

National Nutrition Month: Senior Nutrition

Friday, March 4th, 2011

March is National Nutrition Month so it's a good time to focus on health eating and improving our nutrition. The theme of this month is "Eating Right with Color" in an effort to encourage people to vary their diet and take in all those good vitamins, minerals and antioxidants in fruits and vegetables. Here is a statement from the National Nutrition Month website about recommended nutritional guidelines: "The recently released 2010 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* recommend an increased focus on a plant-based diet. This combined with including lean meats, fish and poultry, and low-fat milk and dairy products creates a rainbow of colors on the plate that serve as the foundation for a healthful eating plan".

When you choose a variety of colorful fruits and veggies, whole grains, and lean proteins you'll experience some important benefits:

- **Live longer and stronger** – Good nutrition keeps muscles, bones, organs, and other body parts strong for the long haul. Eating vitamin-rich food boosts immunity and fights illness-causing toxins. A proper diet reduces the risk of heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, type-2 diabetes, bone loss, cancer, and anemia. Also, eating sensibly means consuming fewer calories and more nutrient dense foods, keeping weight in check.
- **Sharpen the mind** – Scientists know that key nutrients are essential for the brain to do its job. Research shows that people who eat a selection of brightly colored fruit, leafy veggies, certain fish and nuts packed with omega-3 fatty acids can improve focus and decrease the risk for Alzheimer's disease.
- **Feel better** – Wholesome meals give you more energy and help you look better, resulting in a self-esteem boost.

*Helpguide.org on Senior Nutrition

Age-related changes may affect nutritional intake, as outlined below. At the same time, senior nutrition needs change from those we have when younger.

Age-Related Changes

Sensory changes that occur with age include a decline in sight and peripheral vision, hearing, smell and taste. Though these may be gradual and vary among individuals, they can affect health status and nutritional intake, for example:

- Vision loss may lead to less activity or a fear of cooking, especially using a stove. This can also affect grocery shopping.
- Loss of hearing may lead to less eating out or not asking questions of the waiter or store clerk.
- Generally, when people are in their 50s, the ability to taste and smell starts to gradually diminish. Both senses are needed to enjoy the flavors in food. Taste buds decrease in number and become less sensitive, affecting the tastes of sweet and salty most. Changes

in ability to smell are slight, but will affect subtle smells. Because of these changes, many foods tend to taste bitter, and subtle smelling foods may taste bland. Individuals may also increase intake of sugar and salt to compensate for this.

As we age we lose lean body mass (though we can counteract this through exercise). This results in lowered basal energy metabolism. To avoid gaining weight, we must reduce calorie intake or increase activity. Loss of lean body mass also means reduced body water (72 percent of total body water is in lean muscle tissue). Total body fat typically increases with age, often related to this reduced metabolism combined with reduced activity for many and no corresponding reduction in calories. As we age, fat tends to concentrate in the trunk and as fat deposits around the vital organs. However, in more advanced years, weight often declines.

The digestive tract may produce less lactase, an enzyme the body needs to digest milk. As a result, older people are more likely to develop lactose intolerance. There may also be some slowing of the digestive tract action & reduction in digestive secretions, and thus dietary fiber and sufficient fluids become more important.

Older adults may have some difficulty with eating due to swallowing problems, dry mouth and dental issues, especially if missing teeth or wearing improper fitting dentures.

For elderly individuals with health problems and reduced mobility, many of these issues are compounded and their nutritional needs may be greater. Also, a number of conditions as well as medications affect appetite and nutritional status.

From the American Dietetic Association, key nutrients needed by older adults include:

- Calcium and Vitamin D to protect against bone loss (Vitamin D may be especially low in someone who is housebound or does not get exposed to sunlight much)
- Vitamin B12 (many older adults do not get enough, and may require a supplement)
- Fiber (not only to deal with slowing digestive system but may protect against weight gain and diabetes)
- Potassium (can help with high blood pressure, along with reduced sodium intake)

Look for our upcoming blog post with great tips on healthy, senior nutrition and eating better! With small changes you can feel your best and boost your health.

Read more: <http://www.easylivingfl.com/national-nutrition-month-senior-nutrition/#ixzz41DYbbDmj>