

Healthy Eating vs Taking Supplements

DID YOU KNOW...

Vitamin and mineral supplements should not be used as a substitute for healthy eating. The best source of nutrients is food.

Many people over 60 don't get the nutrients they need. Aging can lower the body's ability to absorb and use certain nutrients.

Some vitamins and minerals react with each other reducing their absorption. For example, iron supplements can interfere with the absorption of calcium. A high dose of folic acid can hide vitamin B12 deficiency.

Does This Sound Familiar?

George, 75, has diabetes and arthritis. He has open wounds on both his lower legs. He has lived alone since his wife passed away last year. Although he has some family who live close by, they are busy with their own young families.

George has never cooked for himself, but has learned to manage simple meals. He frequently has tea and toast because it is easy and it fills him up.

When he visited his doctor about the wounds on his legs, the doctor suggested that he arrange for a nurse to clean the wounds and to apply dressings. A CCAC Case Manager came to George's home to discuss his health history and his needs for service.

The Case Manager asked him about his nutrition and stressed that a good balanced diet was essential for wound healing. George never realized that good nutrition had any effect on healing wounds.

The Case Manager asked him if he would like to try "Meals on Wheels" or prepared frozen meals. She also authorized nursing and dietitian visits in George's home. Both of these professionals will be able make suggestions about easy, nutritious meals and snacks that George can prepare on his own. Since George is also a diabetic, he may also get additional counselling from the local Diabetes Education Centre.

YOU TOLD US WHAT YOU THOUGHT...

Thank you to everyone who took the time to provide feedback and answer the survey form attached to the last newsletter. The responses were very positive and will help us to plan future issues. Most people reported being pleased with the format, information, and layout. New topics were identified and we are encouraged to continue to produce this newsletter.

Suggestions were made to circulate this newsletter by e-mail or by direct mail. Due to budget constraints, direct mail is not possible. However, if you wish to receive this newsletter by e-mail, please contact Louise Choquette at the Muskoka-Parry Sound Health Unit at louise.choquette@mpshu.on.ca (789-8813, ext. 225 or 1-800-563-2808).

Nutrition for Seniors

A healthy diet is a cornerstone of good health for older adults. Poor nutrition can result from eating alone, taking multiple medications, smoking and poor dental health. The most common nutritional problems are diets high in fat and meals that are low in calories and nutrient value. High fat diets can lead to heart disease, weight gain and diabetes. Lack of variety in food choices results in a low intake of essential nutrients we need for good health and healing.

What is a healthy diet? Diets should be lower in fats, moderate in protein and high in complex carbohydrates. Here are some simple guidelines:

Choose

- wholegrain breads, muffins, crackers, loaves and cereals
- whole grains such as barley, wholewheat pasta, brown rice
- fresh and frozen vegetables (eat them raw or steamed if possible)
- fresh fruit everyday
- beans, peas, lentils, nuts and seeds
- low fat milk, yogurt and cheese
- lean meat, fish, eggs and poultry
- oily fish several times weekly
- small amounts of cold-pressed vegetable oils such as olive oil

Limit

- hydrogenated oils, trans fats and saturated fats
- tea, coffee, alcohol, sugar, salt, processed foods

Food sources of several important nutrients that help in healing are:

Protein- lean meat, fish, poultry, eggs, nuts, beans, peas, lentils

Vitamin C- berries, red peppers, tomato, cabbage, potato

Vitamin A- milk, eggs, liver, cheese and fish

Beta Carotene- green leafy vegetables, carrots

Zinc- wheatgerm, nuts, wholegrains

Iron- beef, pork, turkey, liver, kidney, peas, beans, dried fruits, green leafy vegetables

Much research and attention is given to the benefit of vitamin-mineral supplementation. Before considering this, look carefully at your diet to see if there are wholesome and natural food sources you can add to your diet. Highly processed foods may be low in nutritional value and high in fats, sodium and sugar. You should also check with your pharmacist before using supplements.

Seniors with diabetes or high cholesterol will also have additional issues that affect diet. Ask your doctor to refer you to a dietitian. There are many community resources available to help make meals easier. These include Meals on Wheels, frozen meals through seniors' home support services and Wheels to Meals. Call your local Health Unit to find resources near you.

Submitted by: Kim Bendall, RD

This newsletter was prepared by:



with representatives from:

*Centre for Addiction and Mental Health
Muskoka-Parry Sound Health Unit
Algonquin Health Services Diabetes Centre
Bill Coon, Pharmacist*

Please feel free to copy and share this newsletter with others.

For more information about RISK contact Muskoka-Parry Sound Health Unit at (705) 789-8813.

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