



Healthy Eating----Vital for Older Adults!

Good nutrition is vital to maintaining and preserving our health as we age. However, many older adults don't eat an adequate healthy diet. Because our immune system diminishes as we age, a diet containing less amounts of healthy foods puts us at risk for more illness and disease. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 68 percent of older adults eat a diet that "needs improvement", with less than 30 percent meeting the daily recommendation for vegetables, fruits, and grains.

Many factors--- including social, psychological, and physical issues--- can cause poor health and malnutrition. As we age, our senses of smell and taste diminish. Not being able to smell or taste food affects appetite and the enjoyment of foods. Ill-fitting dentures or poor teeth make chewing foods---especially meats and raw vegetables---difficult. Aging also reduces the body's production of certain digestive enzymes and acids, affecting our ability to absorb nutrients from foods.

Depression, which may affect six million older adults, decreases the motivation to prepare and eat healthful meals. Some diseases affect the ability to swallow foods and fluids safely, requiring altered textures of ground or pureed foods which are less appealing. Medications can cause dry mouth, making chewing more difficult. Decreased ability to stand to prepare foods or walk through large grocery stores also affects the kinds and amounts of foods eaten.

Certain nutrients are very important for older adults; special attention is needed to include foods containing:

Vitamin B6: in fortified cereals, potatoes, bananas, and beans

Vitamin B12: in fortified cereals and oily fish such as salmon

Vitamin C: in fresh fruits and vegetables

Vitamin D: in oily fish—salmon—and fortified milk

Vitamin E: in nuts and seeds

Calcium: in dairy foods and green leafy vegetables such as spinach

Folate: in fortified cereals, lentils, and beans

Magnesium: in almonds, nuts and whole grains

Zinc: in fish, meat, poultry and beans

What can you do?

**Spread peanut butter on toast or add grated cheese to vegetables, soups, and sandwiches to boost protein.

**Chop, steam, stew, or grate foods that are hard to chew.

**Use herbs and spices to bland foods; use salt-free herb blends

**Take supplements if your diet is poor---speak to your doctor.

**Have your dentures adjusted or repaired; practice good oral hygiene

**Get enough exercise to stimulate your appetite!

Adapted from "Focus on Healthy Aging", Mt. Sinai School of Medicine, Volume 12 , Number 8

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