

# Energy and Nutrient Density<sup>1</sup>

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Older adults who have experienced unintentional weight loss may need foods high in nutrients and calories to restore nutritional health.

- Foods that are **energy-dense** have lots of calories per serving. The calories may come from protein, fat, or carbohydrates.
- Foods that are **nutrient-dense** have high levels of nutrients per serving. Nutrient-dense refers to the amount of vitamins, minerals, and/or protein in a food.

Some foods can be energy-dense and provide few nutrients, while other foods can be nutrient-dense but provide little energy or calories. Foods for older adults who have lost weight should target **both** energy and nutrient density.

- **Candy** is energy-dense but provides no vitamins and minerals.
- **Spinach** is nutrient-dense but provides few calories.
- **Cheese** is both energy-dense and nutrient-dense.

Energy-dense foods are often high in sugar and fat. Although a liberal fat diet may be recommended for the older adult who has lost weight, it is important that many of the energy-dense foods served to the older adult be high in protein.

Vegetables are often nutrient-dense but energy densities for most are low. It is recommended that fats and sauces be added to vegetables to increase the energy densities of these foods.

## Examples of Energy- and Nutrient-Dense Foods:

- Whole milk
- Full-fat cheeses
- Creamed soups
- Pudding and Pies
- Pasta and vegetables in cream sauce
- Meat with gravy
- Peanut butter

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