

Insights and evidence from *Mentally Healthy Living After Social Distancing—A Study of Older Canadians*,  
funded by the RTOERO Foundation

# Cooking up calm

Design your menu for mentally healthy  
living in the later years





## What are the ingredients for mentally healthy living as we age?

Stress is a universal experience, and although often considered harmful, it is helpful when it motivates us to act, such as by safeguarding ourselves throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. But chronic stress and anxiety are problematic, as they are tied to physical illnesses and mental health concerns. Cultivating personal stress-management and coping methods is vital to healthy aging!



The COVID-19 pandemic, which greatly affected older people, created a prime opportunity to learn from them about their mentally healthy living strategies—including tips on the most effective strategies for managing anxiety. That was the goal of the RTOERO Foundation-funded project Mentally Healthy Living After Social Distancing—A Study of Older Canadians. The Living Well Research Team, led by Dr. Gail Low, associate professor of nursing at the University of Alberta, surveyed 1,327 Canadians 60 years of age and older in July and August of 2022. This timing is important, as it was when public health restrictions were being lifted across the country.

The learnings are captured in this booklet—side by side with recipes for you to add to your menu for mentally healthy living in the later years.

Project funded by the RTOERO Foundation



## Benefits of cooking beyond nutrition

Cooking has many benefits. Cooking can be:

- a chance to practise skills and learn new ones
- a way to connect with and share traditions and cultures
- a fun way to pass some time
- an activity to do with children, family and friends
- an opportunity to connect with others when preparing and sharing a meal
- a way to do something kind for others—a meal is a nice gift for someone else

“Healthy aging isn’t a destination; it’s a journey—and everything we do is connected. When we can find ways to weave healthy habits into our day-to-day activities, we are more likely to have personal success. The act of cooking can serve as a reminder of your abilities, and it can be a healthy distraction from challenges you face. The recipes we included were designed with easy-to-find ingredients, some familiar flavours, and options to simplify and customize—we hope you enjoy them!”

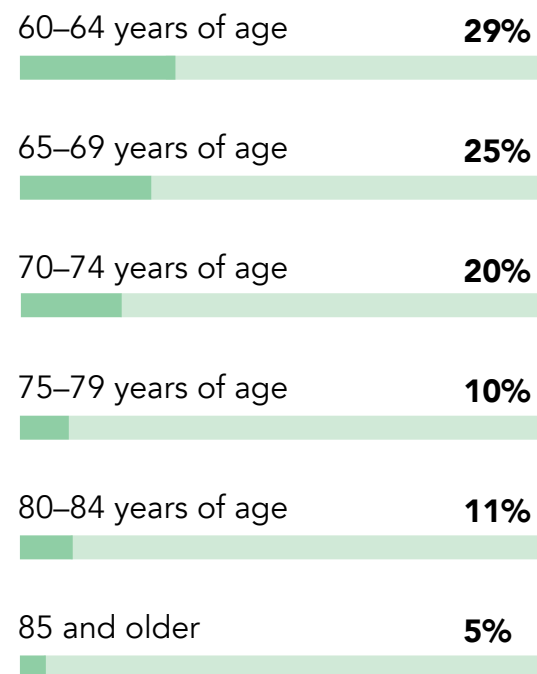
- Dr. Gail Low, Associate Professor of Nursing at the University of Alberta

# Who we heard from

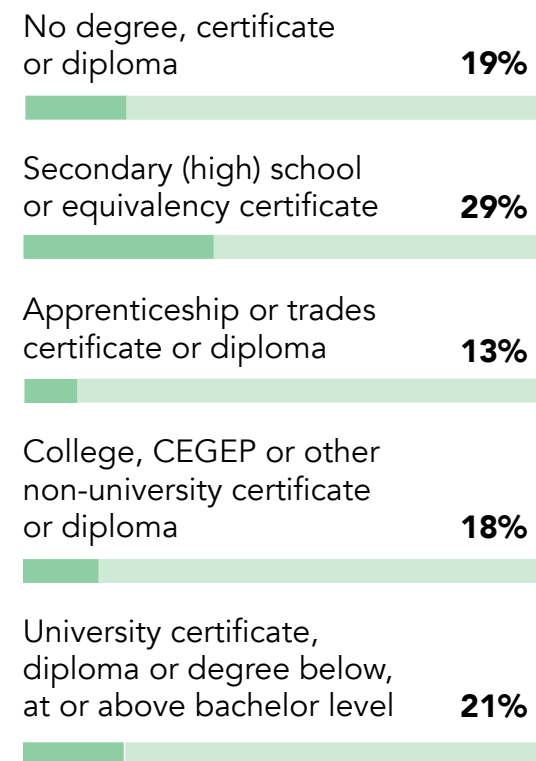
The national sample was designed to include the right number and mix of people to reflect typical older Canadians.

Total study participants:  
**1,327**

## Age



## Education



# What this study found

Anxiety levels were low in general, but one in five people were severely or very, very anxious

Anxiety levels were assessed for each person using the Geriatric Anxiety Scale, a commonly used anxiety measurement tool with 10 questions and answers that add up to a total anxiety score of 0 to 30.

