

## Social relationships encourage healthy eating in older age

Researchers from the Centre for Diet and Activity Research (CEDAR) at the Universities of Cambridge and East Anglia looked at data from nearly 15,000 adults aged over 50 living in Norfolk. They found that:

- Being single or widowed decreased the daily variety of fruit and vegetables eaten (compared to those who were married or living with a partner)
- Single, separated and widowed men ate fewer different vegetables than women in similar circumstances
- Both living alone and having less frequent contact with friends increased the effect of widowhood by reducing the variety of vegetables an individual ate
- People who lived alone and had infrequent contact with friends ate fewer vegetables each day

It is well known that nutrition plays a key role in healthy ageing. In the UK, it is estimated that around 70,000 avoidable deaths are caused by diets that do not match current guidelines. This new research has a number of **implications for policy and practice**. For example:

- Interventions that increase various types of social relationships could support older adults to eat a healthy diet – these could include social activities or making sure accommodation supports interaction
- We need to target our healthy eating interventions – for example, around the time of widowhood any assessment of healthy eating needs should consider gender, living arrangements and contact with friends
- We must remember that social relationships are not all about our marital status – so when delivering services for single or widowed older people, think about the range of people they could have around them

If you would like to read the full study on social relationships and diet, the reference is:

Conklin et al. (2013) 'Social relationships and healthful dietary behaviour: Evidence from over-50s in the EPIC cohort, UK' *Social Science & Medicine* <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2013.08.018>