

Diet in Elderly

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- Ms Prutha Handigol Deshpande

Ageing is a natural phenomenon that starts with conception and ends with death. A person's physiologic age reflects his/her health status but may or may not reflect chronologic age. The factors that influence physiologic age are adequacy and regularity of sleep, frequency of consumption of balanced meals, sufficiency of physical activity and optimization of body weight. Diseases and disorders are inevitable and can be one of the consequences of ageing.

¹⁴ Nutrition is about eating a healthy and balanced diet so that our body gets all the nutrients for day-to-day functioning. Nutrients are substances the body needs to function and grow. The nutrients are carbohydrates, proteins, fat vitamins and minerals.

² The amount of energy one needs each day depends on the age, height, weight and the kind of activity being carried out. Energy needs would change with ageing because the person has less lean muscle, more body fat and a sedentary lifestyle. This doesn't mean you need fewer calories; in fact, the need for nutrients (carbohydrates, fat, protein, vitamins, minerals, fibre, water, etc.) will remain roughly the same.

Energy

Energy or calorie requirement reduce with age because of changes in body composition and physical activity. The three main nutrients used as energy are carbohydrates, protein, and fats.

Carbohydrates: These are the most important source of energy. The body can also use protein and fats for energy when carbohydrates have been depleted. When we eat, the body breaks down nutrients into smaller components and absorbs them to use as fuel. It is important to consume more complex carbohydrates like millets, wheat, whole grains, legumes, fruits.

Protein: ¹⁶ These are important for building muscle mass. Protein when broken down helps to fuel muscle mass, which aids in metabolism. It helps strengthen the immune system. When the right amount ¹³ of protein are consumed it keeps the body full. The protein rich foods are meat, poultry, seafood, beans and peas, eggs, processed soy products, nuts and seeds, milk and milk products

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Dietary fats: These can be found in foods from both plants and animals. Fat is as essential to the diet as protein and carbohydrates are in fueling the body with energy. Some bodily functions require fat for their metabolism in the body. But one has to keep in mind to eat limited portions of the fats to avoid unnecessary problems to the body.

Sources of good fat are nuts like almonds, walnuts, pista, cashewnuts, seeds like sunflower seeds, melon seeds, chia seeds, pumpkin seeds, flax seeds, oils like groundnut oil, rice bran oil, sun flower oil etc.

Avocado is the fruit which has some good healthy fats in it.

4 **Healthy bones and teeth**

Protein is essential for building, repairing, and maintaining healthy bones and muscles to avoid the risk of falls and broken bones. Vitamin D is also essential for healthy bones. The best source is the sunlight. If the body doesn't receive sufficient sunlight then ask the doctor for the vitamin D supplement.

Atherosclerosis

Unhealthy lifestyle and bad eating habits are factors leading to atherosclerosis, that is common in elderly people. Antioxidants play a very important role in reducing the risk of atherosclerosis. So, consume a variety of antioxidants like vitamin C rich foods like lemon, sweet lime, orange, guava or amla. Along with this regular intake of a variety of green leafy vegetables, different coloured fruits, whole grains, legumes, lean meat, nuts, seeds are helpful in keeping the heart healthy. Limit on the intake of sodium. It is recommended to avoid alcohol, fried food, high fat foods processed foods, packaged foods, canned juices etc.

Dementia

Foods that help boost memory are green leafy vegetables, cold water fish, berries, olive oil, cold pressed virgin coconut oil. Recent evidence has shown that omega-3 fatty acids could reduce the risk of Alzheimer's disease and keep the brain alert.

Sleep

Falling asleep for some older people is a difficult task. Few guidelines to improve sleep are to limit caffeine intake, avoid alcohol, avoid sugary foods just before bedtime, and avoid spicy and big meals. The foods that can help sleep

are warm milk with turmeric before bed time, almonds, kiwi, fatty fish, walnuts, chamomile tea. Some physical activity as recommended by the doctor to be done to improve sleep.

Diabetes Mellitus

The food guide to eating healthy with diabetes is to consume foods from all the food groups in required quantities. The focus of the diet should be on whole grains, sprouts, vegetables, fruits, lean meat, fish, egg, low fat dairy products. Consumption of fried food, foods high in salt, sweets, bakery foods, ice creams, candy, beverages with added sugars, red meat should be avoided.

High blood pressure

Foods that should be included to control high BP ¹¹ are citrus fruits, fatty fish, pumpkin seeds, beans and lentils, berries, amaranth, pistachios, carrots, tomatoes, broccoli, herbs and spices, chia and flax seeds, beetroot, spinach.