Average score among all **1,327** people: **6.47 = minimal to mild anxiety**

**21%** had a score of **0** = not at all anxious

**40%** had a score of **1–6** = minimal anxiety

**11%** had a score of **7–9** = mildly anxious

**6%** had a score of **10** = moderately or very anxious

**22%** had a score of **12–30** = severely or very, very anxious

## The ability to cope with anxiety improved with aging

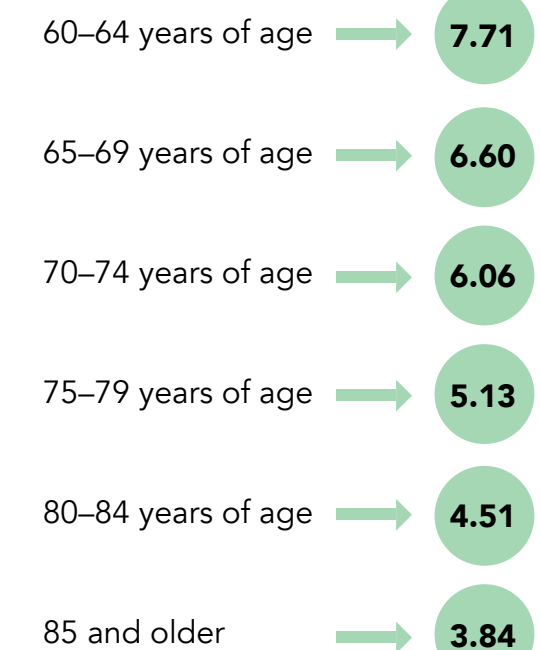
Anxiety scores decreased as the person’s age increased.

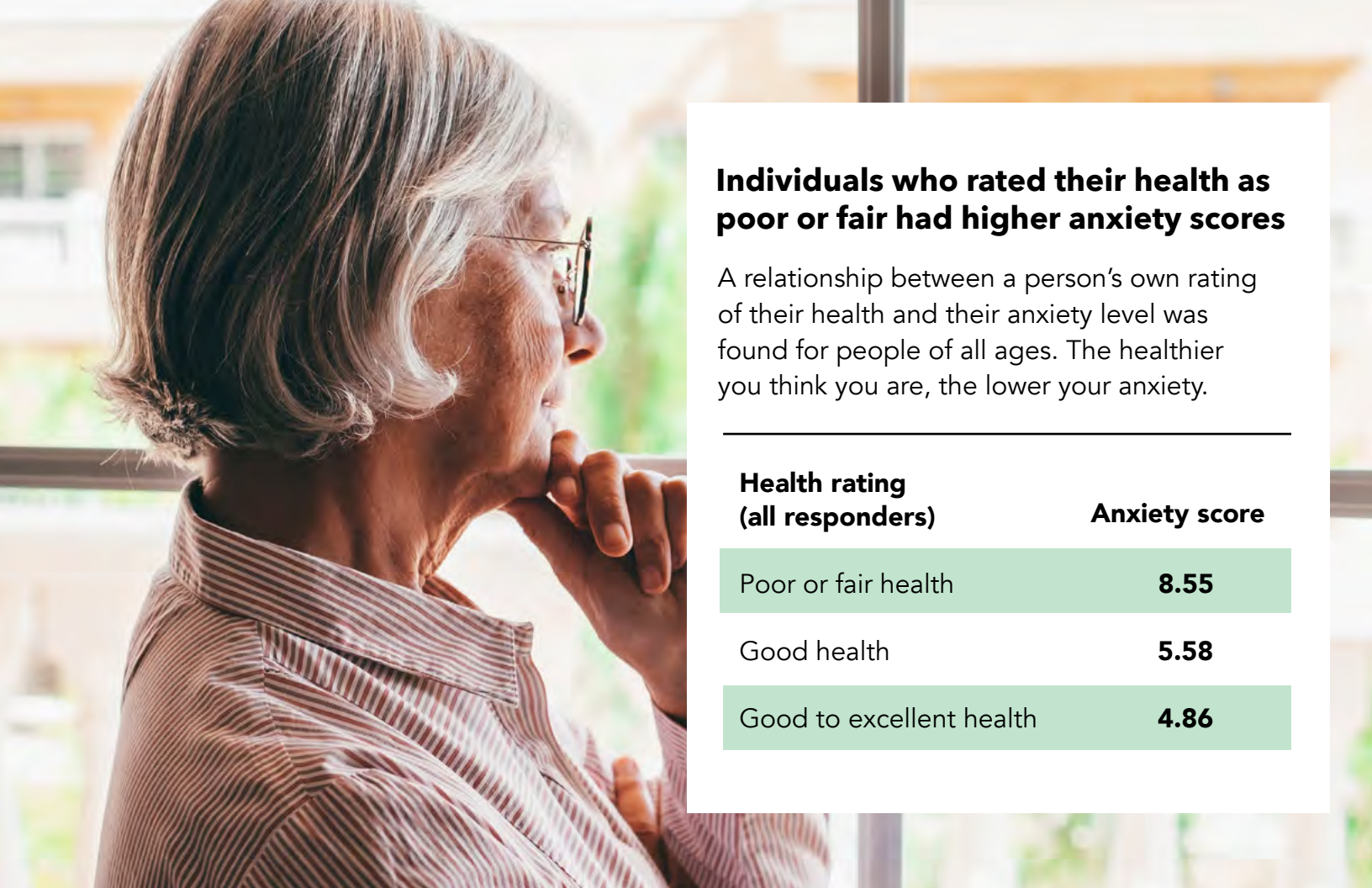


“It could be because the older you are, the more life experience you have to draw on. Older people could perhaps take COVID-19 more in their stride than younger people,” Low explains.

