eldercare locator

Connecting You to Community Services

EAT WELL. LIVE WELL. AGE WELL.

A Guide to Healthy Home-Delivered and Community-Based Meals for Older Adults



Healthy food and good nutrition are essential for older adults to maintain health, independence and quality of life as they age. What we eat supports physical strength and brain health. Proper nutrition helps reduce the risk of chronic disease, supports immune function and maintains cognitive health. Access to healthy, balanced meals can also improve energy levels and support staying active and engaged in daily life.

Food nourishes more than the body—it also supports connection. Shared meals and nutrition programs bring people together, boosting mood and reducing isolation and loneliness.

For many older adults, however, getting the nutritious foods they need can be a challenge. Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) are committed to making healthy eating accessible, enjoyable and affordable in every community. Through meal programs, nutrition services and education, AAAs help older adults eat well, live well and age well. The Eldercare Locator, a national contact center, connects people to local AAAs for nutrition support and other services.

AAA Nutrition Services

AAAs nationwide offer many services to support older adults in maintaining optimal health and well-being, including home-delivered meals and congregate meals in the community. Some AAAs provide nutrition services directly, while other AAAs use local service providers.

- **Home-delivered meals** are brought to older adults and people with disabilities who have difficulty leaving their homes to get to congregate meal sites.
- **Congregate meals** are served in places where older adults often gather, such as senior or community centers, senior cafés, schools or churches.

Common Questions

- **How can I find a meal program?** Call, email, text or chat online with the Eldercare Locator. A specialist can provide contact information for your local AAA which will have information on meal programs and services in your area and may be able to assist with enrollment in a meal program.
- **How much do meals cost?** Costs may be covered by federal Older Americans Act funds; most AAAs use a variety of funding to help defray the costs of each meal and target meals to individuals with greatest social and economic need. Meal recipients are encouraged to voluntarily contribute to the cost of meals.

Nutrition Services for Native American Elders

Contact the Eldercare Locator to learn more about local Title VI Native American Aging Programs and tribes serving Native American elders through congregate and home-delivered meals. Title VI programs strive to create meals that are culturally relevant to and in keeping with the cultural traditions of tribal elders.



Contact the Eldercare Locator

Voice, videophone or text:
1-800-677-1116

Email:
eldercarelocator@USAging.org

Chat:
eldercare.acl.gov

Home-Delivered Meals

- **Who is eligible?** Your local AAA staff will help determine if you are eligible for home-delivered meals. Eligibility is based on age (60 years and older) and unmet needs, such as mobility limitations, cognitive functioning or lack of kitchen facilities to prepare meals. Spouses of any age, caregivers and people with a disability living in the same home as an eligible older adult may also be able to receive meals.
- **Is there a choice of meals?** The ability to choose meals varies by AAA. Most offer lunch and some offer breakfast, dinner and/or frozen weekend meals. Most AAAs list menu options on their websites.
- **Are meals fresh and nutritious?** Home-delivered meals are either fresh or ready-to-heat frozen meals. Menus are developed by registered dietitians, are typically low in salt, meet one-third of daily nutritional needs and can often be tailored for specific health needs.
- **Can a family member help me sign up?** Yes, a loved one, caregiver or neighbor can help with the enrollment process.
- **Who delivers the meal?** Vetted staff or volunteers typically bring home-delivered meals to your residence.
- **What if there is a wait list?** If your AAA meal program has a wait list, ask for other local resources that may have meal delivery options.

Congregate Meals

- **Who is eligible?** Generally, anyone age 60 years and older is eligible for a congregate meal. Your local AAA can let you know the congregate sites available in your area.
- **Do I have choices in meals?** Most AAAs and meal sites make every effort to offer a variety of meals and post menus on a community/senior center or AAA meal site calendar.
- **Are meals fresh and nutritious?** Senior/community centers offer fresh, healthy and delicious meals developed by registered dietitians to meet the unique nutrition needs of older adults. Meals may be customized for individual tastes, dietary needs and cultural food preferences.
- **Can I get a ride to the congregate meal?** Many AAAs offer transportation to and from meal sites.
- **Can I bring someone with me?** Spouses of any age, caregivers, dependents with a disability or friends may join you for a congregate meal. If your guest is not at least 60 years old, there may be a cost for their meal. Ask your local site about the guest policy.
- **Are there other benefits to attending a congregate meal?** Senior/community centers meals offer more than nutrition—they also provide opportunities for social connection and to engage in other activities, such as health promotion, falls prevention and computer classes, field trips, games and more.

Other AAA Nutrition Services

AAAs offer a variety of other nutrition-related services, including:

- Nutrition counseling, education and risk screening
- Assistance with the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
- Grocery deliveries
- Farmer's market programs
- Cooking classes
- Chronic disease management and nutrition programs
- Information on local food pantries
- Caregiver nutrition training

ACL Administration for Community Living

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