



Maintaining Balanced Nutrition & Thriving in Older Adulthood



Created by Grace Omotunde, MS

Background

Our nutritional needs change as we age due to health, mobility, and social support challenges. Balanced nutrition is crucial for preventing chronic diseases and enhancing mental clarity, emotional well-being, and quality of life. This handout serves as a guide for understanding the nutritional needs of older adults, identifies barriers to healthy eating, and provides strategies to overcome these challenges. By equipping individuals and caregivers with knowledge and resources, we can foster a healthier and vibrant aging experience.

Understanding Age-Related Changes

Bones, Joints, and Muscles

- Shrinkage and reduced density lead to fractures.
- Muscle strength and flexibility can decline.

Digestive System

- Increased constipation due to structural changes.

Metabolism

- Slower calorie burning and decreased activity - Potentially leads to diet-related diseases.

Cardiovascular System

- Stiffening of blood vessels - Increases heart workload and hypertension risk.

Vision

- Difficulty focusing on close objects.
- Sensitivity to glare (e.g., cataracts).
- Risk of macular degeneration.

Brain & Cognition

- Nerve cells, level of neurotransmitters, and blood flow decrease - Slowing brain function and leading to cognitive decline.

Memory & Thinking Skills

- Minor memory lapses and slower reaction times.



Common Deficiencies

- Vitamin B6
- Vitamin B9 (Folate)
- Vitamin B12
- Vitamin C
- Vitamin D
- Vitamin E
- Calcium
- Magnesium
- Potassium
- Protein
- Fiber
- Omega 3
- Water

Nutritional Needs

Key Nutrients: **Protein** (supports muscle mass), **Calcium & Vitamin D** (essential for bone health), **Fiber** (aids digestion and prevents constipation).

Hydration: Crucial for health; encourage regular water consumption.

Nutrient-Dense Foods: Prevent chronic diseases and meet nutritional needs.

- Fruits: Stone fruits (cherries, peaches, apricots), avocados.
- Vegetables: Bell peppers, cabbage, mushrooms, squash.
- Dairy: Plain yogurt for probiotics.
- Proteins: Nut butters, plant-based proteins.



Maintaining Balanced Nutrition & Thriving in Older Adulthood



Created by Grace Omotunde, MS

Tips for Meal Planning

- Break down your favorite meal ingredients to create a shopping list and set budget.
- Explore farmers' markets, food banks, and pantries in your area.
- Shop the grocery store perimeters first for nutrient-dense foods. Go into aisles for whole grains, legumes vegetables, and seasonings.
- Prepare meals in advance and set reminders for meals/hydration,
- Frozen and canned foods are excellent options for maintaining nutrient intake. Choose frozen if fresh isn't available, and canned (in water) if frozen isn't an option

Common Challenges to Eating

- Getting nutrient-dense foods on a budget
- Food access
- Transportation
- Unable or tired of cooking
- Eating alone
- Challenges chewing or swallowing
- Physical problems from illnesses
- Recovering from illness
- Social isolation
- Physical limitations
- Different tastes of food
- Low/lack of appetite
- Unhappiness, sadness, anxiety, or depression affecting appetite
- Food allergies
- Dietary restrictions
- Cognitive decline

Overcoming Nutritional Barriers

- Stay connected and seek support from family, friends, and healthcare professionals.
- Express and advocate for your needs
- Use food banks and pantries, they're there to help!
- Set small, achievable goals for eating well and staying active.

Caregiver Tips

For New Caregivers:

- Create an open and understanding partnership to ensure older adults feel included in their care.
- Try compromising as changes can be challenging.
- Listen and support!
- Get support for yourself as well.

Signs an Older Adult May Need Help:

- Changes in eating habits, weight, hygiene, mood, memory, mobility issues, or cognitive decline.

Conclusion

By recognizing age-related changes, overcoming barriers, prioritizing key nutrients and balanced nutrition, older adults can enhance their quality of life and thrive!

Scan the link here to view the video!