## Age

## Anxiety Score





### Individuals who rated their health as poor or fair had higher anxiety scores

A relationship between a person’s own rating of their health and their anxiety level was found for people of all ages. The healthier you think you are, the lower your anxiety.

Health rating (all responders)	Anxiety score
Poor or fair health	8.55
Good health	5.58
Good to excellent health	4.86

## 10 anxiety symptoms, as worded in the Geriatric Anxiety Scale:

1. I was irritable.
2. I felt detached and isolated from others.
3. I felt like I was in a daze.
4. I had a hard time sitting still.
5. I could not control my worry.
6. I felt restless, keyed up, or on edge.
7. I felt overly tired.
8. My muscles were tense.
9. I felt like I had no control over my life.
10. I felt like something terrible was going to happen to me.

### A troubling trio of anxiety symptoms

Three of the 10 anxiety symptoms were the most problematic, as they were linked with other anxiety symptoms and to each person’s anxiety level. These three are the ones to pay attention to and then take action on if necessary to lower your anxiety:

**1**  
**Feeling restless, keyed up, or on edge**  
 (symptom 6)

**2**  
**Muscle tension**  
 (symptom 8)

**3**  
**Feeling of having no control over life**  
 (symptom 9)

“These three symptoms were the most influential symptoms in the anxiety network. If people were experiencing them, they were more likely to be experiencing other symptoms, and they also had higher anxiety levels.”

- Dr. Gail Low, Associate Professor of Nursing at the University of Alberta



## About anxiety, stress, and mental health

The World Health Organization defines mental health as “a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community.”

Just like physical health, mental health fluctuates. It is affected by life circumstances that you are dealing with, your environment, your relationships, your social and emotional skills, any substance use, what has happened to you in the past, and genetics—what you are born with.

**Remember:** Anxiety, stress, and mood changes are normal responses to challenging circumstances (like a pandemic, when needing to cope with loss, and other tough life experiences). They don’t mean that you have an anxiety disorder or a mental illness.

## Design your menu for mentally healthy living

How people deal with stressful events varies greatly. Just as each person will enjoy certain foods, your approach to mentally healthy living will be unique—based on your preferences, culture, and what you have learned over time. Learning to recognize what’s helpful to you and building a menu of strategies can help you cope when you are facing difficult situations.

### Anxiety-lessening strategies by popularity

The study participants were given a menu of 16 anxiety-reducing strategies to choose from. These 16 strategies were based on advice from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) in Toronto. Study participants were asked to select all of the strategies that they had used during the pandemic.



### This is what we learned, in order of popularity:

87%	I accepted that some fear and anxiety are normal.
83%	I was kind to myself.
77%	I dealt with problems in a structured way.
77%	I found a balance by staying tuned in (to news stories about COVID-19), but knowing when to take a breather.
76%	I got proper rest and sleep.
75%	I remembered that I was resilient and was careful with the “what ifs.”
75%	I had a moderate caffeine intake.
72%	I ate healthily.
69%	I stayed active.
64%	I avoided substances, including smoking, vaping, and alcohol.
63%	I challenged anxious thoughts and worries.
57%	I decreased other sources of stress in my life.
44%	I sought credible information.
43%	I sought support from loved ones.
38%	I practised relaxation and meditation.
21%	I brought an intentional mindset to unplugging from electronic devices, including phones, tablets, and computers.

## Six strategies had greater anxiety-lessening effects

The use of the 16 strategies was analyzed alongside the anxiety scores to identify the most effective anxiety-lessening strategies. While there was no single best anxiety-lessening strategy, six of the 16 were used more frequently by the study participants with lower anxiety scores.



1. staying active



2. eating healthily



3. dealing with problems in a structured way



4. getting proper rest and sleep



5. decreasing other sources of stress in life



6. remembering resilience

“Our findings reinforce existing evidence—but from the perspective specifically of older adults. A core insight here is we don’t need to get complicated—it’s about consistently doing foundational health behaviours to maintain or bolster our well-being.”

- Dr. Gail Low, Associate Professor of Nursing at the University of Alberta



### Sage advice follows!

For a twist, you’ll find sage—the herb, and also sage words of advice—sprinkled throughout the next pages. Don’t care for sage? Omit it—use flavours you like!

