Fast Facts About

Nutrition and Aging

Recent studies suggest that the mature person may have unique nutritional needs. Some changes that come with age:

✔ The body's ability to correct some nutritional imbalances declines with age.

✔ An increase in the use of multiple prescription and over-the-counter drugs can change the way the body takes in, and uses, various nutrients. They can also weaken the body’s sense of taste.

✔ The number of taste buds on the tongue declines and may result in a loss of appetite, and in turn, a lack of essential nutrients.

✔ Older adults are more likely to suffer from, and be more concerned about, heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, obesity and osteoporosis. Due to the roles that nutrition plays in these diseases, older adults often look closely at the foods they eat.

Eating right and engaging in physical activity can extend the quality of life.

FINDING AN APPETITE FOR GREAT FOODS

With age, energy output may go down, mostly as a result of declining physical activity and decreasing lean tissue. Despite a drop in energy needs, an adequate supply of over 40 nutrients like protein, vitamins and minerals are still important for good health. Any food that supplies calories and nutrients can be part of a nutritious, balanced diet.

GETTING THE NUTRIENTS YOU NEED

Some tips include:

✔ Limit fat intake. 30% or less of total calories should come from fat.

✔ More than half of calories should come from carbohydrates, which include breads, cereals, sugars, fruits and vegetables, beans, and pasta.

✔ Your daily diet should include 5 or more servings of vegetables and fruits, especially green and yellow vegetables and citrus fruits.

✔ Make sure smaller, more moderate portions of lean meat, poultry, fish and beans are part of your diet.

What you eat should be high in protective nutrients such as vitamins. The disease fighting properties of vitamin C, vitamin E and beta carotene can be found in the following foods:

Vitamin C – Citrus fruits, green peppers, strawberries, raw cabbage, green leafy vegetables

Vitamin E – Nuts, seeds, whole grains, fish, vegetables

Beta Carotene – Dark green, yellow and orange vegetables and fruits

✔ Increasing your calcium intake is one of the most important steps you can take to improve your diet. Calcium increases bone mass and reduces the rate of bone tissue loss. Low-fat milk products are a good start.

✔ Vitamin D is linked to calcium absorption, which affects bone strength and development. Fortified milk and milk products, as well as liver and some fish, including herring, salmon and sardines provide Vitamin D. Very moderate sunlight is also a source of Vitamin D.
TRYING VITAMIN AND MINERAL SUPPLEMENTS
Before trying supplements, talk to your doctor. Let your doctor know about all prescription drugs you are taking so that, if necessary, your diet can be changed to avoid any possible reactions from the combination of supplements and these medications.

ENHANCING FLAVOR
The ability to identify flavor declines with age. To help increase enjoyment of foods, enhance their flavors using:

✓ Sugar
✓ Onions
✓ Salt
✓ Butter flavoring
✓ Reduced stocks
✓ Herbs
✓ Garlic
✓ Substitutes
✓ Wine
✓ Flavored vinegars.

ENJOYING MEALS
Your desire to eat may decrease with age, especially if you live alone. Some tips for making meals more enjoyable and less work include:

✓ Prepare meals in advance. Divide into single servings and freeze for future use.
✓ Purchase frozen entrees, fruits and vegetables at the supermarket.
✓ Take advantage of opportunities offered by churches and community organizations to enjoy meals in the company of others.
✓ Look into community group-dining programs and delivery services that provide nutritious meals for those who are unable to cook, or dislike doing so.

STAYING ACTIVE
You can increase your energy levels, build and strengthen muscles, improve the health of your circulatory system and bones, and keep your arteries clear of fatty deposits if you maintain physical activity.

Walking, climbing stairs and moving the body take energy. To stay in great shape and boost your energy levels, indulge in a physical activity that you enjoy each day and exercise vigorously at least three times a week.