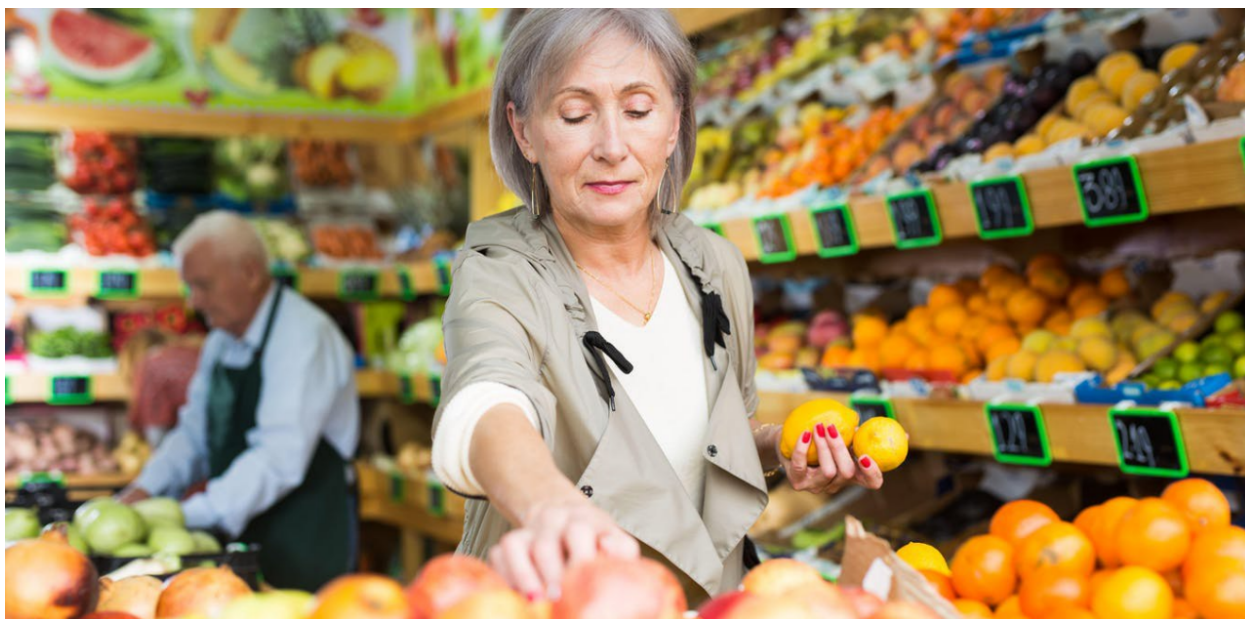


## Changing your diet could add ten years to your life – new research

Everyone wants to live longer. And we're often told that the key to doing this is making healthier lifestyle choices, such as exercising, avoiding smoking and not drinking too much alcohol. Studies have also shown that diet can increase **lifespan**.

A new study has found that eating healthier could extend lifespan by six to seven years in middle-aged age adults, and in young adults, could increase lifespan by about ten years.



The researchers brought together data from many studies that looked at diet and **longevity**, alongside data from the Global Burden of Disease study, which provides a summary of population health from many countries. Combining this data, the authors were then able to estimate how life expectancy varied with continuous changes in **intake** of fruit, vegetables, whole grains, refined grains, nuts, legumes, fish, eggs, dairy, red meat, processed meat and sugary drinks.

The authors were then able to produce an **optimal** diet for longevity, which they then compared with the typical western diet – which mostly contains high amounts of processed foods, red meat, high-fat dairy products, high-sugar foods, pre-packed foods and low fruit and vegetable intake. According to their research, an optimal diet included more **legumes** (beans, peas and lentils), whole grains (oats, barley and brown rice) and nuts, and less red and processed meat.

The researchers found that eating an optimal diet from age 20 would increase life expectancy by more than a decade for women and men from the US, China and Europe. They also found that changing from a western diet to the optimal diet at age 60 would increase life expectancy by eight years. For 80-year-olds, life expectancy could increase by almost three and a half years.



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But given it isn't always possible for people to completely change their diet, the researchers also calculated what would happen if people changed from a western diet to a diet that was **halfway** between the optimal diet and the typical western diet. They found that even this kind of diet – which they called a “feasibility approach diet” – could still increase life expectancy for 20-year-olds by just over six years for women and just over seven years for men.

A table which shows how many grams of each food group a person should aim to **consume** on each of the three diets the researchers looked at in their study.