## Strategy 1: Stay active

Much evidence supports the relationship between physical activity and mental health. In this study, staying active was the most effective anxiety-lessening strategy that people used. Incorporating regular exercise into your life can help you maintain positive mental health. When you're feeling increased stress levels, physical movement is a way to help yourself cope. Here are some tips:

- Your mindset about exercise is important. Remind yourself of the many activities you already do that count as staying active. Yardwork, house cleaning, and dancing in the living room to music are all exercise.
- Muscles tense under stress, and stretching can help to relieve tension. Try simple stretches, such as reaching your arms overhead with your fingers laced together and stretching your torso upwards.
- If you want an activity target, [ParticipACTION](#) offers advice for adults aged 65 and up. These use the Canadian 24-hour movement guidelines:
  - 150 minutes per week of moderate to vigorous aerobic physical activities (your heart rate should rise)
  - muscle strengthening twice a week and activities that challenge your balance
- Most adults in Canada aren't reaching the recommended levels. Any increase in activity is worth celebrating—and increasing your activity level can lead to other mentally healthy (and physically healthy) behaviours.

"Exercise is a great chance for social interaction, and working out with others offers accountability and routine. You could join a class or existing group or form your own with a few contacts. Keep it simple—for example, meet for walks. During winter months, move inside to a mall or other indoor space. Often, the hardest part is getting started, so if you're feeling stuck, ask a friend or family member to help you make a plan."

- Dr. Donna Wilson, Professor Emerita at the University of Alberta



"Get out, if possible, and go for a walk; if you can't walk outside because of poor circulation, go out on your balcony or fire escape to get fresh air."

(60–64 years, female)

"If you are able, go for a short walk and take your time, and use a walker that you can sit on. People will stop and make sure you are OK. It gets you outside and a little vitamin D from the sun."

(80–84 years, male)



## Strategy 2: Eat healthily

Studies have tied healthy diets to good mental health, so it's unsurprising that healthy eating emerged as one of the more effective anxiety-lessening strategies. Despite the benefits of healthy eating being widely known, eating healthily can still be a struggle.

Here are some suggestions for eating healthily:

- Canned and frozen vegetables and fruit offer the same health benefits as fresh ones, and they are often cheaper. Plus, they'll keep longer. Look for canned fruit packed in water and canned vegetables with low or no salt.
- Protein helps to build and maintain your body. Include protein in every meal. The best sources are meat, fish, poultry, milk, eggs, cheese, yogurt, and legumes (such as chickpeas, beans, and lentils).
- Make sure you eat regular meals and have snacks—avoid becoming too hungry because it can cause you to overeat or make less healthy choices.
- Make sure you're drinking enough water. Aim to consume about two litres of fluid (preferably water) throughout the day, and start early in the day so you're not drinking much water right before bed—to avoid needing to wake up to use the washroom.
- Your healthcare provider can offer dietary tips based on your unique situation or connect you with a dietitian to help with planning meals.

When stressed, you might turn to convenience foods, which aren't necessarily healthy. Nourishing yourself by eating more fruits and vegetables and drinking plenty of water can support stress management, coping, and overall mental and physical health. Homemade food is generally healthier than ready-to-eat purchased foods.



"Go for a walk, go for a drive, breathe in fresh air, listen to beautiful music, watch programs that will make you laugh, see friends that listen and can joke around with you and laugh with you. Eat good food that you like the taste of and drink lots of water."  
(60–64 years, gender unknown)

### Try our quiche recipe

Quiche is an excellent option if you have a friend or family member over for lunch. You can also portion and freeze this quiche for a quick and comforting meal later on. Quiche pairs well with soup, salad, and fruit or is great on its own.



# Caramelized onion quiche 8 servings



## Ingredients

- 2 tbsp (30 mL) butter
- 1 large yellow onion, sliced
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1 tsp (5 mL) dried thyme
- 1 ½ tsp (7 mL) chopped fresh sage (or a smaller amount of dried sage)
- 1 9-inch (23 cm) puffed pastry sheet
- ½ cup (125 mL) heavy cream
- ½ cup (125 mL) whole milk
- 3 eggs
- ¼ tsp (1 mL) ground nutmeg
- 1 cup (250 mL) shredded cheese such as cheddar or gouda, divided

## Nutrition facts:

One serving (181g) contains 440 calories, 26g total fat, 15g saturated fat, 470mg sodium, 39g total carbohydrates, 2g dietary fibre, 3g total sugars, and 12g protein.

## Instructions

1. Melt the butter in a large frying pan, add the onions, and cook on low heat for 20 minutes, stirring periodically until they are soft and golden brown. Season with salt and pepper, stir in the thyme and sage (if you wish), and transfer to a plate to cool.
2. Heat oven to 350°F (175°C).
3. Roll out the pastry on a lightly floured surface until large enough to line a 9-inch (23 cm) pie plate, with a little overhang of pastry around the top rim to prevent the pastry from shrinking when cooked in the oven. Trim off the excess pastry with scissors or a knife. Gently press the pastry into the sides of the tin and prick the base with a fork. Chill for 15 minutes.
4. Line the inside of the pastry in the pie plate with a sheet of parchment paper and fill it with ceramic baking beans or regular dried beans. Bake for 15 minutes in the oven (this helps to prevent a soggy bottom). Carefully remove the parchment and beans, and return pastry to the oven for 10 more minutes until slightly golden brown (be careful not to overcook). Remove from oven and let it cool for 5 to 10 minutes.
5. Beat the cream, milk, and eggs with salt and pepper to taste and the nutmeg. Stir in half the cheese.
6. Spoon the caramelized onions evenly over the base of the pastry case. Pour in the egg, milk, and cheese mixture and put the

remaining cheese on top. Bake for 25 to 30 minutes, until golden brown and the filling is just set with a slight wobble in the centre.

