



## Senior Nutrition Fact Sheet

- ✓ An adequate intake of calories, protein, and other nutrients on a regular basis is essential for health maintenance and a good quality of life.
- ✓ DETERMINE your nutritional warning signs:
  - **DISEASE:** Diseases, illnesses, or chronic conditions may decrease appetite, cause elders to change the way they eat, or make it hard for them to digest or absorb certain nutrients.
  - **EATING POORLY:** The data indicate that 54% of elders consume less than 75% of their caloric needs and 38% consume less than 75% of their protein needs. Malnourished patients have 2 to 3 times more complications than healthy patients with similar medical problems. More than 30% of individuals over the age of 65 skip meals almost daily. Only 17 to 19% of adults over 60 eat five portions of fruits and/or vegetables a day, limiting their intake of vitamins A & C and folate. This also detracts from fiber intake which may lead to constipation and/or diverticulosis.
  - **TOOTH LOSS/MOUTH PAIN:** Missing, loose, or decaying teeth, mouth sores, or dentures that don't fit well reduce the desire and the physical ability to eat. This often results in poor caloric and nutritional intake.
  - **ECONOMIC HARDSHIP:** As many as 40% of older Americans have incomes of less than \$6,000 per year. Having less than \$25 - \$30 per week available to spend on food makes it very hard to get a nutritionally adequate diet.
  - **REDUCED SOCIAL CONTACT:** It is estimated that 29% of Floridians over 65 live alone. Daily socialization and feelings of affection can have a positive effect on morale, motivation for living, appetite, food intake, and nutritional health.
  - **MULTIPLE MEDICINES:** Over 250 medications have been confirmed to affect the sense of taste. The average elder over age 65 takes between 2.9 and 3.7 medications daily. The more medications a person takes, the greater the chance for

side effects such as increased or decreased appetite, change in taste, constipation, weakness, drowsiness, diarrhea, nausea, and others.

- INVOLUNTARY WEIGHT LOSS/GAIN: Undesirable weight changes (loss or gain) in amounts of 10 pounds or more within a six month period is an important nutritional warning sign that must not be ignored. Undesirable and fast weight loss increases the chance of poor nutritional status and weakens the immune system. Obesity increases the incidence of cardiovascular disease and is also associated with increased risk of complications from other chronic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension.
  - NEEDS ASSISTANCE IN SELF CARE: One of every five elders has trouble walking to the refrigerator, table, and/or restroom. Many are not able to buy and/or cook the type of foods that they prefer or need to eat for their health.
  - ELDERS ABOVE AGE 80: Elders 80 years of age or more need to recognize the importance of regular medical exams, medical supervision, and follow-ups.
- ✓ Approximately 20% of elders suffer from constipation. Contributing factors include chronic laxative abuse, limited mobility, decreased fluid intake, poor eating habits, low fiber intake, ignoring the urge to defecate, decreased motility in the colon, and reduced rectal sensation.
  - ✓ Limited mobility has been associated with reduction of appetite, increased constipation, and reduced contact with other people, which can lead to depression and lack of appetite.
  - ✓ Meals that require minimal preparation and no cooking are very desirable to many elders. Some reasons for choosing no-cook meals include preference for speed and convenience, difficulty preparing and cooking food, or lack of appliances.
  - ✓ Lack of desire, physical limitations, and economic hardship (e.g. absence of stove or oven, etc.) may lead to unbalanced or missed meals, resulting in nutritional inadequacy. For this reason, elders can benefit from simple, quick, and convenient meals that are nutritionally balanced.
  - ✓ Snack food choices go beyond the traditional selections of chips, cookies, and candy; snacks can be chosen from all five basic food groups of the Food Guide Pyramid. Carefully chosen snacks can supplement meals by providing key nutrients for which elders have increased need.
  - ✓ Elders typically have decreased muscle mass and lower activity levels than younger adults. Therefore, elders have decreased energy (calorie) requirements. However, the need for

some nutrients, including calcium and vitamins D & B<sub>6</sub> increases with age. This means that elders need to select high quality, nutrient-dense foods.

- ✓ Snacks can provide 12 – 15% of total daily energy intake and at least 10% of seven vitamins and minerals. Snacking on foods that are full of vitamins and minerals rather than empty calories can help elders increase their intake of nutrients that may be lacking in their diet.
- ✓ Consuming a small, snack-sized portion of food at least two hours before mealtime should not interfere with appetite.
- ✓ Snacks should include nutrient-dense foods from all food groups.
  - *Milk, Yogurt, and Cheese Group*: Snacks from these groups are rich in calcium, protein, riboflavin, and vitamin D.
  - *Meat and Meat Alternates Group*: This group provides excellent sources of protein, B vitamins, iron, and zinc. Be careful to choose lower fat selections from this group.
  - *Fruit Group*: This group is a good source of many nutrients including beta carotene, vitamin C, potassium, and folate. Fruits are excellent & convenient snacks. They are affordable, portable, and usually easy to chew. They can be eaten fresh, canned, or dried. Fruit juice can also make a nutritious snack.
  - *Vegetable Group*: Dark green and deep yellow vegetables are excellent sources of beta carotene, which is used to make vitamin A. Tomatoes, broccoli, and bell peppers are rich in vitamin C.
  - *Bread, Cereal, Rice, and Pasta Group*: Grain products are excellent snacks; they are portable, relatively shelf-stable, and easy to prepare. Enriched grains supply energy and nutrients such as thiamin, riboflavin, folic acid, niacin, and iron. Whole grains are also excellent sources of dietary fiber.
- ✓ Liquid nutrition supplements are commercially prepared products that contain many nutrients and can be used to replace or supplement meals. However, elders are encouraged to consume whole foods since they contain dietary fiber and other components not found in supplements.

For more information, please contact:

Samantha E. Kennedy, M.S.  
Family & Consumer Sciences Agent  
Manatee County Extension Service  
(941) 722-4524