida International University. It is designed to improve nutrition and encourage physical activity in older adults. Simple, modest increases in daily activities can improve overall health, prevent disease and disability, and reduce health care costs for our nation.

**WHY:** Poor health is not a foregone consequence of aging. An active healthy lifestyle is a key component to successful aging. *Eating Better & Moving More*, the two steps in *Steps to Healthy Aging*, can help even frail older adults prolong their independence and improve their quality of life. Caregivers of family members, who often neglect their own physical, nutritional, and mental health, can also benefit from *Eating Better & Moving More*.

### **HEALTH:**

- ❑ Physical inactivity and poor diets are the major causes of America's overweight and obesity epidemic. Since 1990, the prevalence of obesity has increased 50%. Forty percent of older adults are overweight and 18% are obese (1).
- ❑ Obesity increases chronic disease risk, decreases functionality and independence, and lowers quality of life (2).
- ❑ Medicare and Medicaid programs spend \$84 billion annually on five major chronic conditions that could be significantly improved through increased physical activity and improved nutrition: diabetes, heart disease, cancer, depression, and arthritis (3).
- ❑ Sedentary lifestyles and inadequate diets account for 14% of all deaths in the United States (4).

### **NUTRITION:**

- ❑ Good nutrition prolongs independence by maintaining hearing and vision, cognitive abilities, physical strength, mobility, and endurance (5-8).
- ❑ Good nutrition promotes health by lowering chronic disease risk for heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes, and osteoporosis (9-13).

- ❑ Eighty-seven percent of older Americans have one or more chronic diseases that can be improved by nutrition therapy, including cancer, chronic lung disease, congestive heart failure, dementia, diabetes mellitus, high blood cholesterol, high blood pressure, osteoporosis, obesity, and overweight (14).
- ❑ Forty percent of community-residing older Americans eat poorly (15). For example, three-fourths of African American and two-thirds of white older Americans eat less than the 5 recommended servings of fruits and vegetables daily (16).
- ❑ Up to two-thirds of hip fractures are due to inadequate calcium intake (17).
- ❑ About 50% of older caregivers are likely to be at nutrition risk and benefit from nutrition interventions (18,19).

**PHYSICAL ACTIVITY:**

- ❑ Regular physical activity sustains the ability of older adults to live independently (20).
- ❑ One-third of older adults are inactive (21). Older women are less active than older men. African American older adults are less active than white older adults (16).
- ❑ Regular physical activity benefits individuals with arthritis and those with depression and anxiety. It may reduce the risk of cognitive decline in older adults (20,22).
- ❑ Physical activity is effective in treating heart disease, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, chronic lung disease, diabetes, osteoporosis, obesity and overweight, and arthritis (20).
- ❑ Regular physical activity can improve the mobility and functioning of frail and very old adults. Weight training, flexibility, and endurance activities can also reduce the risk of fall injuries (20,23).
- ❑ Osteoporosis can be delayed or prevented by moderate walking. Two million men suffer from osteoporosis; it is not just a woman's disease (24).

**HOW: *Steps to Healthy Aging Eating Better & Moving More Guidebook*:** In September 2003, the Center published a *Guidebook* for Older Americans Act Nutrition Programs and community congregate dining and senior centers. It is downloadable (pdf) from [fiu.edu/~nutreldr](http://fiu.edu/~nutreldr) and single copies are available free to Aging Network staff. Fax requests on letterhead to 305-348-1518. Based on successful pilot projects, the *Guidebook* has plans for 12 weekly sessions, with “mini-talks,” activities, resources, and “Tips & Tasks” sheets to take home. It describes setting up a program, adapting it to large and small groups, customizing it for participants’ health status, functional ability, and ethnic/racial diversity, recruiting and motivating participants, and measuring results. *Eating Better* is encouraged by easy food check-offs. Wearing user-friendly step counters and writing daily total steps encourage *Moving More*. Nutrition and activity are the two vital *Steps to Healthy Aging*.



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[www.fiu.edu/~nutreldr](http://www.fiu.edu/~nutreldr)

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