7. Leave to set for 10 minutes, then remove from the pie plate to slice and eat.

## Variations and tips:

- You can try any variety of hard cheese that you like or have on hand.
- You can use dried sage instead of fresh sage (use one-third the amount—i.e., ½ tsp).
- Add vegetables to this recipe based on your taste and what's in your fridge or freezer.
- For a lower-fat variation, substitute evaporated or 2% milk for the cream and whole milk. As a bonus, evaporated milk comes in a can—you could easily keep some on hand.
- To increase protein, add bacon bits, ham, chickpeas, chicken, or another meat.
- Use a pre-made regular pie crust instead of puff pastry to make this simple.
- If you want to make the crust and don't have ceramic baking beans, dried chickpeas, lentils, peas, or rice will also work. The purpose of the ceramic or dried beans is to help the pastry keep its shape as it cooks. You can skip this step, but baking the pie crust is a good idea before you add the onions and egg mix.



## Strategy 3: Deal with problems in a structured way

Sometimes challenges pile up, leading to feelings of being overwhelmed. The study found that an intentional effort to deal with problems in a step-by-step or structured way was a popular and effective strategy.

Here are some suggestions:

- Identify which problems you need to address, then brainstorm some options for dealing with each of them.
- Try to break each problem into small action steps. What should happen now? Tomorrow? Later, or not at all?
- Write down ideas, and consider the pros and cons of each possible action.
- Consider what resources, groups, or people are available in your community that may be able to help you.
- Not sure if a problem is a real problem or a worry that is running away? Ask a trusted friend or family member for their opinion on it.

“Before the study, participants were all dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought various anxiety-provoking challenges. An intentional approach to problem-solving can help when things start to feel like too much to handle. Use a pen and paper to make notes. Or, talk with a trusted friend or family member.”

- Dr. Gloria Gutman, Professor Emerita at Simon Fraser University



“Reach out to area resources and friends. Join social groups in person or online via Zoom.”

(60–64 years, female)

“Do not sweat over things that you have no control over.”

(80–84 years, male)

### Try our one-pan salmon recipe

When you have challenging problems to tackle, the brain-boosting benefits of omega-3 fatty acids may help, and salmon is a great source. Other sources of omega-3 include most other fish, such as mackerel and sardines, as well as flaxseed, chia seeds, and walnuts. This recipe uses just one pan to keep it simple.



# One-pan garlic-baked salmon with potatoes and asparagus

2 servings

## Ingredients

- 2 medium to large potatoes (approximately 10 oz/300g total)
- 1 tbsp (15 mL) olive oil
- 2 ½ tbsp (43 mL) minced garlic, divided
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 2 tbsp (30 mL) unsalted butter
- ¼ cup (60 mL) lemon juice
- 2 6 oz (170g) salmon fillets
- 1 medium bunch asparagus (approximately 8 oz/225g)
- 1 ¼ tsp chopped parsley
- 1 tsp minced fresh sage

## Instructions

1. Heat oven to 400°F (200°C).
2. Wash the potatoes and cut them into quarters or smaller portions, leaving the skin on. Toss the potatoes with olive oil and half of the minced garlic; season with salt and pepper.
3. Spread the potatoes out on a baking sheet and roast them in the oven for 20 minutes or until they begin to soften and brown.
4. While the potatoes are baking, melt the butter, then add the lemon juice and remaining minced garlic.
5. Move the potatoes to one side of the tray and place the salmon skin-side down in the centre. Arrange the asparagus in a single layer on the other end of the pan.
6. Brush the lemon butter mixture over the salmon and asparagus. Season with salt and pepper.
7. Return the baking sheet to the oven and continue baking until potatoes are golden and fork-tender and the salmon is opaque throughout, about 15 minutes. (Cooked salmon should reach an internal temperature of 125°F/52°C).
8. Garnish with parsley and sage—if you like these flavours.

## Variations and tips:

- You can use an air fryer instead of the oven.
- Substitute carrots, cauliflower, mushrooms, etc., for the potatoes and vegetables in the recipe—use what you have on hand!
- If you don't like salmon or it's too pricey, try swapping it for another fish or a chicken breast.



## Nutrition facts:

One serving (420g) contains 510 calories, 31g of total fat, 11g of saturated fat, 60mg of sodium, 39g of total carbohydrates, 6g of dietary fibre, 6g of total sugars, and 26g of protein.

## Strategy 4: Get proper rest and sleep

A good night's sleep can help you cope with stress during the day. More than 75% of study participants used this strategy, which was linked with lower anxiety scores.

Seven to eight hours of sleep is enough for most people, but some need a little more, and some do well with a little less. Research on sleep and human aging by the Center for Human Sleep Science in California has shown that, in general, older adults do not sleep as well as younger adults. Older people can have difficulty falling asleep and can also wake up more often through the night. This isn't the case for everyone, though, and there are things you can do to improve sleep.

