

# Starting Healthy Habits After 60 Still Lowers Fracture and Cardiac Death Risk

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## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › A 2025 study shows that adults in their mid-60s with healthier diets and lifestyle habits had significantly lower rates of hip fractures and cardiovascular-related deaths
- › Diet quality has the biggest impact on long-term health, especially when focused on whole, unprocessed foods rather than processed meats, refined grains, and added sugars
- › Calcium from food sources was associated with lower cardiovascular mortality, while those using calcium supplements faced higher fracture risk, likely due to prior fractures and poor nutrient balance
- › Participants with healthier diets also smoked less, exercised more, and had fewer chronic health conditions
- › It's never too late to adopt healthier habits, but combining multiple healthy practices delivers the greatest benefits for reducing disease risk and extending quality of life

Your risk of developing age-related conditions like heart disease and osteoporosis increases as you get older. Cardiovascular disease (CVD) remains the leading cause of mortality worldwide,<sup>1</sup> while osteoporosis leads to fractures in one in three women and one in five men over age 50.<sup>2</sup>

These issues are strongly influenced by dietary and lifestyle factors and develop gradually over time. Midlife is an important period to reduce your risks before the decline becomes harder to reverse.

This prompted researchers from the University of Southampton in the U.K. to launch a long-term study that explores whether healthier eating habits and lifestyle choices in midlife translate into lower rates of fractures and heart-related deaths. Their findings serve as a reminder that it's never too late to make changes, but the sooner you start, the better the outcome.<sup>3</sup>

## How Diet and Lifestyle in Your 60s Matter More Than You Think

The featured study, published in March 2025 in *Frontiers in Aging*,<sup>4</sup> followed nearly 3,000 adults in their mid-60s from the Hertfordshire Cohort Study for over 20 years. They found that people who fared best had stronger overall habits rooted in nutrient-rich diets and daily movement.

- **Diet quality made the biggest difference in long-term health** — Participants with higher scores on the “prudent diet” pattern (marked by greater intake of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and oily fish, as well as lower intake of chips and full-fat dairy) had lower risks of both hip fracture and cardiovascular mortality. The association with hip fractures was modest but still important for long-term health.

That said, the researchers listed full-fat dairy as one of the foods to avoid — a recommendation I disagree with. I believe that high-quality, full-fat dairy actually supports both your metabolic and cardiovascular health, and I explained more about it in [“The Amazing Benefits of Dairy Fat.”](#)

- **Calcium from whole foods outperforms supplements** — People who obtained calcium through food had a lower risk of dying from CVD. In contrast, those taking calcium supplements faced a higher risk of fractures, likely because the supplements were prescribed after a fracture had already occurred.
- **Healthy diets went hand-in-hand with healthy lifestyles** — People who ate a healthy diet exercised more, smoked less, and had fewer chronic conditions like diabetes or high blood pressure. Meanwhile, those who smoked, exercised less, or had

hypertension were more likely to experience fractures and cardiovascular-related deaths. For example, ever-smokers had a 25% higher risk of fracture and a 29% higher risk of cardiovascular death.

- **Men are dangerously unaware of their bone health risks** – Despite facing a 10% to 25% lifetime risk of fracture and higher death rates after hip fracture, many men still see osteoporosis as a condition that only affects women. This lack of awareness is what led researchers to pair fracture risk with cardiovascular data to frame the issue in terms men already recognize.

Together, these findings highlight that the habits you build in your 60s still matter – enough to reshape your risk of disease and death for years to come.

## **What Other Studies Reveal About Diet and Heart Health in Aging**

The Southampton study fits within a larger body of evidence built over the past two decades. A major review published in *Clinical Interventions in Aging*,<sup>5</sup> which analyzed data from global cohorts and clinical trials, found that diets centered on unprocessed, nutrient-dense foods were most strongly linked to lower rates of heart attacks, strokes, and cardiovascular deaths. However, this study also exposed major gaps in how different types of dietary fat were evaluated.

- **Whole, nutrient-dense foods drive better cardiovascular outcomes** – In older adults, diets built around whole vegetables, fruits, fish, and naturally occurring fats support healthier blood pressure, improved insulin sensitivity, and stronger lipid profiles.

These patterns are consistently linked to lower rates of heart disease. In contrast, Western-style diets heavy in processed meats, refined grains, and added sugars are tied to worse outcomes, especially when they replace more traditional, nutrient-rich staples.

