

Energy and Nutrient Density¹

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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 the older adult who has lost weight should target **both** energy and nutrient density.

Table 1.

Candy is <u>energy dense</u> but provides <u>no vitamins and minerals</u> .
Spinach is <u>nutrient dense</u> but provides <u>few calories</u> .
Cheese is both <u>energy and nutrient dense</u> .

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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