



## **Eating Well as We Age: Advice for Seniors**

We are all used to hearing the basics about maintaining a good diet: eat plenty of fruits and vegetables, stay away from foods that contain too much saturated fat and/or salt, and eat whole grains whenever possible. But as we age, our nutrition requirements change. If senior adults want to continue the good eating habits they've already established, making some dietary adjustments can help them stay as healthy as possible as they reach 50-60 years of age and beyond.

### **What are some basic adjustments seniors can make to their diets?**

Although an emphasis on the four major good groups—fruits and vegetables, starches, milk and dairy choices and varied protein sources—is still a good practice for seniors, they should consider making moderations to this basic food plan.

*Fiber is more important as we age.* This is especially important for seniors as irregularity is often a problem for them, which is exacerbated caused by taking certain medications and also not drinking enough water. Consult your physician about how much fiber you need given your current health. And always make sure you drink plenty of fluids, or adding more fiber could make constipation worse. In addition to helping with regularity, fiber might help protect you against heart disease.

*Many seniors do not get enough calcium.* Some experts recommend seniors get about 1,200 to 1,500 milligrams of calcium per day. This is especially important to keep bones strong and prevent osteoporosis whenever possible. Low- or non-fat milk offers the benefits of calcium, and also includes Vitamin D and other nutrients so it's a good choice for seniors as they age.

Additional good choices for adding more calcium to your diet are: yogurt, calcium-fortified orange juice and soymilk. Your doctor may also have you take calcium supplements.

*Pay attention to Vitamin A:* While this nutrient is an important component to any diet, too much can put seniors at risk of bone fractures.

*Seniors should also pay attention to getting enough iron.* This nutrient is important for general health, but it also contributes to how energetic we feel. A great source of iron is red meat. However, most dieticians would suggest limiting the amount of cooked red and processed meat to 70 milligrams per day.

*Eating less salt and more potassium is recommended by the United States Department of Health and Human Services.* Many seniors grew up in a time when we didn't know the effects of salting food too heavily. Now it's clear that too much salt can cause high-blood pressure, especially if it comes from processed sources of food, such as pre-made meals and most snacks. High-blood pressure increases the risk of heart disease, stroke, congestive heart failure and kidney damage.

*Foods that contain potassium can actually prevent high-blood pressure, according to the United States Department of Health and Human Services.* Potassium helps counter-balance the

harmful effect of sodium on blood pressure. Your physician or dietitian is the best person to tell you how much sodium and potassium you should consume each day. An average recommendation is: not more than 1,500 milligrams of sodium per day (about 60-percent DV on a food label), and consuming about 4,700 milligrams per day of Potassium.

Foods rich in potassium include white beans, dark leafy greens like spinach, baked potatoes with the skin on, dried apricots, mushrooms and bananas.

### **Variety is the spice of life**

We all tend to eat more of our favorites foods. But eating a varied diet is recommended as seniors age. It helps balance both the digestive system offer the most comprehensive selection of nutrients. Here are some ideas for eating a better variety of foods:

\*If you like meat, try to get other sources of iron in your diet, such as legumes, lentils, eggs and some breakfast cereals with added vitamins.

\*If you like spinach, try another leafy green vegetable such as Swiss Chard and Kale.

\*If you typically have milk with your cereal, try mixing with yogurt instead; it makes a great and healthy snack.

### **Water remains critical**

As we age, drinking enough water is as important as ever, especially if you drink caffeinated beverages. Any non-alcoholic drink is a source of fluid intake, including coffee and tea, but milk and fruit juices are best. If you are physically active, drink more fluid than if you're not. Since we hear different recommendations about how much water per day is sufficient, consult your doctor or dietitian.

### **Stay fit, stay healthy**

Getting enough exercise is just as important as seniors age. Exercise will enhance the benefits of good nutrition. But consult an expert on how to modify your exercise as you grow older. If you haven't exercised regularly, consult a physical therapist about how to start an exercise program. In addition to exercise, consult your doctor or dietitian about adding vitamin supplements to your diet.

### **Should seniors follow a low-carb diet?**

Although a low-carbohydrate, high-protein diet is currently considered the best way to lose weight, studies are beginning to show this program may cause Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) in seniors. One such study by Medical News Today found that seniors who consumed this type of diet showed a loss in memory and concentration. The researchers believe this affect might be due to a high-carb diet's impact on glucose and insulin.

### References

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