- **Healthy habits work better together** – Diet has a greater impact when combined with other lifestyle choices. People who eat well, stay active, avoid smoking, and limit alcohol have a significantly lower risk of heart-related deaths. Moreover, the more healthy habits you adopt, the greater the payoff.
- **Dietary change improves outcomes even if you have heart disease** – Clinical trials show that patients with existing cardiovascular conditions lower their risk of future cardiac events by shifting to a healthier diet.
- **Olive oil’s reputation deserves a closer look** – While many of the studies in this review associated olive oil with lower cardiovascular risk, I recommend limiting its use. Despite its healthy image, most olive oils are adulterated with cheap, oxidized omega-6 vegetable oils.

They’re also composed of oleic acid, a **monounsaturated fat** (MUF) that is still prone to oxidation, especially with heat or light exposure. In large amounts, MUFs disrupt mitochondrial function and increase oxidative stress, making olive oil a questionable long-term staple.

- **My stance on saturated fats** – While this review reflects the conventional view that saturated fats contribute to cardiovascular risk, I take a different position based on a broader understanding of fat metabolism, mitochondrial health, and oxidation. The paper’s conclusions are based largely on epidemiological data and outdated assumptions about saturated fat, much of which has been challenged by more recent studies.<sup>6</sup>

In contrast to unstable polyunsaturated fats (PUFs) like **linoleic acid**, saturated fats like those found in coconut oil, grass fed butter, and tallow are highly resistant to oxidation and support mitochondrial function. Learn more about this in “[How to Fix Your Heart Naturally with Saturated Fat and Cholesterol.](#)”

## **Healthy Lifestyle Habits Also Lengthen a Disease-Free Life**

Beyond supporting bone and heart health, healthy lifestyle habits add significantly more years of life free from cancer, CVD, and Type 2 diabetes. In a large-scale BMJ study, researchers followed over 100,000 adults for nearly 30 years and found the following:<sup>7</sup>

- **Healthy habits added a decade of disease-free life** – People with no healthy habits lived about 24 years without major illness, while those who followed four to five key habits gained roughly 10 more years of disease-free life. For women, that meant an increase from 23.7 to 34.4 years; for men, from 23.5 to 31.1 years.
- **The greatest gains came from combining multiple healthy habits** – Similar to the findings from the Clinical Interventions in Aging study,<sup>8</sup> the BMJ study found that individuals who exercised regularly, avoided smoking, maintained a healthy weight, limited alcohol, and followed a nutrient-rich diet experienced significantly more years free of chronic disease.
- **Heavy smoking and obesity cut the most years from a healthy lifespan** – These two factors consistently shortened the healthy lifespan. Even for those who lived into their 70s or 80s, the burden of illness was far higher when these risk factors were present.

## **The Synergistic Nutrients That Protect Your Heart and Bones**

As the Southampton study showed, supplementing with calcium alone isn't enough to protect your bones or heart as you age.<sup>9</sup> To get optimal results, you need the synergy of nutrients that work together to guide where calcium goes and how it's used.

- **Vitamin D and K2 work together to manage calcium properly** – Vitamin D plays an important role in helping your body absorb calcium from the food you eat, but you need vitamin K2 to make sure calcium ends up in your bones – not your arteries or kidneys.<sup>10</sup>

- **Vitamin K2 keeps calcium out of soft tissues and directs it to bones** – Vitamin K2 acts like a traffic director for calcium in your body. It activates proteins that move calcium into your bones and teeth, where it strengthens your structure. At the same time, K2 prevents calcium from building up in soft tissues like blood vessels, where it hardens and blocks circulation.

Without enough K2, the extra calcium will actually harm you, even if you're getting plenty of vitamin D.<sup>11</sup>

- **Magnesium works behind the scenes** – Your body needs magnesium to convert vitamin D into its active form, so it turns on your calcium absorption. Magnesium and vitamin K2 also complement each other because magnesium helps lower blood pressure, which is an important component of heart disease.

While no precise guidelines exist, magnesium helps keep calcium in your cells so they can do their job better, and most experts recommend a 1-to-1 ratio of calcium to magnesium.<sup>12</sup>

- **Optimize your levels through a healthy diet** – It's important to understand that magnesium, calcium, vitamin D3, and vitamin K2 need to be properly balanced for optimal heart and overall health. Your best and safest bet is to simply eat more foods rich in calcium, magnesium, and vitamin K2, along with sensible sun exposure.
- **If supplementing, make sure to balance these nutrients** – If you're taking vitamin D or calcium, make sure you're also getting enough K2 and magnesium. Aim for around 150 mcg of K2 daily, ideally in the MK-7 form, along with a magnesium supplement.