Arthritis

¹⁸ Omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids ² are good for arthritis. If one is a non vegetarian fish can be consumed twice a week, or talk to the doctor about a supplement.

Osteoporosis

⁹ The most important nutrients for people with osteoporosis are calcium and vitamin D. Calcium is a key building block ¹⁵ for the bones and vitamin D helps the body absorb calcium. Foods such as milk, yogurt, cheese, and other dairy products have high levels of calcium. They also have phosphorus and protein for bone health. Other sources of calcium are green leafy vegetables, broccoli, spinach, salmon, oysters, clams, crab and shrimp

Healthy bowels

² To keep the bowels active, include plenty of fibre in the diet. Wholegrain cereals, fruit, dried fruit, dried peas, beans and lentils are all excellent sources. One has to make sure to drink enough water to prevent constipation. Most older people require 8 – 10 cups of water per day.

Healthy teeth

If it's the ²teeth or dentures get it checked regularly so one can continue to enjoy a wide variety of foods. Choose foods that are naturally soft. Always choose soft and moist foods. Enjoy soups and porridges.

Healthy food choices

⁵Foods High in Omega-3 Fatty Acids

These fatty acids are important for people of all ages including elderly people as they help prevent inflammation which can cause cancer, rheumatoid arthritis, and heart diseases. They can be found in fish mainly sardines, Tuna, Mackerel, and Salmon. They are also found in flaxseed, soyabeans, canola oil, walnuts and almonds.

Supplements are also available but consult the doctor before consuming the supplement.

⁴Foods Rich in Calcium

Calcium has also been known to lower blood pressure. The body's need for calcium is so essential that, if one is not getting enough calcium, it begins to reabsorb it from the bones. This makes your bones fragile and brittle leading to osteoporosis. Foods rich in Calcium ¹are mainly dairy products such as milk, curd, sesame seeds, green leafy vegetables and cereals fortified with calcium. If sufficient calcium is not available from foods, then a supplement can be consumed upon doctor's recommendation.

¹Foods Rich in Vitamin D

Vitamin D aids in the absorption of calcium in the body slowing down the rate at which bones lose calcium. It aids in the maintenance of bone density; therefore, preventing osteoporosis. Sources of vitamin D are egg yolks, sea fish, mushroom. If not talk to the doctor about a supplement.

¹Foods Rich in Fiber

As one gets older, the digestive system slows down. The walls of the gastrointestinal tract thicken and the contractions are slower and fewer which may lead to constipation. Foods rich in fiber promote proper digestion by moving food through the digestive tract. These foods have also been known to reduce the risk of heart disease. Foods rich in fiber include nuts, wholegrain cereal, whole grains, brown rice, fruits, and vegetables.

Water

1 Drinking eight glasses of water daily is as important to health as is physical activity. As we age, the body's ability to conserve water decreases, and also one doesn't feel thirsty as often. However, the body still needs water. Dehydration causes drowsiness and confusion among other side effects so it is essential to stay hydrated. The water can be stored in small bottles and drink it throughout the day as opposed to storing it in a big container to meet the daily requirements. There is an exception for seniors with kidney or liver disease; please consult the doctor to how much water can be consumed.

Foods Rich in Iron

1 Iron is needed for haemoglobin which carries oxygen in the blood from the lungs to the rest of the body. When you are not consuming enough iron, there is a limited supply of oxygen to the body tissues. This results in feeling tired and lethargic. The sources of iron rich foods are green leafy vegetables, beetroot, carrot, dals, sprouts, ragi, beaten rice, dry fruits. To aid better absorption of iron, consuming vitamin C rich foods (orange, lemon, sweet lime, amla, guava) is recommended.

3 Foods Rich in Vitamin C

Vitamin C has antioxidant properties which are believed to prevent cancer and heart disease. It is also involved in the production of collagen, which gives your skin elasticity and gets rid of dead skin cells giving you healthy skin. It also helps repair bones and teeth and aids in healing wounds. This essential vitamin can be found in fruits and vegetables.

1 Foods Rich in Vitamin B12

Vitamin B12 is responsible for maintaining nerve function, production of red blood cells, and DNA. As one ages, absorbing the vitamin from food is slower, therefore, consult the doctor for supplements. It is found in dairy products like milk, meat and poultry products.

References

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Disclaimer: All above mentioned foods are guidelines but it is necessary and important one consult the dietitian for an individualized diet plan to suit the requirements based on various factors.

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