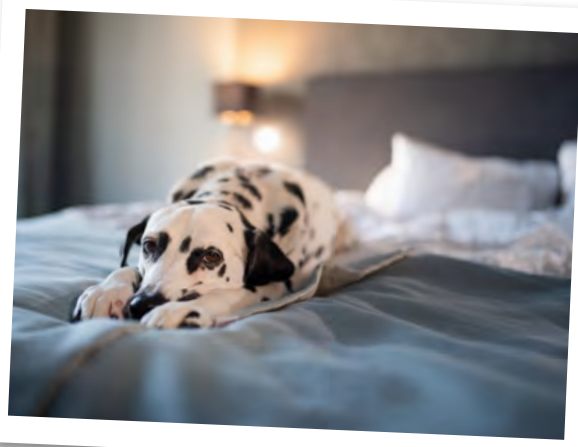
Here are some suggestions to get a better night's rest:

- Spend time outside, especially during the morning.
- Limit caffeine intake and avoid alcohol, especially before bedtime.
- Keep your bedroom cool to support your body's need to drop its temperature to fall asleep.
- Try a wind-down bedtime routine—it could include a bath, reading, stretching, or listening to a story.
- If you find worry keeps you up, try a worry journal: write down your concerns and to-dos before bed.
- Try to keep a routine: go to sleep and wake up at the same time every day to support your body's internal clock.

- Don't do strenuous exercise within a few hours of bedtime.
- Avoid late-night eating and don't drink too much fluid close to bedtime, to avoid waking up to use the washroom.
- Talk to your doctor about whether your medications will disrupt sleep and if taking them earlier in the day is an option.

"Rest periods during the day, which could include a short nap, are also important for health as people age."

- Dr. Donna Wilson, Professor Emerita at the University of Alberta



"Make a plan to do different things in a day: time to read, time to exercise, time for household chores, time to have meals, time to play online games, time to shop, and time to watch some TV and have a good night's sleep."

(65–69 years, female)

"Rest or relax each day; maybe use that time to sit down and call friends."

(85 years and older, female)

### Try our oatmeal recipe

Follow a good night's sleep with a nourishing breakfast to get you going for the day. Oatmeal is a familiar go-to breakfast that's low-cost and packed with nutrition. We've added some mix-ins to a classic oatmeal recipe. Check the tips and suggestions for more ways to customize this dish.

# Blueberry, raspberry, and sage oatmeal topped with sweet coconut flakes

2 servings



2 servings

## Ingredients

- 1 1/3 cup (325 mL) water
- 1/4 tsp (1 mL) salt
- 1/4 tsp (1 mL) cinnamon
- 2 tbsp (30 mL) maple syrup
- 2/3 cup (150 mL) rolled oats or instant oats
- 1/3 cup (75 mL) blueberries (fresh or frozen)
- 1/2 tsp (2 mL) orange zest
- 1/2 tsp (2 mL) chopped sage
- 1/2 cup (125 mL) milk
- 1/3 cup (75 mL) raspberries (fresh or frozen)
- 1 tbsp (15 mL) sweet coconut flakes

## Instructions

1. Bring the water to a boil in a medium-sized pot.
2. Add the salt, cinnamon, maple syrup, and oatmeal. Reduce heat to medium and simmer uncovered for 5 minutes or until most of the water has been absorbed.
3. Add the blueberries, orange zest, sage, and milk. Bring to a simmer for 5 minutes or until the oatmeal is thick and creamy and the blueberries have begun to pop.
4. Turn off the heat, add the raspberries, and stir. Cover and let stand for 5 minutes.
5. Garnish with sweet coconut flakes. Serve.

## Tips and suggestions:

- Substitute any alternative milk beverage you prefer (almond milk, soy milk, etc.).
- A frozen mixed-berry blend works well with this recipe.
- If you don't like or have orange zest and sweet coconut, try other mix-ins, such as flaxseed for omega-3. Pumpkin or hemp seeds are good options too.



## Nutrition facts:

One serving (308g) contains 280 calories, 8g total fat, 4g saturated fat, 5mg cholesterol, 360mg sodium, 47g total carbohydrates, 7g dietary fibre, 18g total sugars, and 7g protein.

## Strategy 5: Decrease other sources of stress in life

We learned in this study that when new challenging situations arise, reducing other sources of stress in your life is helpful.

Here are some suggestions:

- New stresses will occur from time to time. Each one will be a challenge, and this would be a good time to put other stresses aside temporarily or to reduce those stresses so you can manage the new one.
- Think through different parts of your life that cause you stress. Are there activities you could let go or routines you can change?
- Are there scenarios that feel stressful for you, ones that you could ask for help with? For example, a supportive friend or family member could attend an appointment with you.
- Consider whether the cause of your stress will matter a year from now. Sometimes it's helpful to put things in perspective. You will get through this.
- Loud noises can trigger a stress response. If there's loud noise in your environment, try to reduce it. If you can't reduce it, earplugs can help. Playing soothing music can trigger a relaxation response.

"Life throws us curveballs at times, and we don't always feel equipped to cope. It can help to put down some of what you're carrying—reduce commitments or ask for help. Part of healthy aging is cultivating a network you can lean on. For some, that could be family, friends, neighbours, or community services. Recognize that most people are happy to be able to help out—so ask."