To find your optimal magnesium dose, start with magnesium citrate, as it has a laxative effect that makes dosing easy to gauge. Gradually increase your dose until you experience loose stools, then reduce it slightly – that's your ideal daily amount.

Once you've identified the right dose, switch to another form you prefer. The forms I most often recommend are magnesium glycinate and magnesium malate because they're well-absorbed and easy on your digestive system.

## 5 Strategies to Adopt for Healthy Aging

For years, I've emphasized the powerful impact that small, consistent lifestyle changes have on your overall well-being. You don't need extreme measures or expensive interventions. What you need is a daily commitment to better choices in key areas of your health. Here are some strategies I recommend:

- 1. Prioritize whole, unprocessed foods** – These include grass fed meat, wild-caught fish, pasture-raised eggs, fermented dairy, and healthy fats like butter, ghee, tallow, and coconut oil. If your gut is healthy, add in fruits, cooked vegetables, and properly prepared whole grains to your diet. Avoid vegetable oils, processed grains, and added sugars, as they damage your health over time.
- 2. Stay physically active** – Regular movement improves circulation, strengthens your muscles, maintains bone density, and supports joint flexibility. Aim to move daily through walking, stretching, lifting light weights, or gardening. Consistency matters more than intensity. Learn more about how much you should exercise in [“Nailing the Sweet Spots for Exercise Volume.”](#)
- 3. Keep your brain active** – Your mind needs exercise just like your body does. Read daily, play memory games, write by hand, or learn new skills. These activities help protect against cognitive decline, boost coordination, and maintain focus and clarity. Staying mentally active also lowers stress, improves mood, and helps you stay engaged in daily life.
- 4. Avoid smoking and alcohol consumption** – Few choices impact your health more than quitting smoking and cutting out alcohol. Tobacco restricts blood flow, accelerates bone loss, and increases the risk of fractures, stroke, and heart attack.

Even longtime smokers benefit from quitting, with risk levels dropping steadily over time.<sup>13</sup>

Alcohol poses its own risks, as it interferes with calcium absorption, weakens bone formation, and raises blood pressure.<sup>14</sup> No amount of alcohol is safe for your health, so it's best to avoid it entirely.

- 5. Get sunlight** — Sensible sun exposure helps your body produce vitamin D. However, if you still consume vegetable oils, you need to practice caution, as LA triggers inflammation and DNA damage in your skin when it interacts with UV radiation. Avoid sun exposure during peak hours (10 a.m. to 4 p.m.) until you've eliminated vegetable oils from your diet for four to six months.

If building these habits feels overwhelming, keep an eye out for the upcoming Mercola Health Coach, which is designed to guide you toward a healthier diet and lifestyle with practical, personalized support. It's coming soon — learn more about it [here](#).

## **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) About Diet, Aging, and Disease Risk**

**Q: Is it ever too late to start making lifestyle changes?**

**A:** No. Research shows that even in your 60s, adopting healthier habits significantly reduces your risk of fractures, cardiovascular disease, and early death. The earlier you start, the better the outcomes, but meaningful benefits still come from changes made later in life.

**Q: Why is calcium from food better than supplements?**

**A:** The Southampton study found that people who got their calcium from food had lower cardiovascular risk, while those taking calcium supplements had a higher risk of fractures. This is likely because supplements are often prescribed after fractures occur and lead to calcium imbalances if not paired with other key nutrients like magnesium, vitamin D, and vitamin K2.

**Q: How are diet quality and physical strength connected in aging adults?**

**A:** People who maintained higher physical function tended to have better diet quality and fewer chronic conditions. This suggests that good nutrition supports physical resilience, which in turn reduces the risk of fractures and heart-related deaths.

**Q: Do healthy habits work better when combined?**

**A:** Yes. Research shows that the more healthy habits you follow, the better your results. People who combined several habits lived longer and had fewer problems like heart disease, cancer, and Type 2 diabetes compared to those who followed just one.

**Q: What are the best steps to take for healthy aging?**

**A:** Focus on simple, consistent habits. Eat whole, nutrient-dense foods, stay physically active, avoid smoking and alcohol, and get regular sun exposure. Optimal levels of key nutrients like calcium, magnesium, vitamin D, and K2 is also important for protecting your bones, heart, and overall health as you age.

## Sources and References

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