

The importance of good nutrition for seniors

By **SHERRY A. MEARNS**
SPECIAL TO FEELING FIT

Good nutrition is important at any age. But it can sometimes be difficult for seniors to get the nutrients needed for a balanced diet because of health issues and other physical limitations.

“Your food intake is less as you get older,” says Port Charlotte dietician/nutritionist Paula Allison of Eat 2 Live LLC Nutrition Services. Allison is also a Certified Diabetes Educator for the Living Smart Diabetes Self Management program, serving Charlotte and Sarasota counties.

“This decline in food intake seems to be greater in men than women,” says Allison. “This decline would affect most nutrients. It has been shown that as you age, for example, your fruit and milk consumption drops along with the amount of grain, vegetable and meat that you eat.”

As a result of decreased food intake, Allison explains, nutrient requirements tend to increase with age. As we age, increased nutrient requirements are usually accompanied by altered or reduced rates of digestion, absorption, metabolism and excretion. It is important that these issues be taken into account so that optimal nutritional status is maintained.

Studies show that a good diet in later years reduces the risk of osteoporosis, high blood pressure, heart disease and certain cancers, according to the National Institutes

of Health. While energy needs may decrease with age, the challenge is to continue to get the nutrients required for good health.

“As you get older, the number of calories needed is usually less than when you were younger,” says Allison. “This is because basic body processes require less energy when there is a decline in physical activity and loss of muscle.”

Allison states that contrary to popular belief, basic nutrient needs do not decrease with age.

“In fact, some nutrients are needed in increased

Nutrient needs of older adults

Eating right and staying fit are important no matter what your age. As we get older, our bodies have different needs, so certain nutrients become especially important for good health.

Calcium and Vitamin D
Older adults need more calcium and vitamin D to help maintain bone health. Have three servings of vitamin D-fortified low fat or fat-free milk or yogurt each day. Other calcium-rich foods include fortified cereals and fruit juices, dark green leafy vegetables and canned fish with soft bones.

Potassium
Increasing potassium along with reducing sodium (salt) may lower your risk of high blood pressure. Fruits, vegetables and low fat or fat-free milk and yogurt are good sources of potassium. Also, select and prepare foods with little or no added salt.

Vitamin B12

Many people older than 50 do not get enough vitamin B12. Fortified cereal, lean meat and some fish and seafood are sources of B12. Ask your doctor or a registered dietitian if you need a B12 supplement.

Fiber

Eat more fiber-rich foods to help stay regular. Fiber also can help lower your risk for heart disease, control your weight and prevent type 2 diabetes. Eat whole-grain breads and cereals and more beans and peas. Fruits and vegetables also provide fiber.

Fats

Foods that are low in saturated fats, trans fats and cholesterol help reduce your risk of heart disease. Most of the fats you eat should be polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats. Check the Nutrition Facts panel on food labels for total fat and saturated fat.

Source: Paula Allison, Eat 2 Live LLC Nutrition Services.

amounts,” Allison says. “The challenge is to develop an eating plan that supplies plenty of nutrients but not too many calories. This can be done by choosing nutritious foods that are low in fat and high in fiber, such as whole grain breads and cereals, fruits and vegetables.”

Moderate amounts of low-fat dairy products and protein foods like meat, poultry, fish, beans and eggs should also be included. Sweets and other foods high in sugar, fat and calories can be enjoyed from time to time, but the key is to eat



Photo by Sherry A. Mearns

Mina Sundeen of North Port enjoys a low-fat eggplant veggie burger served on Ezekiel bread at the Café Evergreen at Warm Mineral Springs in North Port during a recent luncheon with friends.

them sparingly.

“The Food Guide Pyramid is a great guide for your daily food choices,” Allison says.

To eat healthy, Allison advises consuming a variety of good foods each day: “Foods that will provide the energy, protein, vitamins, minerals, fiber and water you need for good health.”

Allison offers the following tips for creating a well-balanced diet:

- Plan meals in advance.
- Stock up on ready-to-eat cereals and instant

oatmeal for a quick, healthy breakfast.

- Fill the refrigerator with ready-to-eat foods, such as baby carrots, fresh fruits and vegetables.

- Prewash and cut up salad ingredients.

- Snack on low-fat cheese and low-fat yogurt or pudding.

- Cook ahead.

- Prepare stews, soups, casseroles or roasts in large quantities. Package in small containers and freeze the leftovers for reheating later.

- Bring snacks with you as you dash around town.

- Take a bagel with a favorite low-fat spread.

- Try low-fat crackers, ginger snaps, vanilla wafers, juice boxes, crisp vegetables and dried or fresh fruits.

Eating well isn't just a “diet” or “program” that's here today and gone tomorrow. It is part of a healthy lifestyle that you can adopt now and stay with the rest of your senior years.

For more information, contact Sherry Mearns at 941-258-5997, or visit www.allprohomehealth.net.