Table 1<sup>1</sup>

Ingredient	Typical western diet (grams)	Feasibility approach diet (grams)	Optimal diet (grams)
Whole grains	50	137.5	225
Vegetables	250	325	400
Fruits	200	300	400
Nuts	0	12.5	25
Legumes	0	100	200
Fish	50	125	200
Eggs	50	37.5	25
Milk/ dairy	300	250	200
Refined grains	150	100	50
Red meat	100	50	0
Processed meat	50	25	0
White meat	75	62.5	50
Sugar-sweetened beverages	500	250	0
Added plant oils	25	25	25

These results show us that making long-term diet changes at any age may have substantial benefits to life expectancy. But the gains are largest if these changes start early in life.

### Full picture?

The life expectancy estimates this study makes come from the most thorough and recent meta-analyses (a study that combines the results of multiple scientific studies) on diet and **mortality**. While meta-analyses are, in many cases, the best evidence because of the amount of data analysed, they still produce **assumptions** with the data, which may cause important differences between studies to be ignored. It's also worth

<sup>1</sup> A table showing the typical amount of foods people should aim to consume daily on each type of diet. Laura Brown, Author provided



noting that the evidence for reducing consumption of eggs and white meat was of a lower quality than the evidence they had for whole grains, fish, processed meats and nuts.

There are also a few things the study didn't take into account. First, to see these benefits, people needed to make changes to their diet within a ten-year period. This means it's uncertain if people may still see benefits to their lifespan if they make changes to their diet over a longer period of time. The study also didn't take past ill-health into account, which can affect life expectancy. This means that the benefits of diet on life expectancy only reflect an average and may be different for each person depending on a variety of other factors, such as ongoing health issues, genetics and lifestyle, such as smoking, drinking alcohol and exercise.

But the evidence the researchers looked at was still **robust** and drawn from many studies on this subject. These findings also **align with** previous research which has shown that modest but long-term improvements to diet and lifestyle can have significant health benefits – including longevity.

It's not yet entirely clear all the mechanisms that explain why diet can improve lifespan. But the optimal diet that the researchers uncovered in this study includes many foods that are high in antioxidants. Some research in human cells suggests that these substances may slow or prevent damage to cells, which is one cause of **ageing**. However, research in this area is still **ongoing**, so it's uncertain whether antioxidants that we consume as part of our diet will have the same effect. Many of the foods included within this study also have anti-inflammatory properties, which may also delay the onset of various diseases – and the ageing process. Of course, changing your diet completely can be difficult. But even **introducing** some of the foods shown to increase longevity may still have some benefit.

### Essential words for writing and speaking

1. **Lifespan** – the length of time for which a person, animal, or thing exists.  
*The average human lifespan in the developed countries has increased over the last hundred years.*
2. **Longevity** – a long life; the fact of lasting a long time.  
*He attributed his longevity to exercise and a healthy diet.*
3. **Intake** – the amount of a particular substance that is eaten or drunk during a particular time.  
*It says on the packet that four slices of this bread contains one half of your recommended daily intake of fibre.*



4. **Optimal** – best; most likely to bring success or advantage.  
*Several treatment sessions are required in order to obtain optimal results.*
5. **Legume** – a plant that has its seeds in a pod, such as the bean or pea.  
*It is concluded that grass+legume mixtures increased milk yields on farms.*
6. **Halfway** – in the middle of something, or at a place that is equally far from two other places.  
*New York City is halfway between Boston and Washington, DC.*
7. **Consume** – to eat or drink, especially a lot of something.  
*He consumes huge amounts of bread with every meal.*
8. **Mortality** – the state of being human and not living forever.  
*After her mother's death, she became acutely aware of her own mortality.*
9. **Assumption** – something that you accept as true without question or proof.  
*These calculations are based on the assumption that prices will continue to rise.*
10. **Robust** – (of a person or animal) strong and healthy, or (of an object or system) strong and unlikely to break or fail.  
*He looks robust and healthy enough.*
11. **Align (sth) with sth** – to be the same or similar, or to agree with each other; to make two things do this.  
*The post was deleted because it did not align with the values of this website.*
12. **Ageing** – the process of growing old.  
*Ageing process might be hard for people who have not a healthy lifestyle.*
13. **Ongoing** – continuing to exist or develop, or happening at the present moment.  
*There are a number of ongoing difficulties with the project.*
14. **Introduce** – to put something into use, operation, or a place for the first time.  
*Apple has sold many billions of iPhones since the product was introduced in 2007.*