- Dr. Gloria Gutman, Professor Emerita at Simon Fraser University



"Remember that you are not alone."  
(60–69 years, female)

"Keep calm, don't overthink things."  
(70–74 years, male)

### Try our roasted cauliflower salad recipe

For some, food can be a source of stress—wondering what to make, what to eat, and the affordability of healthier food options. Our roasted cauliflower salad is an example of a nutritious, smaller meal that feels a bit fancy, and it packs a low-cost and high-protein punch with the canned chickpeas. Rinsing the chickpeas with tap water will remove added sodium. You may want to watch for cauliflower on sale to try this one. We've offered a dressing recipe with the signature sage in it, but you can use another dressing. See tips and suggestions for other ideas.



# Chickpea and cauliflower salad with sage lemon dressing

2 servings

## Roasted cauliflower ingredients

- 1 medium to large head cauliflower (approximately 1 lb/454g)
- 1/2 red onion (approximately 4 oz/125g)
- 2 tbsp (30 mL) olive oil
- ¼ tsp (1 mL) salt
- ¼ tsp (1 mL) pepper
- 1 ½ tsp (7 mL) chopped parsley

## Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 400°F (200°C).
2. Cut the cauliflower into small florets and place them in a large mixing bowl. Slice the red onion into 1/4-inch (1/2 cm) strips and place them in the same bowl. Drizzle with olive oil and season with salt and pepper. Toss until well coated.
3. Spread the cauliflower and red onions on a baking sheet and roast in oven for 20 minutes. Remove from oven, stir, and roast for 10 more minutes or until cauliflower is tender and browned on the edges.
4. Garnish with chopped parsley.

## Fried chickpea ingredients

- 1 cup (250 mL) chickpeas
- 1 tbsp (15 mL) canola or olive oil
- ¼ tsp (1 mL) smoked paprika
- ¼ tsp (1 mL) garlic powder
- ¼ tsp (1 mL) salt
- ¼ tsp (1 mL) pepper

## Instructions

1. Drain and rinse the chickpeas with tap water and pat dry.
2. Add the chickpeas to a skillet or frying pan with the oil, smoked paprika, garlic powder, salt, and pepper.
3. Stir and cook the chickpeas over medium heat for 5 minutes until they become crispy.

## Tips and suggestions:

- The chickpeas can be air fried instead at 375°F (190°C) for 10 minutes.
- You can use plain chickpeas in place of seasoned/fried chickpeas.
- Instead of making your own dressing, you can purchase Dijon honey mustard dressing, Italian dressing, or other vinaigrettes.
- If you make the dressing, consider doubling the recipe and storing the extra in your fridge to use on other salads throughout the week.

## Sage lemon dressing ingredients

- 1 tbsp (15 mL) chopped sage
- 1 clove garlic, chopped
- ½ cup (125 mL) canola or olive oil
- ¼ cup (60 mL) fresh lemon juice
- 2 tbsp (30 mL) Dijon mustard
- 1 tbsp (15 mL) maple syrup
- ¼ tsp (1 mL) salt

## Instructions

1. Combine all ingredients in a bowl and mix well.
2. Taste and adjust seasoning if necessary.
3. Combine the roasted cauliflower and onions in a bowl with the spiced chickpeas and garnish with chopped parsley. Drizzle with sage lemon dressing.

## Nutrition facts:

One serving (319g) contains 220 calories, 16g total fat, 2.5g saturated fat, 370mg sodium, 18g total carbohydrates, 6g dietary fibre, 7g total sugars, and 5g protein.

## Strategy 6: Remember resilience and be careful with the ‘what ifs’

In challenging times, you may underestimate your ability to cope and start asking “what if” questions. It can be helpful to remind yourself that you are resilient. This strategy was more popular among the youngest study participants, who noticed and reported it.

Here are some suggestions to try:

- Think of other difficult or challenging situations you’ve been through and recall how you coped in those situations.
- Remind yourself that you have people in your life to support you—resilience doesn’t mean dealing with everything on your own.
- Practise accepting situations you can’t control. Learning to accept or expect change can make it easier to adapt.
- Try to do at least one thing daily that gives you a sense of accomplishment or purpose. This could be as simple as getting out for a walk or other movement.
- Lean into your spiritual practice if you have one.
- If you notice yourself having “what if” thoughts, try saying to yourself, “I’ll deal with that if or when it happens.”



“Perhaps as people age, they know they are resilient. They don’t need to think about this or give themselves a reminder.

- Dr. Gail Low, Associate Professor of Nursing at the University of Alberta



“Relax and let destiny guide you; you have done all you can.”

(80–84 years, female)

“Remind yourself this is only temporary and that you still have a lot to do in your life, so get up and be active; you will be surprised how this takes away the anxiety.”

(65–69 years, male)

### Try our pot pie recipe

Our pot pie recipe might be just what you need to remember that you are resilient and capable. It’s a bigger job than the other recipes, especially if you make your own pie crust. It’s a good option if you have others over for a meal, or it can be frozen in portions. Check the tips and suggestions for more ways to customize this dish.



# Chicken Pot Pie 8 servings



## Pie crust ingredients (or buy a pre-made crust and pastry sheet)

- 2 ½ cups (625 mL) all-purpose flour
- ½ tsp (2 mL) salt
- 1 cup (250 mL) chilled butter
- ½ cup (125 mL) cold water

## Instructions:

1. Combine the flour and salt in a large bowl. Cut the butter in until the butter chunks are the size of small peas.
2. Put the flour and butter mixture into a mixing bowl. Begin mixing it by hand or slowly by machine while adding the water a little at a time until the dough begins to take shape (but is not sticky). You may need less water than suggested. After the dough comes together, shape it into a ball and flatten it slightly. Wrap it with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 2 hours or overnight.
3. Place the chilled dough on a generously floured surface and roll it out until thin. Carefully roll the dough onto the rolling pin and unroll over a 9-inch (23 cm) pie dish. Press the dough evenly into the bottom and sides of the dish, and cut off the extra dough on the rims.
4. Use the remaining dough to roll another sheet for the top layer, which will be put on after the fillings have been added.

## Pie filling ingredients

- 2 cups (500 mL) tap water
- Salt (to taste)
- 2 chicken breasts
- ¼ cup (60 mL) unsalted butter
- 1 cup (250 mL) diced yellow onion
- 1 cup (250 mL) diced carrots
- 8 oz (225 grams) thinly sliced mushrooms
- 1 ½ tsp (7 mL) minced garlic
- 1/3 cup (75 mL) all-purpose flour
- 2 cups (500 mL) chicken stock
- ½ cup (125 mL) heavy cream
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1 cup (250 mL) frozen peas
- 1 tbsp (15 mL) chopped parsley
- 1 egg (beaten)

## Instructions:

1. Bring a pot of salted water to a simmer (170 to 180°F/77 to 82°C). Add the chicken breasts and cook well, until they reach an internal temperature of 160°F (71°C). Remove from pot to cool while you prepare the other ingredients.
2. After the chicken breasts cool, shred or cut the chicken into small pieces.
3. In a pan or pot over medium heat, melt the butter and add the onions and carrots. Sauté until they become soft.

4. Add the mushrooms and garlic, and sauté until the mushrooms are soft.
5. Add flour and stir constantly for 2 minutes. Add chicken stock and heavy cream and bring to a simmer. Cook on low heat until the mixture is thick or has a gravy-like consistency. Add salt and pepper to taste.
6. Add the chicken, frozen peas, and parsley and stir to combine. Remove the pot from the heat and let it cool.
7. Preheat the oven to 425°F (220°C).
8. Spoon the filling into the pie crust.
9. Place the remaining pastry sheet on top of the pie filling. Pinch the pie crust to seal the top and bottom edges together. Use a sharp paring knife to cut a small slit in the top to allow the steam to escape. Brush the top of the crust with the beaten egg.
10. Bake pie for 30 minutes or until golden brown.
11. Remove from oven and let cool before slicing and eating.

## Tips and suggestions:

- Leftover vegetables and meat do very well in this pie. Substitute chickpeas for a vegetarian option.
- For a lower-fat variation, try replacing the heavy cream with evaporated or regular 2% milk.
- The cooked pie can be portioned and frozen.

## Nutrition facts:

One serving (273g) contains 450 calories, 23g total fat, 13g saturated fat, 800mg sodium, 45g total carbohydrates, 3g dietary fibre, 4g total sugars, and 16g protein.





## Find what works for you and ask for help

The study found that there was not a single magic solution to reduce anxiety for everyone. It's about finding what works for you. It's also important to recognize that help is available if and when you need it.

### How to know when help is needed:

- If you're experiencing a distressing change (in your behaviour, emotions, or thoughts) that lasts more than two weeks and negatively affects your day-to-day living, it is time to get it checked out.
- If you aren't sure, go ahead and reach out. Having a conversation about how you feel may be useful.

### How to get help:

- Talk to your doctor, nurse practitioner, social worker, or psychologist.
- Talk to a trusted friend or family member about what you're experiencing, and ask them to help you make a connection to a mental health professional.
- Connect with a counsellor yourself through [Wellness Together Canada](#). Phone counselling is available 24/7 at 1-866-585-0445.
- Visit [211.ca](#) online and filter by your province/territory of residence to look for services that are available in your community.



Many thanks to the RTOERO Foundation for funding this study of mentally healthy living strategies among older Canadians. Their commitment to supporting a better and healthier future for all of us as we age is critically important.

The RTOERO Foundation is a registered Canadian charity that supports research and initiatives promoting healthy, active aging by investing in three critical activities through its grant program:

- Geriatrics research: Initiatives that take a scientific approach to examining healthy aging, health services, and the quality of life for older adults.
- Seniors' health and well-being: Initiatives that have as their primary focus improved physical, mental, and/or social health and wellness among older adults.
- Social engagement: Initiatives that have as their primary focus improved social engagement for older adults.

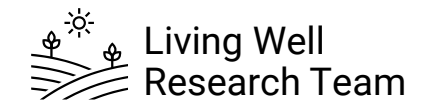
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